If I willingly confess my ignorance in economic matters, however, I claim some expertise on a topic that has been my main research field during the past decade: women trafficking and prostitution. And, indeed, ATTAC took a very strong position on this topic that was published in *Globalization of Prostitution, a Global Threat to Human Dignity*.[1] In this text, some judgments stand out. “In total, the system of prostitution is based on the operation of major power relations based on inequalities: gender relations, classes, relations of domination North and South. These are structural factors that strongly question the idea of a ‘choice’ for this activity.”

How can one not agree on this? If practicing prostitution abroad were a choice in the full sense of the term, there would be as many young French, Germans and Belgians migrating to Moldova, Nigeria and Cambodia as we see young Moldovans, Nigeriens or Cambodians on the sidewalks and brothels of richer countries. I also find it shocking that so many young women in these countries do not find better options to survive – and often in order to support their families – as to prostitute themselves. I totally agree with ATTAC that this situation is one of many possible indicators of serious structural inequalities that they are right to denounce. However, these are exactly the same reasons given for women to migrate in order to join the growing ranks of those who become our cleaning ladies, nannies and nurses: All those women we import in a large scale in order to “care”[2] for us. Here also we have strong asymmetry within choices strongly constrained by economic necessity.

In order to support their positions, ATTAC produces empirical data. This does not come as a surprise since the movement and its supporters do not engage solely for reasons of principle. It is indeed the state of the world they are worried about and their indignation is based on facts, as it is important to know the reality in order to effectively combat it. That is why ATTAC activists recognize their debt towards the help they receive from experts.[3] Again, I can only be happy about the fact that scientific research inspires activists.

One of the tasks of research is certainly the responsibility for quantitative measurement, arduous but necessary, which requires specific skills, especially statistics. The document by ATTAC provides many estimates. One I found particularly striking since it helps to realize the extent and severity of the globalization of prostitution: “According to the *United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention*, in the 1990s, there were three times more

victims of trafficking for prostitution only in Southeast Asia than in the entire history of the African slave trade: 33 million people in a decade against about 11.5 during 400 years.”

This is indeed a telling comparison: the slave trade, that we recognize today as a particularly shameful and intolerable crime, is largely “outnumbered” by today’s human trafficking: 33 million against 11.5 million victims. We thought the slave trade and slavery no longer existed except in some exceptional circumstances, which otherwise were happily overcome: experts and activists are forcing us to open our eyes to the reality of a world that has become in need of fundamental reform.

Searching for sources

Still, the figure of 33 million trafficked women in ten years in Southeast Asia seemed very high to me and where does this figure come from? Leaving aside for a moment the document by ATTAC, I look up the scientific literature and, as I recommend to my students, I start by turning toward a scientific encyclopedia, in this case, the *Dictionary of Violence* just released by the “Presses Universitaires de France”, which seems to be a good starting point. I open my dictionary at page 1330 with the entry “Traffic”. This is an important entry, since the article has no less than six pages. It is signed Malka Marcovich – one of the authors who inspired ATTAC’s document – and I quickly found the confirmation that activists were not mistaken in the estimated number. I quote: “Pino Arlacchi, Director of UNODC [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime], stated that trafficking for prostitution had reached 33 million victims in the 1990s in Southeast Asia, three times more victims than the figures established for the African slave trade for a period of four hundred years, which were estimated at 11 and a half million people.”[4] Since the author of the estimate is identified here, I look at the bibliography of the article by Marcovich in order to research Pino Arlacchi’s statement, which she found sufficiently reliable in order to be reproduced in a scientific article for an encyclopedia. She presents herself as a historian and, therefore, I assume being an expert in reading sources critically.

The bibliography contains no title written by Pino Arlacchi, but there are named three UNODC

publications accessible on the Internet: The first, “Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking”[5] (2008), is a presentation of an international campaign; the second “Global Report on Trafficking in Persons” (2009)[6], contains figures gathered in 155 countries, but does not mention 33 million; and the third, “Trafficking in Person: Analysis in Europe” (2009), does not match any title on the website of UNODC and I suppose it must be the last part of the report devoted to Europe. But where does the figure of 33 million come from?

So I return to the bibliography from Marcovich and find a book that I think might help me in my quest: it is the work of Richard Poulin, professor of sociology at the University of Ottawa, entitled *The Globalization of Sex Industries. Prostitution, Pornography, Trafficking of Women and Children*. He also ranks among the inspirer of ATTAC activists. In his introduction he gives me hope to find what I look for, since the author writes frankly: “In some respects, this book may seem daunting, because I made the choice to give a lot of information to quantify the reality of prostitution, trafficking women and children for prostitution, pornography, sex tourism, mail order brides, international migration, etc. I choose this so that my argument and my analysis are based on data. I believe that knowledge of the facts help for a better understanding and just a political or purely ideological discourse, which, by the way, is common in this area, is unproductive at best.”[7]

Here I am reassured and I continue reading. Well, it takes me hardly twenty pages, when I came across what I wanted: “according to Pino Arlacchi the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, during the 1990s, in Southeast Asia alone, there were three times more victims of trafficking as in the entire history of the African slave trade. He believes that the African slave trade in a period of 400 years counted 11.5 million victims, while trafficking for prostitution only in the region of South-East claimed 33 million victims.”[8] If I were Richard Poulin, I would ask seriously if the author of the article in the *Dictionary of Violence* did not plagiarize a bit, but this is not my business. The only thing that matters is to find the basis of the estimate. Unfortunately, Richard Poulin does not cite any text signed by its original source (i.e. Pino Arlacchi), but at least it gives us a source: he wrote in a note that the statement is quoted by Demir (2003).

The publication by Jenna Shearer Demir is a research paper for completing an MA and is also available online[9]. It is entitled *Trafficking of Women for Sexual Exploitation: a Gender Based Well-founded Fear? An Examination of Refugee Status Determination for Trafficked Women*

Prostituted from CEE / CIS Countries to Western Europe.

The paper is about obtaining refugee status for women trafficked for prostitution in the EU or the CIS (former USSR). There seemed to be little chance that I would find the information I look for on Asia’s South-East, but I begin reading again. Luck is still with me, because in the first paragraph of the summary of the report the author mentions the 33 million victims: “Approximately 120,000 women and children are trafficked into the European Union every year. Worldwide, estimates range from 700,000 to an astounding 4,000,000 women and children trafficked annually. To put this number into perspective, in the last decade of what is being called ‘Modern Slavery’, Southeast Asia alone has produced three times as many victims of trafficking than the entire history of slavery from Africa.” A footnote is in support of this observation: “From statement by Pino Arlacchi, UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. 400 years of slavery from Africa produced 11.5 million victims; victims of trafficking in the 1990s in Southeast Asia are estimated to be 33 million. As quoted in Refugee Reports (2000) Vol. 21. No. 5”.

As was to be expected, given the different object of Demir’s study, there is no more reference to this estimate and it is completely absent from the report itself. However, a “detail” strikes me: the “statement” of Arlacchi quoted by Demir reports 33 million victims of trafficking, but does not specify as Poulin and Marcovich wrote, “trafficking for prostitution.” Since Demir did not specify and, in the absence of further clarification, we must believe that the 33 million mentioned includes all forms of trafficking, what allows then Poulin to say – and Marcovich to repeat – that all the victims were trafficked for prostitution? And if one could suspect Marcovich had somehow plagiarized Poulin, an even more serious problem seemed to exist, for the source of Poulin is in no way an expert on trafficking in Asia, and furthermore Poulin lets her say something that she actually does not write. Either someone here is incompetent (he cannot read correctly) or he is dishonest (changing the information), or it is both at once and I’m starting seriously to worry about the credibility of their information.

Demir, in her remarks, also gives us a reference: it is a report from the year 2000 where Arlacchi is quoted. This report is also on the Internet: it is an eight-page document entitled *Trafficking in Women and Children: A Contemporary Manifestation of Slavery****[10]***. The report is not signed. Hosted on the website of the UNHCR, it comes from an American NGO assisting refugees, the *United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants* and consists of a

comprehensive presentation of the trafficking of women and children. There are no bibliographic references. It is by no means a scientific text.
Under the heading “Trafficking on the Rise”, on the fourth page in the first paragraph is written the following: “According to U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright, trafficking in people is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world and the third largest source of profits for international organized crime, behind only drugs and guns. Arlacchi from the UN explained, ‘In four centuries, about 11.5 million Africans were trafficked into slavery, while in the last decade, more than 30 million women and children may have been trafficked within and from Southeast Asia for sexual purposes and illegal labor’.”

So there is the source of Demir: she has herself apparently added three million people to 30 million estimated by Arlacchi, who explicitly wrote “for sexual purposes and illegal labor.” At least we have confirmation that over 30 million by Arlacchi turn into 33 million by Demir, apparently included trafficking for prostitution and other forms of trafficking, but our research stops here, since no reference is given.
Recapitulation: Demir reproduced in 2003 (incorrectly) an anonymous document dating from 2000 published by an NGO, Poulin uses in 2004 (incorrectly) Demir, Marcovich recopies Poulin, and in 2011 we find the figure of 33 million stated in the *Dictionary of Violence,* published by Presses Universitaires de France. None of these authors has made any effort to verify the numbers: they just simply reproduced them uncritically. But we are not yet at the end of our surprises.
Pino Arlacchi is today a member of the European Parliament. I wrote to him directly, as a sociologist to a sociologist[11], to ask him how he had arrived at his estimate. He very kindly responded the next day that his research had been conducted in the late 1990s and he did not remember. He thought he had found it in an ILO publication or, more likely, in the Far Eastern Economic Review[12].

Since then, I bought his book. It is titled *Slaves. The New Human Trafficking*. In the first chapter, intended to open our eyes to the realities of contemporary slavery, he writes: “The dimensions of contemporary slavery are pale figures of the past as very accurate calculations produced by American researchers who examined records and documents on human trafficking from Africa to the New World are proving, victims of trafficking have not exceeded 12 million people in four centuries. In less than thirty years, from the early 1970s to today, the selling of women and children for sexual slavery in Asia is estimated at around 30 million

people.”[13]

This quote deserves some comments. Firstly, to note that Arlacchi is the author of the comparison between the figures of the slave trade and those of contemporary trafficking. Then, to note that the two estimates were not produced by him: he is not responsible for either the former or the latter. Finally, in the game of quoting from each other, several errors were made: the number of slaves went down from 12 million to 11.5 million people, while the number of contemporary victims increased from 30 million to 33 million. The spatio-temporal coordinates of reference, however, got smaller: from three decades towards one decade for the period and from Asia to South-East Asia for the region. Note also that Arlacchi speaks only of trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation and not of “illegal labor” (clandestine and often forced work), as it is quoted in the NGO report in 2000. Finally and most importantly, it is worth looking at the source that Arlacchi gives us: “U.S. News & World Report, 30-4-97.” It is a weekly paper not collected by universities and it was not easy to get hold of the article in question (especially since it was not in the number quoted by Arlacchi). But Miriam Lodeweyckx from the Center for American Studies in Brussels found one electronic copy of it, with an article by journalists Victoria Pope and Margaret Loftus entitled “Trafficking in Women. Procuring Sex for Russians Abroad – Even in America “(published April 7, 1997). As its title indicates, it is almost exclusively devoted to the situation in Russia, but to give an idea of the magnitude of the growing phenomenon of trafficking, the journalists write in the fourth paragraph of the article “In bars, massage parlors, and brothels around the world, these young women join the indentured ranks of the global sex industry. Watchdog groups estimate that some 30 million women and children since the early 1970s have fallen victim to the traffickers of human flesh. Many come from Thailand, the Philippines, and other Asian countries”.

In other words, an estimate explicitly identified in 1997 as being from unnamed “watchdog groups” finds itself somewhat modified with each new quotation, fourteen years later in a scholarly dictionary and a book of ATTAC[14]. No scientific research has ever established this number. This is not serious, while the problems discussed – forced prostitution and child prostitution – are serious.

Please forgive me for being so detailed while tracing these numbers; a process that could have been summarized in a few lines – but would you have believed me that the figures were

treated with a lightness that is unprofessional for a researcher or those deemed to be such (Arlacchi, Demir and Poulin in this case). They are paid to provide reliable data. I would like to explain the reasons why I find this state of affairs so worrying, first from the perspective of the activists, and then from the perspective of the researcher.

Given the uncertainties surrounding the estimates (Who? What kinds of victims are we talking about? Where? In Asia, South-East Asia, some countries in Asia … When? Within three decades, a decade?), it would be pointless to test this scientifically. However, it is possible to have more limited estimates and researchers have engaged in the exercise. Thomas Steinfatt et al. are a good example of this. In the past ten years they attempted three times to estimate the number of victims of trafficking in Cambodia[15]. I refer to their texts (also available online) where you can verify the methodologies.

It should be noted that since the 1990s the estimate usually repeated over and over again – by the same process of blind repetition we have seen for the 33 million – was in a range of 80,000 to 100,000 “sex slaves” in Cambodia[16]. However, at the end of Steinfatt’s investigations and with a thousand precautions, he and colleagues conclude that in 2001 there must be about 20,000 prostitutes in Cambodia, with 2500 victims of trafficking. Estimates made then (in 2002 and especially in 2008) give even lower figures, but remain in the same order of magnitude. In other words, compared to the lowest estimates by the aforementioned NGO, Steinfatt arrives at a figure 32 times lower (80,000 divided by 2,500 = 32)!

Just imagine our reaction if an NGO or an international organization such as the ILO stated that in Belgium the number of people receiving unemployment benefits is 32 times greater than it is in reality: for 2009, this would mean 1,309,930 multiplied by 32, which is 41,917,760. Just several times the total population of the country! The poor fool who dared to publish these figures would be forever discredited, and if it were an official statistician, there is every reason to dismiss it on the basis of being obviously incompetent. Or imagine the opposite: that the figure provided would be divided by 32 and we would have only forty thousand unemployed people in the country. The problem of unemployment would be almost solved in Belgium, and the country could become a model for its neighbors.

I just want to point this out so we remember that numbers matter. The militant who puts his

trust into the alleged “experts” preaching figures absurdly wrong will not be taken seriously by anyone and all his work will be disqualified: if he is so wrong on this point, how are we supposed to trust him on anything else?

Suppose further that the error is not corrected and inspires public policy: be the estimates 32 times higher or 32 times lower, in all cases, these policies would be inevitably doomed to fail. Beyond the damage to the credibility of activists, it is the effectiveness of political actions, which would be undermined if they were based on such estimates. And the “experts” who provide such estimates to the activists discredit at the end the causes they advocate.

Researchers and pseudo-experts: a necessary denunciation

Researchers have also reasons to be concerned about the rantings of those “pseudo-experts”, since their status as experts in the public sphere gives them influence[17]. If it were clear to everyone that these pseudo-experts keep to a purely ideological discourse, it would not have been necessary to make the exercise I undertook: a sociologist working on witchcraft does not need to demonstrate the falsity of witchcraft; it is not his problem. Similarly here, there are more interesting questions to be addressed. For example, taking these pseudo-experts as objects of research, one would wonder how they work, if they themselves believe what they write and what they explain to their audience, etc. Already in 1929, Erich Fromm and Max Kreutzberger had advocated the undertaking of such a research program: Fromm invited researchers to investigate the psychological reasons for the persistent belief in the existence of massive women trafficking, while Kreutzberger suggested a sociological study of people involved in the moral crusade against trafficking[18]. These researches unfortunately have never been conducted for the simple reason that people still believe these pseudo-experts, and their crusade seems therefore still justified.

It is those who enroll in the wake of Fromm and Kreutzberger that are suspected by the pseudo-experts to be the advocates of a new “historical revisionism or denial”.[19] It is then

the researchers who must justify themselves and excuse themselves for doing their job properly. It is time to reverse the trend and demand that they meet their claims and their “data”, which is endlessly repeated[20]. This requirement is the daily lot of any researcher and if they pretend to be such, there is no reason that academic activists are exempted from it.

By the way, the means these pseudo-experts use to counter criticism is not scientific debate. Thomas Steinfatt recounts in a recently published article how a powerful anti-trafficking NGO lobbied continuously both U.S. and international authorities (such as UNESCO) to prevent the release of his report.[21] Closer to home, Malka Marcovich was one of the two referees appointed by the City of Paris during the investigation into prostitution in Paris in 2003 and therefore was in a position to oversee the work of researchers. I could also state similar experiences. The most disturbing is not that these pseudo-experts can inform policy – after all, it is part of the business of ideologists to be effective propagandists – but they seduce and rampant even in the academic world and Malka Marcovich, author of the articles “Traffic” and “Prostitution” in an encyclopedia published by the Presses Universitaires de France, is unfortunately not an isolated example. It is therefore necessary to identify them so it becomes clear to everyone that their work should be taken as surrealist objects of study and not as serious descriptions of reality.

There is still another major reason why the deception must be exposed: the discourse of pseudo-experts has practical consequences.[22] For reasons that are not very difficult to analyze,[23] these pseudo-experts’ publications were particularly welcome to the Bush administration – and by part of the European left – and had an impact on several substantial decisions: for example, any U.S. federal subsidy was banned for associations in the United States or abroad suspected of “supporting” prostitution, which is by our pseudo-experts inevitably connected to trafficking. Many associations working on reducing the risks for prostitutes rather than the abolition of prostitution are not able getting state funding anymore. In contrast, repressive but ineffective actions like spectacular raids against brothels to “save” the victims are generously supported.[24] Raids most often lead to arrests and expulsions of foreign prostitutes, but that does not prevent pseudo-experts for whom by definition all prostitutes are victims of trafficking, claiming to represent the interests of the victims of trafficking.

Many causes probably contribute to the surprising attention pseudo-experts are getting.

Some are well-known historical reasons. Indeed the ancestors of our modern pseudo-experts were not unmasked and so their descendants remain able to deceive us. Since the existence of a massive white slave trade at the turn of the last century is supposed to have been “scientifically” proven in the past, why doubting that the phenomenon could be repeated today? But in fact, already in the past, the demonstration was flawed and I found a similar mixture of good intentions, incompetence and dishonesty in the final report of the Committee of Experts of the League of Nations on trafficking women and children published in 1927.[25] Nevertheless, they had a lasting impression on the representations of human trafficking and influenced policies against trafficking. It would be unfortunate if history continues to repeat itself.

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[1] *Mondialisation de la prostitution, atteinte globale à la dignité humaine,* Mille et une nuits, 2008. I will also refer here to the document: Mondialisation de la prostitution. http://www.france.ATTAC.org/archives/IMG/pdf/Mondialisation_de_la_prostitution.pdf.

[2] Compare: Françoise Gendebien, « Et maintenant, c’est l’amour qu’on importe … », La Revue nouvelles, nr. 3 March 2005, pp. 71 – 74 ; see also Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Forced to care. Coercion and Care giving in America, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010.

[3] The names of Richard Poulin, Elaine Audet, Malka Marcovich, Claudine Legardinier, Yolande Geadah, Judith Trinquart, Janice G. Raymond are quoted in this context. I do not know all of them, but the first one is a colleague of mine, Professor in Sociology recently retired from the University of Ottawa and M. Marcovich is a historian.

[4] *Dictionnaire de la violence*, edited by Michela Marzano, PUF, 2011, p. 1331.

[5] Cf. http://www.unodc.org/pdf/gift%20brochure.pdf, consulté le 7 octobre 2011.

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[6] http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf, consulté le 7 octobre 2011.

[7] Richard Poulin, *La Mondialisation des industries du sexe. Prostitution, pornographie, traite des femmes et des enfants*, Ottawa, Les Éditions de L’Interligne, 2004, p. 45.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[9] Jenna Shearer Demir, *Trafficking of Women for Sexual Exploitation: a Gender Based Well-founded Fear?* An examination of refugee status determination for trafficked prostituted women from CEE/CIS countries to Western Europe http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/files/2011/04/a115.pdf.

[10]United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *Trafficking in women and children: a contemporary manifestation of slavery* , 1 July 2000, http://www.refworld.org/docid/3c58099b8.html.

[11] According to his biographie on Wikipédia,Pino Arlacchi is still professor for sociology at the University of Sassari (http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pino_Arlacchi, consulted at the 7th Octorber 2011.

[12] Mail from the 7th October 2011.

[13] Pino Arlacchi, *Schiavi. Il nuovo traffico di esseri umani*, Milan, Rizzoli, 1999, p. 14.

[14] Please notice that also Pino Arlacchi could not resist modifying his own source, because according to the journalist the estimation of the « *watchdog groups* » does not concern specifically Asia. Perhaps they meant the whole world? The journalist only writes the « many » are coming from Asian countries.

[15] Thomas Steinfatt *et al.*, « Measuring the Number of Trafficked Women in Cambodia : 2002. Part 1 of a Series », Accepted for presentation at The Human Rights Challenge of Globalization in Asia-Pacific-US : The trafficking in persons, especially women and children ; Steinfatt T., (2003), « Measuring the Number of Trafficked Women and Children in Cambodia : A Direct Observation Field Study. Part III of a Series », 2003 ; Thomas Steinfatt et Simon Baker, « Measuring the Extent of Sex Trafficking in Cambodia-2008 », SIREN Trafficking Estimates, UNIAP, 2011.

[16] See for example the Sao Sary Foundation: http://ssf.org.kh/1/index.php/child-protection.

[17] As an expert Malka Marcovich contributed to the Sub-commision on prostitution and human trafficking for prostitution in 2002 with an report on: *Le Système de la prostitution : une violence à l’encontre des femmes.* Commission nationale contre les violences envers les femmes, Mars 2002. http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/rapports-publics/024000228/index.shtml.

[18] Eric Fromm, « Zur Psychologie des Mädchenhandels und seiner Bekämpfung », *Judische Wohlfahrtspflege und Sozialpolitik*, n° 4, 1929, pp. 294-303, and Max Kreutzberger, « SchluBwort », *ibid.*, pp. 303-308.

[19] Like the title of chapter IV by Malko Marcovich suggest: IV.Négationnisme ou révisionnisme historique.

[20] Marcovich already in 2006 copied Poulin in the „Black book of women‘s condition“ published by Christine Okrent, were she repeats the same numbers. The text is also online: http://storage.canalblog.com/38/54/412709/23124823.pdf. retrieved on 7 Octobre 2011.

[21]Thomas Steinfatt, « Sex Trafficking in Cambodia : Fabricated Numbers *versus* Empirical Evidence », *Crime, Law and Social Change*, n° 56, 2011, pp. 443-462.

[22] Cf. Ronald Weitzer, « The Mythology of Prostitution : Advocacy Research and Public Policy”, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, n° 7, 2010, pp. 15-29.

[23] Cf. Gretchen Soderlund, « Running from the Rescuers : New U.S. Crusades against Sex Trafficking and the Rhetoric of Abolition », *NWSA Journal*, vol. 17, n° 3, 2005, pp. 64-87.

[24] Again on Cambodia, the raids between 2002 and 2004 in Svay Pak had as consequences as Frédéric Thomas reports for the COSECAM (Coalition to Address Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cambodia): “the new living conditions of the trafficked and sexually exploited children are worse, than before and their commercial exploitation became completely underground.” (*Impact of Closing Svay Pak. Study of Police and International NGOs Assisted Interventions in Svay Pak*, 2005, p. 21. http://www.cosecam.org/publications/impact_of_closing_svay_pak_eng.pdf (retrieved the 4th February 2012.

[25] Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Le Mythe de la traite des Blanches. Enquête sur la fabrication d’un fléau,* La Découverte, 2009.