

Comparative cultural studies: European and Latin American perspectives



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Human trafficking. Different contours, new scenarios: comparative perspectives between Europe and Latin America.

Coordinators

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Presentation of the monograph

Human trafficking is no longer a crime with rigid structures; it has become one of the most dynamic and lucrative illicit economies in the world, ranking as the third largest source of income for organised crime. Human trafficking is characterised by a high capacity for strategic adaptation to technological changes and contemporary geopolitical transformations. In this context, digitalisation has structurally reconfigured all phases of the trafficking cycle, from recruitment to exploitation and control:

- **Cyber recruitment:** Traffickers use social media, dating apps and online games to identify and recruit victims through emotional deception or false job offers.
- **Online exploitation:** There has been a critical increase in sexual exploitation without physical contact, where control is exercised through constant monitoring and live streaming.
- **AI and Deepfakes:** In 2026, the use of artificial intelligence to generate child sexual abuse content (*deepfakes*) and the automation of cyber scams represent new vectors of mass victimisation that make judicial tracking difficult.

The current landscape is also characterised by a notable increase in situations of vulnerability arising from the systematic exploitation of humanitarian crises and conflicts, armed conflicts, and climatic emergencies. These contexts generate scenarios of structural vulnerability that facilitate recruitment and exploitation:

- **Migration crises:** Flows of refugees and migrants in an irregular administrative situation are a priority target for trafficking networks due to their legal vulnerability and lack of support networks.
- **Child exploitation:** According to the UNODC's *2024 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, child exploitation has grown by 25%, with an alarming 31% increase in child victims detected globally compared to pre-pandemic levels, highlighting a worrying trend.
- **Environments of Trust:** Recruitment within the family nucleus or close social circles persists, where emotional bonds and deception operate as mechanisms of control and coercion.

On the other hand, beyond sexual exploitation, which remains one of the most visible forms, criminal networks have diversified and complexified their modes of operation:

- *Labour exploitation:* Present in sectors such as illegal mining, agriculture and domestic work, articulated through mechanisms of "debt bondage" and extremely precarious conditions.
- *Forced criminality:* Forcing victims, especially minors, to commit criminal activities such as drug trafficking, organised theft or financial fraud in digital environments.
- *Reproductive exploitation:* Use of women in vulnerable situations for pregnancy for the purpose of delivering or selling the newborn.

The complexity of trafficking today requires new research and studies from academia that go beyond its sole consideration as a criminal offence. It is imperative to produce new knowledge about its forms of production and to share the findings obtained in different spaces.

Likewise, we encourage the submission of papers that examine media representations, public narratives, the social construction of the victim and the perpetrator, and the cultural imaginaries that permeate human trafficking in European and Latin American contexts. Intersectional approaches that consider gender, ethnicity, social class, and migratory processes will be especially valued.

This monograph invites reflection on human trafficking from a comparative perspective between Europe and Latin America, addressing not only its operational transformations, but also its cultural, discursive, and symbolic dimensions. Contributions are expected to analyse how the historical, social, normative, and cultural contexts of both regions shape different forms of vulnerability, representation, and institutional response to the phenomenon.

Questions to be answered

- How has digitalisation reconfigured the modus operandi of trafficking networks?
- How do current humanitarian and climate crises act as catalysts for victimisation?
- What is the role of "emotional deception" and environments of trust in contemporary recruitment?
- How does human trafficking interact with other illicit economies within transnational organised crime?
- What barriers prevent victims of labour trafficking from being effectively identified in global supply chains?
- Why does such a wide gap persist between the estimated number of victims and official detection figures?
- What is the impact of intersectionality (gender, ethnicity, social class) on vulnerability to trafficking?
- Are "human rights" approaches more effective than "crime-centred" approaches in the recovery of victims?
- What similarities and differences can be observed between Europe and Latin America in the cultural construction of vulnerability?
- How do the media and institutional discourses represent trafficking in both regions?
- What tensions exist between crime-centred approaches and human rights-based approaches in different regional contexts?
- How do historical and colonial trajectories influence contemporary dynamics of exploitation?

Descriptors

- ✓ Cyber recruitment.
- ✓ Exploitation through digital environments
- ✓ Grooming
- ✓ Money laundering
- ✓ Vulnerable situations
- ✓ Human mobility
- ✓ Debt bondage
- ✓ Forced criminality
- ✓ Exploitation in tourism
- ✓ Public policies and revictimisation
- ✓ Media representations
- ✓ Digital culture
- ✓ Intersectionality
- ✓ Gender and migration
- ✓ Coloniality and postcoloniality

✓ Transnational governance

Coordinators

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José Manuel Grima (ORCID: 0000-0002-9103-7110) holds a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology and a Higher Teaching Degree in Sociology (USAL), a Master's Degree in Minority and Family Studies (UNLZ), a Master's Degree in Gender, Society and Politics (Priggepp – Flacso) and a PhD in Social Sciences (Flacso). He is a lecturer in the Common Basic Cycle at the Faculty of Social Sciences and a researcher at the Gino Germani Research Institute, University of Buenos Aires. He is also a postgraduate lecturer at the Centre for Advanced Studies at the National University of Rosario. He is co-coordinator of the International Diploma in "Human Trafficking, Migrant Smuggling and their Link to Money Laundering" at the National University of Southern Chaco, coordinator of the University Extension Diploma "Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling as a Serious Violation of Human Rights. Intervention mechanisms for prevention, assistance and access to justice" developed in cooperation between observaLatrata and the National University of Río Negro.

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Verónica Gómez Fernández (ORCID: 0000-0003-0849-4757) is a social worker with a Master's degree in Family Sciences from the Catholic University of the Holy Conception and an academic in the Department of Social Sciences at the same institution, where she works as an assistant professor and director of the Master's programme in Social Intervention with Children. Her career combines university teaching, applied research and social innovation, with a specialisation in human rights, gender, children, families and public policy, with a particular emphasis on the protection of vulnerable populations from exploitation and structural violence.

Her academic work addresses the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, the protection of rights in contexts of vulnerability, and the analysis of public social protection policies, contributing to the study of human trafficking from human rights and intersectionality perspectives.

She has conducted research on migrant children, alternative residential care, and reducing gender gaps in research, in collaboration with public and international organisations such as UNICEF and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.

She is a member of the Chilean Chapter of observaLATrata and participates in intersectoral spaces on children and trafficking, contributing to regional analysis and the design of prevention and protection strategies from Latin America.

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