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About Whores and Prostitutes*

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Abstract

This reflective article arises from ongoing doctoral research, taking a critical look at abolitionist positions on prostitution around the question: what implications do the conceptions about prostitutes have on the lives of whores who do not derive their livelihood from being whores? This discussion poses four implications that are dangerous for all women: I) abolitionist positions on prostitution infantilize us and call into question our ability to make our own choices. II) Prostitution abolitionism seeks to manipulate our gaze, making the part appear as a whole. III) Many of these positions are based on puritanical ideas about sexuality. IV) They recreate and encourage a conservative sexual morality that has never benefited women. A series of questions are suggested at the end as an invitation to open the feminist debate on these issues instead of closing it.

Keywords: prostitution; sexuality; feminist movement

Sobre putas e prostitutas

Resumo

Este artigo de reflexão, no âmbito da investigação de doutoramento em curso, analisa de forma crítica as posições abolicionistas sobre a prostituição. Articula-se em torno da questão: que implicações têm as concepções de prostitutas na vida das prostitutas que não ganham o nosso sustento por serem prostitutas? A reflexão levanta quatro implicações que são perigosas para todas as mulheres: I) as posições abolicionistas da prostituição infantilizam-nos e lançam dúvidas sobre a nossa capacidade de fazer as nossas próprias escolhas; II) o abolicionismo da prostituição procura manipular o nosso olhar: faz passar a parte para o todo; III) muitas destas posições baseiam-se em ideias puritanas sobre a sexualidade; e IV) recriam e encorajam uma moralidade sexual conservadora que nunca beneficiou as mulheres. Uma série de questões é sugerida no final, como um convite para abrir, em vez de fechar, o debate feminista sobre estas questões.

Palavras-chave: prostituição; sexualidade; movimento feminista

Sobre putas y prostitutas

Resumen

Este artículo de reflexión, en el marco de la investigación doctoral en curso, expone una mirada crítica a las posturas abolicionistas de la prostitución. Se articula en torno a la pregunta: ¿qué implicaciones tienen las concepciones sobre las prostitutas en la vida de las putas, que no derivamos nuestro sustento de serlo? La reflexión plantea cuatro implicaciones que resultan peligrosas para todas las mujeres: I) las posturas abolicionistas de la prostitución nos infantilizan y ponen en duda nuestra capacidad de hacer elecciones propias; II) el abolicionismo de la prostitución pretende manipular nuestra mirada: hace pasar la parte por el todo; III) muchas de estas posturas se fundan en ideas puritanas sobre la sexualidad, y IV) recrean y alientan una moralidad sexual conservadora que nunca ha beneficiado a las mujeres. Se sugieren al final una serie de preguntas, como invitación a abrir el debate feminista sobre estos asuntos, en vez de cerrarlo.

Palabras clave: prostitución; sexualidad; movimiento feminista

What direction can a feminist policy on sex take in the future?
Above all, feminism must be a movement that addresses sexuality, not yielding the field to reactionary groups more than willing to speak [...] Being radical in these times consists less in what is done than in what one is willing to think, consider, and question.

CAROL S. VANCE (1989)

Who pays you? Or are you just foolish on your own?

AMELIA VALCÁRCEL (2020)¹

Who is the one speaking?²

First, I will position myself, explicitly mention my standpoint, and share with you who is speaking and from where. I am a Colombian woman over 40 years old, mestiza, with white privileges in this country. I am a middle-class woman, educated at a public university, dedicated to writing and social research. I have not engaged in sex work per se. I have had a rather broad, varied, and non-normative sexual life: it began lavishly in adolescence. I intentionally became a mother at 19, participated in the heterosexual swinger scene for several years, became a lesbian after 30, enjoyed casual and group sex, was attracted to the BDSM scene³, used pornography, and once embarked on a post-porn proposal presented in the auditorium of the law school at Universidad Nacional. And on all these matters, I have written: in the sexuality blog I maintained between 2006 and 2009 (*“El Sexo de Sofía”*), in specialized articles (some academic, others less so), in opinion columns, and my thesis of the master, because I am fundamentally a writer who believes that to write, one must live.

In summary, according to prevailing standards, I would not qualify as a saint but rather as a whore. “We are all whores. What sets us apart from each other is that some dress up as ‘decent’ to hide and perpetuate pettiness, and others do not hide it” (Espejo, 2009, p. 17). However, as I just mentioned, strictly speaking, I have not engaged in sex work, meaning I have not exchanged sex for money. I have exchanged it for other things: for drinks or a walk, for a sense of belonging to something, for the emotional security of what I once understood as “love,” but not for money. Take note of that: is not sex always an exchange, even if it is the exchange of your pleasure for mine? Is not it always a you-give-me-I-give-you? Now, forget that note because it takes us down other paths, critical but different from what I want to propose now.

What does the person speaking think about sex work?

Strictly speaking, I have not engaged in sex work because I have always had another source of income unrelated to my sexual activities. However, I do have a perspective on sex work, shaped

1 Response I received in a virtual exchange about sex work where I questioned abolitionist perspectives.

2 This text is articulated with the research process carried out by the author in the Ph.D. in Sociology: Social Change in Contemporary Societies, UNED, Spain. The doctoral thesis (in progress) is titled “El rey desnudo. Aproximación a los sistemas discursivos sobre la sexualidad, a partir de una ética puta” (The Naked King: Approach to Discursive Systems on Sexuality, Based on a Whore Ethics).

3 BDSM is an acronym (in English) for Bondage, Discipline/Domination, Submission/Sadism, Masochism, all practices related to the erotic exchange of power, both literal and symbolic.

by extensive reading on this debate from a feminist standpoint⁴, and from numerous conversations with friends and acquaintances who identify as sex workers. My current perspective can be summarized as follows:

i) Sex work is a legitimate form of work, meaning it is a human activity for which one receives economic compensation. It is a job. Some work with their hands, others with their minds, some with their mouths, others with their legs, and some with all of the above (plus, sometimes, with the vagina or anus), and they get paid for it. We all work with our bodies. That is what I mean.

4 I have approached this debate in my academic articles, Prada, N. (2012) "All Little Red Riding Hoods Turn into Wolves in Post-Pornographic Practice," and Prada, N. (2010) "What Do Feminists Say About Pornography? The Origins of a Debate." Both publications originated from my thesis in the Master's in Gender, Identity, and Citizenship at the Universidad de Cádiz, Spain.



ii) Sex work takes many forms and is practiced in different conditions. As Laura Agustín has well documented:

we find potential jobs such as being a phone operator, where the client is not even seen. Or working as a stripper, which in many places means moving naked and nothing more. Even when we talk about ‘full-service’ sex, it is not the same to perform it for a pornographic film as it is to do it in a brothel (or, for example, with clients of sexologists). These are different jobs performed in bars, houses, offices, or consulting rooms. In some, the worker has more control over the situation and working hours, while others lack control. Some are well-paid, others are not. Some services seem easy to certain people while difficult to others. The boss or owner of the place can be the most significant factor in some positions. In short, everything depends on the specific situation (Agustín, 2004, p. 29).

iii) It is crucial to differentiate between “sex work” and “sexual exploitation” or “human trafficking” (which are indeed condemnable and against which I also fight). The fundamental difference lies in consent. If a person is forced into sexual acts without their consent, it is rape, sexual violence. If a person is forced into sexual acts for the profit of someone else while they gain nothing, it is sexual exploitation. If a person is transported and held through coercion or deception to be sexually exploited, it is trafficking for sexual exploitation. What we talk about when we say “sex work” is not the situations mentioned above but consenting adults engaging in sexual acts for profit. I am simplifying, of course, for didactic purposes, but the central point is: “sex work,” “sexual exploitation,” and “trafficking for sexual exploitation” are different things. We should not mix apples with oranges, although we can talk about both apples and oranges and their relationships.

iv) There is as much exploitation in sex work as in any other form of paid labor. The company owner appropriates the surplus value produced by the labor of the worker; the clothes sewn by workers, for which they are paid 10 pesos, are sold by the company for 100. For the book written, the author receives 5%, the bookstore gets 40%, and the publisher takes the remaining 55%. The

consulting firm pays 10 pesos to the people it hires for work; it charges 200 pesos. The world is full of pimps in various fields. It is called capitalism. Therefore, I see no reason to focus the fight against one particular form of exploitation (that which would fall on the sex worker) with a different emphasis than on other forms of capitalist exploitation (like all other forms of wage labor).

v) Prostitutes constitute the only proletariat whose condition deeply unsettles the bourgeoisie. To the point that often, women who have never lacked anything are convinced of this truth: that should not be legalized. (Despentes, 2007, p. 49).

Why is this so? Why does this form of proletariat unsettle so much more? The reason behind this differentiated struggle against various forms of exploitation seems to be a moral one. If you believe it is okay for a bank teller to earn 30 million pesos a year while the bank owner earns 4 trillion in the same period, if you think it is okay for a bar waitress to earn 12 million pesos a year — minimum wage— while the bar owner earns 200 million in the same time, but you believe it is wrong for a prostitute to earn 3 out of the 10 pesos charged for the service, what is it that you think is wrong? Either all the above are wrong, or none of them is. That is my most considerable distrust of abolitionist positions on pornography or prostitution: it does not seem like what they want to abolish is exploitation, all of it, but a particular type, one that involves sexual acts they do not like, those of whores. In the words of Virginie Despentes: “It takes being an idiot, or disgustingly dishonest, to think that one form of exploitation is unbearable and judge that the other is full of poetry” (2007, p. 24)⁵.

vi) Sex workers have a tough time because they participate in the capitalist exploitation of the contemporary world, but they do so in conditions of unacceptable vulnerability. If they are not recognized as workers, they are not covered by the soothing labor regulations (something is better than nothing; compared to the rest of workers, it is a lot), but instead remain adrift: without social security, without regulation of hours and working conditions, without any guarantees whatsoever. They are among the

5 In the original text: “It takes being an idiot, or disgustingly dishonest, to think that one form of exploitation is unbearable and to judge that the other is full of poetry” (p. 24).

groups that have fared worst during the COVID-19 pandemic, like any informal worker, but adding the stigma. We say “he is making a living” about the candy vendor; about the prostitute, they say, at best, “poor girl”; at worst, “she deserves it for being a vagabond.” My point here is: that the recognition of sex workers as workers is needed, and conditions for all workers need improvement.

What does this speaker have to do with sex work?

My perspective on sex work is secondary. As I mentioned in point 1 (my enunciation standpoint), I am not the most authorized person to speak about what sex workers need or do not need. They are the ones for that task, as they are neither blind, deaf, nor dumb; instead, they are pretty intelligent and brave. They are not a homogeneous group either. There are internal debates, as in all human groups. I have an opinion on the matter, and I share it, as I just did, just as I have an opinion on other topics in which I am not directly involved: soccer, fashion, partisan politics, and many more.

I do not intend to speak for or about sex workers but rather with them because what happens to them also involves the rest of us, especially those of us who aspire to live our sexuality freely, to make decisions in this field about our successes and mistakes. To contribute to the reflection from my particular standpoint (which is, in reality, quite common). I am finally getting to the heart of my reflection, to the question to which I feel more directly concerned: What implications do the conceptions about prostitutes have on the lives of the whores who do not derive our livelihood from being one? I am going to address four implications of abolitionist⁶ positions on prostitution that I find dangerous for everyone: they infantilize women, are based on puritanical ideas about sexuality, manipulate our perspective, and coincide with a very risky conservative policy.

The abolitionist positions on prostitution infantilize women

We have fought for a long time to make it understood that when a woman says “No,” it means “No.” The recognition of our voice also implies that when we say “Yes,” the agency of the one consenting is acknowledged, even if they are making a mistake (we have the right to make mistakes, to choose things that we might not choose later on the go, but that we choose at the moment). If we accept that women have a voice and that this voice must be recognized, it includes women who say “Yes” to sex work. If it does not include them, if the only voice of women we will accept is the one that aligns with our standards of how things should be, then what we are pretending is not that women have a voice but that they all have the same one.

A famous text, often cited in Holocaust memorials⁷, goes:

First, they came for the communists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a communist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

6 The abolition of prostitution and pornography emerged as a position within feminism in the late 1970s. This stance advocates for the need to abolish prostitution and pornography, considering them inherently forms of violence against women. Prominent figures in the early days of abolitionism include Catharine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, Robin Morgan, Susan Brownmiller, Kathleen Barry, and others. Their analyses denounce the situation of women in these spaces, criticize the representations of women involved (as they invariably reproduce misogynistic scenes), and place sexuality within the theory of inequality between the sexes. Thus, what happens in this sphere reinforces and constitutes the social hierarchy between genders.

7 To appear as written by the German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller and later attributed to the German playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht.



Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Catholics, and I did not speak out—because I was Protestant.

Then they came for me, and no one was left to speak for me.

If we accept that the voice of some women is not legitimate because it does not align with our own. We deny it, telling sex workers that when they say “Yes,” we cannot accept it as a “Yes,” that we will only consider legitimate if they say “No,” then we pave the way for a day when our

voice becomes illegitimate. They might tell me, for instance, that I cannot consent to group sex, bondage games like Shibari, sexual activities with another woman, or any other thing “because you do not know what you are saying” or “because no one in their right mind would consent to that.” Just like they are telling sex workers who consent to their work, the ones they came for first.

Not recognizing the voice of women who say “yes” to sex work is a trap: they tempt you with the cheese, but if you get too close, they might cut your head off. The cheese is the idea of “sex, only for love”; you can adopt that idea for yourself and orient your life according to that precept, but

if you get too close, if you go beyond your own choice and extend it as an imperative for others, sooner or later, one of your choices may deviate from the set of imperatives. You might not say “yes” to what you have chosen.

Many abolitionist positions on prostitution are based on puritanical ideas about sexuality

A considerable portion of the critiques of sex work argue that consent is tainted in exchanges of sex for money, that there is no actual consent, only coercion of the kind: “I am forced to do it because it is my only alternative; because if not, I will starve, or worse, my children will starve.” Many sex workers would indeed prefer to earn their living through a different activity (others may not, as I mentioned, it is not a homogeneous group), just like many people earning their living from other activities are not comfortable with what they do. If I stand before you today and honestly (and only I can know if it is honest or not anything I say), if I stand before you and say that I have accepted an offer to sell empanadas because, as a writer, I am not making any money, you might also interpret my consent as coercion, as it is not what I would choose in an ideal world, but it is what circumstances force me to do. However, they would probably tell me: “All work is honest,” or they would say to me: “It is better to work than to steal,” or perhaps: “It will be temporary, what you should do now so you can get back on your path later.” However, you probably would not say that seeking money by doing something I do not want to do (selling empanadas) constitutes violence. What if instead I tell you I will work as a webcam model?

I have always been very bitch. That is why when, about five years ago, perhaps inspired by precariousness, I thought I could start having sex for money. It was not uncomfortable or something to be ashamed of at all, but rather an enterprise for which I not only felt capable but ‘amply prepared’ in her reflection on the profession (Torres 2011, p. 155)

However, for some reason, it is celebrated when someone, instead of engaging in sex work, chooses to sell empanadas, for example. The criterion for this celebration does not consider the material conditions the woman in question may face; economically, she might be better off engaging in sex work than selling empanadas—that is a fact. The reason for rejecting the former and accepting the latter is different. What is it? What makes selling empanadas more honorable than webcam modeling?

I recently raised the question in a social media exchange, but I used an example of a manicurist. A colleague, an abolitionist of prostitution, challenged me: “If you do not see the difference between painting nails and getting your ass torn, it is your problem.” I believe that is the fundamental question. What is the fundamental difference “between painting nails and getting your ass torn”? The difference arises when the exchange involves sex, the sexuality of any of the parties concerned. It does not even have to be the sexuality of a woman (what if I masturbate in a corner in exchange for a few thousand dollars?). Abolitionist positions restore “the dominant sexual ideology [that] develops the threat of sexual danger,” to which



one reacts “by pressing for security through control” (Vance, 1989, p. 18), ultimately “recreating a very conservative sexual morality” (Rubin, 1989, p. 173).

Interesting idea to insist that in an ideal world, no one does what they do not want to do. In the world of work, however, it happens all the time, and abolitionism only worries when what does not want to be done is something sexual. Abolish street vending? Abolish singing on buses for coins? Abolish notarizing documents? Abolish standing all day with a stop or go sign to control traffic? Many people do not want to do those things each morning, but abolitionists do not seem too concerned about those lives removed from their desires. They are concerned about those who offer some kind of sexual satisfaction to others (whether they want to or not).

Accepting *a priori* that painting nails and getting your ass torn are very different things and that painting nails is okay (legitimate work), while getting your ass torn is not imply accepting a series of premises. The first is that there are human activities that are legitimate work, even if done out of obligation and without desire (“because I need to eat”). The second is that there are human activities that, even if chosen (“I would rather prostitute myself than sell things on buses”), never constitute legitimate work. The third is that the boundary of legitimacy is drawn by sexuality; using sexuality for profit is always illegitimate and consistently wrong. It is still what Gayle Rubin pointed out back in the 80s in her *Notes Toward a Radical Theory of Sexuality*: “This culture always looks at sex with suspicion. It always judges all sexual practice always in its worst

possible expression. Sex is guilty until proven innocent” (1989, p. 135).

“If you do not see the difference between painting nails and getting your ass torn, it is your problem.” That alleged difference, I insist, is the fundamental question, and it is not just my problem. It is the problem of women, millions throughout history, split from the possibility of owning their bodies, subject to the will of other men, and now, to the will of other women.

Abolitionism of prostitution aims to manipulate our perspective: it makes the part stand for the whole

The whole is sex work, in its broad range of possibilities; the part is street prostitution practiced in conditions leading to death.

Thus, starting from unacceptable images of a specific type of prostitution practiced in disgusting conditions, conclusions are drawn about the entire sex market. It is as relevant as discussing the textile industry by only showing images of children without contracts in basements. (Despentes, 2007, p. 67)

However, abolitionism will only show “unacceptable images of a certain type of prostitution practiced in disgusting conditions.” Why? Despentes says:

They demand [sex workers] to be dirty, defiled. And if they do not say what needs to be said, do not complain about the harm done to them, or do not tell how they were forced, then they pay dearly. We are not afraid that they will not



survive. On the contrary, we are afraid that they will say that this work is not as terrifying as it seems. (2007, p. 57)

Daniela Maldonado Salamanca, a Colombian “*puteril and travesti* artist⁸,” indeed tells us something else, shows us another part.

In the provision of a sexual service, 60% involves dialogue, and 40% or 30% can be a sexual relationship, you know? Sometimes it is more than what is said that can be done inside. Finally, maybe that also happens as in the experience level of what kind of whore you are, right? If you are a passionate whore or if you are a harpy whore, you know? Everyone has their way of serving men. Some are more about listening, for example. Some partners only listen to people with a lot of problems and issues; they do not want any kind of sexual relations but want someone to listen to them while pampering them. There are others who, for example, go straight to the point, and we just like to do the deal, like the business, get paid, you know? Everyone has a different experience (...) It seems that a street whore lives in a lot of vulnerabilities, violence, and hostile things, but it is because of the context of impoverishment in which they have to carry out their work, not because of the work itself. (Maldonado, 2021)

8 The title of the profile about her published in Vice is: “<https://www.vice.com/es/article/n7we7b/orgullo-vice-daniela-maldonado-y-el-artivismoputeril-y-travesti>”



When sex workers do not appear *dirty or defiled* but instead exercise their autonomy, they *pay a high price*⁹. A prostitute needs to be positioned on the margins of acceptable sexuality, and her corresponding stigmatization is required for the sexist instruments of social control over all women to function (Pheterson, 2000). This delineates, by contrast, the contours of legitimate sexuality. In her *Manifiesto Puta*, Espejo asserts that “*puta* was a term to domesticate and offend. And women were offended and domesticated” (2009, p. 13). What would happen if the mechanism stopped working? Juliano has suggested that it would imply a mighty fracture for the prevailing gender and sexuality order because “in the presence of prostitutes,

⁹ As anthropologist Laura Agustín points out, there are multiple forms and scenarios in which a sexual experience is exchanged. This diversity also marks different conditions for women: brothels or escort houses; hostess clubs; certain bars, breweries, discos, cabarets, and cocktail lounges; erotic phone lines, virtual sex on the internet; sex shops with private booths; many massage parlors, relaxation establishments, and those promoting ‘physical well-being’ and saunas; escort services (call girls); matrimonial agencies; many hotels, pensions, and apartments; commercial and semi-commercial ads in newspapers and magazines and in small forms for pasting or leaving (like cards); cinemas and pornographic magazines; movies and videos for rent; erotic restaurants; domination or submission services (sodomasochism), and street prostitution: an immense proliferation of possible ways to pay for a sexual or sensual experience. It is clear, then, that what exists is not “prostitution” but a variety of different sex work (Agustín, 2000).

the king is literally naked. That is the criticism that the patriarchal system can receive from them” (2001).

The practices of abolitionism dangerously align with conservative politics

“Being radical in these times consists less of what one does than what one is willing to think, take into account, and question” (Vance, 1989, p. 47). However, several abolitionists of prostitution, self-described as “radicals,” insist on the opposite—denying the possibility of questioning these matters and attempting to close the debate. I hear them say even that “such a debate does not exist,” and any resemblance of that statement to other forms of narrowing the democratic field is not mere coincidence. They assert that “feminism has always been and will be abolitionist,” thereby erasing with a stroke of the pen (they intend to erase, rather) the existence, the work, and the voices of thousands of feminists who have not been, nor are we, of their opinion. We seem to agree that the world should be a better place for women, but



Ilustraciones y fotografías
de Ana María Vileta



we disagree on what that means. Many of us do not want to live in a world as some abolitionists propose—too vanilla for me. But we also do not intend to force them to live differently. Not all women are the same; not all of us share the same opinions or desires. We need to insist on that obvious fact; such are the times.

The times are also leaning towards conservative right-wing ideologies, unable to recognize the overwhelming evidence of human diversity. Instead, they insist on flattening it, making it uniform, decreeing, “I am like this, and we are all like this.” Those who exhibit something else are accused: “Who pays you? Or are you just foolish on your own?” Apart from being labeled as foolish or bribed, those of us who disagree with the abolitionism of prostitution (whether we are whores or not) are accused of being pimps, specifically advancing a pro-pimp lobby and being funded by sex trafficking mafias. Abolitionist positions have attempted to silence those who criticize them using the same harassment tactics used by the current power structure¹⁰. It is a kind of collective delirium prevalent these days: even those expressing opposing political ideas on social media in Colombia are accused of being part of “booths” paid by politicians to parrot foreign ideas. In both cases, the subtext is the same: people are not allowed to think if what they say does not align with the imperative. The unequivocal conclusion is not that they think differently but that they do not think. Those who believe that sex work can be an option are not considered thinkers. They are seen as mentally incapacitated, incapable of contributing to the debate¹¹

This line of thought is perilous as it has often paved the way for totalitarianism¹². A different approach that recognizes debates and allows for different points of view is a condition for constructing peace. Closing the field of discussion, on the other hand, narrows the democratic space and creates fertile ground for processing these differences through violence (for the topic at hand and for all). Colombia knows this well: closing the possibility of processing differences through the debate of ideas is part of the reasons that keep us immersed in an endless war. What does it say about a group whose methods include silencing others and imposing viewpoints? From inventing stories about sponsorships from the mafia for those expressing certain views to sabotaging virtual networks so that an academic discussion exposing these ideas cannot take place. Nothing good happens when we shut down debates by force.

From academic spaces like the Faculty Interludes or university journals, it is necessary to encourage thinking, not repeating dogmas. We need to pose questions rather than close them. Questions such as:

- What are the reasons for placing such a special emphasis on combating the exploitation involved in sex work, an emphasis so different from that made for other forms of exploitation? How is that explained? Why is it perceived that what is done with certain parts

10 This has been noted since the beginning of the debate. Not long ago, Kathy Barry described feminist opposition to the anti-pornography movement as a lobbying effort by lesbians and leftist heterosexual women who want to destroy the movement so that “leftist men can continue to abuse women without fear of criticism sexually” (Echols, 1989, p. 88).

11 It would be suggestive to delve into this by connecting this idea with the contributions of Paulo Freire, who, in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), suggests that sometimes the oppressed identify so much with the oppressor that they try to resemble them by oppressing those of their own class.

12 This line of thought also feeds the belief that some lives are more valuable than others; as Judith Butler would say, lives that are “susceptible to being mourned” and others that are not because they are not recognized as subjects but devalued and precarized, lives that are not socially worthy of mourning (Butler, J. (2010). “Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable.” Paidós).

of the body and being is more exploitative than what is done with other parts? And if so, what ideas about the body, sexuality, or eroticism underlie that?

- It is claimed that consent and free choice are impossible in a system marked by multiple dominations and structural inequalities. Based on this premise, can an impoverished woman choose to work as a street sweeper but cannot choose sex work? Who can make choices? Do systems of inequality — which condition our existence — only cloud the ability to select, to consent, for those engaged in sexual occupations? Why not for others?
- When it is deemed a mistake to approach these questions from the notion of consent and propose that the focus of the analysis be the dignity of women, how is “human dignity” understood? What activities go against our dignity? Is there a connection between dignity and the free exercise of sexuality? Does what we do or do not do with our bodies, and particularly with our genitals, have implications for dignity?
- Why are the majority of those engaged in sex work women? What implications does this have in the analysis of gender imaginaries and roles? Is it effective in transforming such imaginaries to move towards the abolition of sex work? If so, why are other sexist representations not combated by eliminating the scenarios where they are reproduced?
- There are women engaged in sex work who are experiencing various forms of violence. What do we do to stop this violence? How can this be done without putting sex workers in conditions of greater vulnerability than regulation would imply?
- And my initial question, my ongoing question: what implications do conceptions about prostitutes have on the lives of the whores who do not derive our livelihood from it?

I yield to the temptation to conclude this text with the suggestive question posed by another sex worker: “I would even say that women marginalize prostitutes more than men themselves. Is it fundamentally a war among prostitutes?” (Espejo, 2009, p. 42).





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