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PROSTITUTION AND VULNERABLE BODIES

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Abstract: Feminism is not a monolithic way of thinking, nor is the debate on prostitution. Throughout the work, and following feminist ethics, the prostitution system is considered as a system that reinforces gender inequality, since women are the ones who provide the body and men are the ones who provide the money. Gender runs through the prostitution issue, but it is not the only system of domination involved. In the first part of this paper, the different existing theoretical and legal models of prostitution are presented: regulatoryism, regulationism, prohibitionism, abolitionism and pro-rights. The abolitionist and pro-rights models are discussed in depth, as they are the ones that are currently the subject of an open debate at the heart of feminism. This debate has been presented as binary and immovable for more than seventy years, however, there are some points shared by both sides that offer some hope in relation to the creation of a space of understanding. In the second part, we reflect on which are the most vulnerable bodies within the prostitutional system and which are the most common inequalities that affect them. An intersectional and structural approach to the prostitution system is proposed, precisely because this system, through pimping and trafficking, violates those bodies with less socioeconomic protection-migrant, transsexual, impoverished bodies, etc.-which it then stigmatizes. Current neoliberalism, hand in hand with patriarchy, generates and propagates structural inequalities that are not only related to gender and that are reproduced and made visible within the reality of prostitution.

Keywords: prostitution, abolitionism, pro-rights, regulationism, feminist ethics, neoliberalism, feminism, intersectionality, transsexuality, stigma.

PROSTITUȚIA ȘI CORPURILE VULNERABILE

Rezumat: Feminismul nu este un mod de gândire monolitic, la fel cum nu este nici dezbaterea privind prostitutia. De-a lungul lucrării, si în conformitate cu etica feministă, sistemul prostitutiei este considerat ca un sistem care consolidează inegalitatea de gen, deoarece femeile sunt cele care oferă corpul, iar bărbatii sunt cei care oferă banii. Problema prostitutiei este legată de gen, dar nu este singurul sistem de dominație implicat. În prima parte lucrării, sunt prezentate diferitele modele teoretice și juridice existente privind prostituția: normativismul, prohibiționismul, abolitionismul si pro-drepturile. Modelele abolitionist si pro-drepturi sunt discutate în profunzime, deoarece acestea sunt cele care fac în prezent obiectul unei dezbateri deschise în cadrul feminismului. Această dezbatere a fost prezentată ca fiind binară și imobilă timp de mai bine de saptezeci de ani; cu toate acestea, există unele puncte împărtășite de ambele părți care oferă o oarecare speranță în ceea ce privește crearea unui spațiu de înțelegere. În a doua parte, analizăm care sunt cele mai vulnerabile corpuri în cadrul sistemului prostituției și care sunt cele mai frecvente inegalități care le afectează. Se propune o abordare intersectională și structurală a sistemului de prostituție, deoarece, acest sistem, prin proxenetism și trafic de persoane, violează acele corpuri cu mai puțină protecție socio-economică-migranții, transsexualii, săracii etc.—pe care apoi le stigmatizează. Neoliberalismul actual, mână în mână cu patriarhatul, generează și propagă inegalităti structurale care nu sunt legate doar de gen, ci care sunt reproduse si făcute vizibile în cadrul realității prostituției.

Cuvinte-cheie: prostituție, aboliționism, pro-drepturi, reglementare, etică feministă, neoliberalism, feminism, intersectionalitate, trans-sexualitate, stigmat.

1. Theoretical-legal models in reference to prostitution

The feminist ethics considers the use of prostitution as a reification of patriarchal power over women.

Beatriz Gimeno, La Prostitución

There is an extensive debate about the concept and definition of prostitution, even more so with the irruption of new ways of relating to sexuality in contemporary times and with the commodification of bodies as a generalized phenomenon. Although it would be apparently simple to know to whom the policies related to prostitution would be applied, the issue is still quite intricate when it comes to being defined and delimited. The Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) defines prostitution as: "An activity of one who has sexual relations with other people in exchange for money"1, the problem is that this description invisibilizes a fundamental issue; the existence of a universal patriarchy, a gender system, a hegemonic male model of sexuality and a stigma surrounding prostitution, configuring a scenario in which the majority of prostituted persons are women, and the majority of clients are men. According to Doctors of the World in 2021, 96.78% of prostituted persons are women², therefore, throughout this paper we will talk about women, since it is considered that the gender perspective is evident in this issue. However, other authors have offered different definitions of prostitution, for example, Enrique J. Díez Gutiérrez: "Payment with economic or other goods for the obtaining of sexual pleasure from the 'client' or 'prostitute'". Ana de Miguel defines it as: "Institution that offers men freely accessible women's bodies for a variable price". Along these lines it has also been defined as "sex between two people, one who wants to and one who does not"3 and since desire is absent for one of the parties, payment takes its place.

Prostitution has become one of the central issues in feminism today. Many countries are considering -or rethinking- its regulation or abolition. It should be borne in mind that feminism is not a monolithic movement but contains a melting pot of opinions within itself. Debates on prostitution are particularly interesting because they bring into play philosophical and political issues such as gender, social class, power, autonomy, and human rights, among others. There are, at present, different theoretical-legal models: regulatoryism, prohibitionism, abolitionism, regulationism and pro-rights.

Regulatoryism understands prostitution as necessary in society. The question arises as to who it is necessary for and what is the need it meets. According to this theoretical model, prostitution should be practiced in certain areas of the city reserved exclusively for it, where there is a greater police presence. In addition, regulatoryism calls for medical check-ups for women in prostitution, but not for clients. This position was especially advocated during the 19th century. According to Ekis Ekman, it was the French hygienist Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet who created this model called, in its beginnings, 'drainage model' which was based on the idea that prostitution was necessary to palliate or channel men's unhealthy impulses4. Regulatoryism has three main weapons: control of space (delimited zones), sanitary control and police control. Its main objective is to prevent the spread of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD), but in no case does it reflect on gender issues. This is why this model remains outside the current debate.

Prohibitionism seeks the criminalization of both sex workers and clients. They consider prostitution as immoral and harmful and, consequently, propose its prohibition. Abolitionism, on the other hand, advocates the eradication of prostitution -not its prohibition- and proposes the penalization of clients and pimps, but not sex workers. This regulation does not directly affect sex workers, but it does affect them indirectly, since if clients are penalized monetarily, they will always look for more secluded and, consequently, less safe places for them. Proponents of this approach understand prostitution as a system of exploitation and violence against women, and therefore seek to build the educational and legislative foundations necessary to

embark on the road to abolition. The problem lies in the fact that if all prostitution is considered as violence, then women in prostitution would not be able to denounce the violations they suffer. Rather, it should be said that all prostitution is symbolic violence and that within the prostitution system there is a great deal of physical violence.

On the other hand, the regulationist model seeks to regulate prostitution through specific laws and policies. Regulations are implemented to protect the rights of sex workers and ensure their safety and well-being. This may include the creation of designated prostitution zones, such as the Red-Light District in Amsterdam, health, and labor regulations for prostitutes. Regulationism is the theoretical continuation of regulatoryism. Abolitionist feminists are often mistakenly named 'prohibitionists' and pro-rights feminists are often mistakenly named 'regulationists'. Paula Sánchez Perera, a philosophy professor and feminist activist, states: "We have been insisting for 23 years that no, we are not regulationists. Models of this type regulate prostitution as a health and public order problem and are developed through administrative and police measures such as compulsory medical controls, registration in police records and zoning of the exercise considering in which spaces it is legal to exercise. They recreate the division between legal and illegal prostitution for migrants in an irregular situation, prohibit street prostitution, favor third parties and stigmatize them as a risk group and in working life"5.

The pro-rights model is based on the idea that sex workers have human rights and should be guaranteed protection and welfare. It focuses on eliminating exploitation, abuse, and discrimination, and advocates the decriminalization of prostitution and access to social, health and labor services for all sex workers. There are several countries that have already implemented these models: the Netherlands and Germany are regulationist, Sweden and Norway are abolitionist, and New Zealand has implemented the decriminalization or pro-rights model. Many of the countries mentioned above put these legislative models into operation more than two decades ago and, therefore, the numbers are there.

This brings us to the major problem associated with the debate on prostitution: percentages. Data on illegal or semi-legal activities are difficult to collect because of their secrecy, on the one hand, and because of their stigma, on the other. However, the main difficulty in collecting data on prostitution arises from the impossibility of determining an exact figure on trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The ILO estimates the number of trafficking victims at between two and four million⁶ (2021, p. 43). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in 2020, victims of trafficking for forced labor accounted for 63%, while victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation accounted for 38%. Of the total, 49% are women and girls, 87% of whom were trafficked for sexual purposes7. The percentage of trafficking within prostitution is not known exactly. Prorights feminists tend to offer lower data, while abolitionist feminists offer much higher data. This statistical gap thus becomes a weapon used by both sectors.

The data that we have been able to collect are those concerning economic profits, it is estimated that in Germany alone prostitution generates six billion euros in profits annually and in the U.S., according to the ILO, about \$28.7 billion dollars are generated from trafficking alone. Abolitionists such as Amelia Tiganus argue that most of the profits do not reach the hands of the people who engage in prostitution: "Every time I hear that women make a lot of money in prostitution I laugh. The prices are set by the brothel. Those who earn a lot of money are the owners, the pimps, who in the Spanish state are called leisure businessmen, the male ones, of course. Where there is money and power, there are men, not women. It is impossible to imagine that men would allow women to manage the five million euros a day that prostitution moves in Spain"8.

The debate between regulationism, pro-rights and abolitionism, according to Beatriz Gimeno, has not moved for decades, remaining irresolvable and binary. The author maintains that there are some points in common between both positions, for example, the total rejection of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, the penalization of those who profit from the prostitution of others,

the implementation of projects to discourage demand, the offer of other employment opportunities to those women who want it and the acceptance of the fact that prostitution is a gender issue. Gimeno is one of the authors who advocates neither regulation nor abolition, but rather the maintenance of prostitution in alegality while continuing to fight to achieve the points we have listed above: "as long as the causes of prostitution are not addressed in depth, the most important of which is gender inequality, what any regulation will do will only perpetuate, in an orderly manner, this inequality"9.

2. Prostitution and vulnerable bodies

As we have already mentioned, women and girls represent the almost total percentage of people in prostitution, therefore, it is a gender issue, but not only. The prostitution system is directly related to poverty rates. One of the first authors to relate the economic issue of prostitution to the patriarchal system was Emma Goldman, Lithuanian writer, activist, and anarchist who wrote *The Traffic in Women*. The author attributed the main cause of prostitution to the economic inferiority of women in a capitalist society. Until the emergence of capitalism in the modern age, prostitution maintained a patriarchal structure, however, it later underwent a transformation. According to Rosa Cobo, in her work *La prostitución en el corazón del capitalism* (Prostitution at the heart of capitalism), from the 1970s onwards the world economy was reorganized and entered what we call 'neoliberalism'¹⁰.

Ana de Miguel author of *Neoliberalismo sexual: el mito de la libre elección* (Sexual neoliberalism: the myth of free choice) points to neoliberalism as an economic and political system that promotes the commodification of all aspects of life, including the body and sexuality. Under this system, prostitution can be considered a form of sex work and its regulation is sought. However, Ana de Miguel argues that this neoliberal view of prostitution does not consider the inequalities of power, violence and exploitation that are inherently present in the sex industry. The author places the prostitution system at the crossroads

between capitalism and patriarchy, a dangerous alliance for women, but above all for impoverished women who can now commodify their bodies, thus favoring both systems. Rosa Cobo expresses this alliance in a phrase: "Capitalism is interested in the growing processes of commodification, and patriarchy is interested in the fact that this merchandise has a woman's body"11.

In today's globalized world, countries recovering from colonization are the most vulnerable at all levels, especially at the economic level. Impoverished countries are the main exporters of immigration and the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in Europe are mostly immigrants. We know, then, which are the most vulnerable bodies within the prostitutional-neoliberal-globalized system: impoverished migrant women. The Spanish Ministry of the Interior conducted a statistical balance sheet comprising the years from 2018 to 2022 entitled Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings in Spain, a count of trafficked persons through data received through the Police and, especially, through non-profit organizations such as APRAMP. They sampled 900 trafficked women in Madrid. Of these, only 0.3% are Spanish, 15% are Romanian and almost 40% are Nigerian¹². The prostitution system thus represents one of the major phenomena of women's migration. According to Rosa Cobo, women belonging to culturally oppressed communities are condemned to exile to culturally dominant areas. Amelia Tiganus activist, victim of trafficking and Romanian ex-prostitute in Spain argues: "To practice prostitution in other countries such as Spain, where native women have achieved important advances on the road to equality, while "others", migrant women from impoverished countries, reinforce their condition of being colonized by Spanish clients who are not willing to give up the privileges that patriarchy offers them [...] Romania is a country that does not love its women, it is a society that uses them to perpetuate itself and to satisfy the desires of its males. And to profit from their bodies, since the booty that the trafficking business leaves to the State is very succulent".

But don't be fooled either, it is in Spain where the circle is closed. Here, men you know, maybe your husband, your father, your brother, your cousin, your son, your neighbor, your friend... finance this slavery, they are the main partners of the pimps. And all this is allowed by the Spanish State and society¹³.

Women in prostitution not only carry a heavy stigma, but also a class stigma. Poverty and class stigma are not considered when analyzing the stigma of prostitution, linked to gender, and the truth is that they are, in many cases, indissoluble. While it is true that there is a stigma of prostitution linked to gender, known in the collective imaginary as the "other", there is also that "other of the other" who is usually migrant and poor. This looped expression so often used in current feminism -the other of the other- precisely expresses this intersectional system. The more discriminatory vectors cross the subject, the more complex the structure becomes.

According to a study conducted by the Department of Social Psychology, Social Anthropology, Social Work and Social Services of the Faculty of Social and Labor Studies of the University of Malaga entitled Transsexuality in Spain: Analysis of the social reality and associated psychosocial factors, 48% of transsexual people have been involved in prostitution at some point. A total of 153 respondents were surveyed, of which 110 were transsexual women and 43 were transsexual men. Thirty-three percent of those surveyed said they had an income of less than 600 euros per month and 15% had an income of less than 300 euros per month. Unemployment is also as high as 35% of the total. The main cause of job insecurity is due to the condition of transsexuality and, more specifically, to transphobia. Therefore, Mar Cambrollé, Spanish activist for trans rights, who presented the results of the study in 2012, stated: "90% of transsexuals who work as prostitutes would leave if they had the option of getting unskilled jobs"14.

The sex industry feeds on women of low socioeconomic status. Impoverished, migrant and transgender women are the most vulnerable, which is why prostitution demands a political interpretation of the commodification of bodies and cannot be limited to personal or individual issues. Rita Segato, a Brazilian feminist anthropologist, highlights how the patriarchal and colonial system

reproduces and perpetuates sexual exploitation, disproportionately affecting these groups. According to her, prostitution is based on a logic of domination and inequality, and she argues the importance of observing the structure behind the violence against women. The feminist slogan *The personal is political* expounds precisely this idea, that women's personal problems are not merely individual problems, but are rooted in sociopolitical structures and the power relations within them.

Prostitution thus demands a political and not a moral analysis, especially in the contemporary historical moment, in this modernity that Segato calls colonial modernity to point out the indissolubility between modernity and colonialism. The modern epoch reproduces the structure of colonist, owner or master and slave in not only economic, but also cultural and epistemic terms. The alliance between patriarchy and capital lays the foundations on which the relations of lordship and slavery are built. The relations of master and slave have been studied by Hegel in his work The Phenomenology of Spirit. According to the author, the master seeks recognition of his own individuality and self-consciousness through the domination of the slave. However, this relationship is revealed as unsatisfactory since the master only obtains a unidirectional and non-reciprocal recognition. The slave, on the other hand, finds a form of recognition through work and the transformation of nature. As the slave becomes an active agent in the world, he also develops a consciousness of self. Thus, from the Hegelian perspective, the master-slave relationship is primarily intrasubjective, as it focuses on the formation of individual consciousness and self-consciousness. The master-slave relationship is seen as a stage in the developmental process of the individual.

In order to analyze prostitution within 'colonial modernity' it is necessary to use a tool of analysis that is not intrasubjective, therefore, the analysis offered by Karl Marx on this relationship acquires a more intersubjective and collective dimension. Marx considers that the relationship between individuals and social classes is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of society. In his analysis, labor and the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class are central elements. Rather than focusing on individual consciousness, Marx

stresses the importance of class struggle and collective solidarity. The relationship between master and slave, in the Marxist context, is expanded to address the relations of power and exploitation between the ruling class and the working class. Prostitution deserves an approach based on gender and structure, precisely in order not to forget that the personal is political and that the subject is traversed by various structures. The prostitution system is crossed by the patriarchal, colonial, and economic systems, among others.

The approach to prostitution must be intersectional, understanding intersectionality as an analytical tool that recognizes inequalities in the system as an overlapping of different factors such as: class, race, gender, or ethnicity. Gerard Coll-Planas and Marta Cruells, in their article La puesta en práctica de la interseccionalidad política: el caso de las políticas LGTB en Cataluña (The implementation of political intersectionality: the case of LGBT policies in Catalonia), differentiate three types of policy to address inequality: single issue, multiple discrimination and intersectionality. The first addresses problems on a purely individual basis. The second considers the various factors that traverse the subject, but its flaw is an approach to inequality that is more individual than structural. Finally, intersectionality, which arises from feminism, proposes to understand inequalities as if it were a network of different intersections where the subject can be oppressor and oppressed at the same time and the intersection must be considered within its historical, social, and political context. Amelia Tiganus reflects the importance of this approach at the end of the following paragraph: "Can we talk about equality when there are at least one hundred thousand sex slaves in the Spanish State? Or is equality only for white and Spanish women? [...] Sexual colonialism that allows men of all social classes to have Romanian, Paraguayan, Dominican, Brazilian, Nigerian women within their reach... Let us not deceive ourselves, the acceptance of sexual slavery of women and prostitution also has to do with colonialism, race, and class"15.

While much has been researched and more has been written about the bodies of the women who find themselves and work within

the prostitution system, little has been said about the consumers. In Spain, according to the guide on Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation prepared by the Association for the Prevention, Reintegration and Care of Prostituted Women (APRAMP) and published by the Ministry of Health, Social Policy, and Equality, 39% of Spanish men have consumed prostitution at some time¹⁶. In other words, the bodies of consumers or clients are extensive and varied and difficult to classify. In any case, Tiganus taxonomizes them into three large groups: the nice, the 'macho' and the misogynist. The first are cynical, the second seek to reinforce their masculinity and the third are feminicides. What the three proposed typologies do have in common is a common sexism, since all of them seek access to women's bodies through purchase and place their personal desire above female desire by becoming clients. Rita Segato in her article El sexo y la norma: frente estatal, patriarcado, desposesión y colonidad (Sex and the norm: state front, patriarchy, dispossession, and colonization) sustains the importance of the pact between men in reference to prostitution: "Once again, we are faced with the pedagogy of the pornographic gaze on the body-object of women. A pedagogy of the sacrificial feast of the consumed body as food for the pact between men that thus, in front of its remains, concelebrates and consolidates. Necessary pedagogy of insensitivity, blocking of empathy and rapacious distance, to generate the esprit-de-corps of male brotherhood"17.

3. Conclusion

The prostitution system feeds on both the patriarchal system, on the one hand, and the neoliberal capitalist system, on the other. The abolitionist and pro-rights theoretical-legal models aim to protect the rights of women within this system. Both fight against human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Although the exact number of victims of trafficking into prostitution is unknown, it is known that they are mostly impoverished women, migrant women, and transgender women. The most vulnerable bodies within the prostitution system are bodies crossed by different inequalities: race,

gender, class, ethnicity, sex. Therefore, it is essential to approach the issue from a structural perspective by offering intersectional legislative solutions that can address the issue in all its complexity.

Notes:

- ¹ Beatriz Gimeno, 2012, *La prostitución*, (Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra), 45.
- ² Amelia Tiganus, 2021, *La revuelta de las putas,* (Barcelona: Ediciones B), 141.
- ³ Beatriz Gimeno, 2012, *La prostitución*, (Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra), 45.
- ⁴ Kajsa Ekis Ekman, 2017, *The self and the commodity. Prostitution, surrogacy and dissociation* (Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra), 82.
- ⁵ Paula Sánchez Perera, 2018, *El feminismo regulacionista no existe, pero el pro-derechos sí in El Diario* https://www.eldiario.es/opinion/tribuna-abierta/feminismo-regulacionista-existe-pro-derechos_129_2212408.html
- ⁶ Amelia Tiganus, 2021, *La revuelta de las putas* (Barcelona: Ediciones B), 43.
- ⁷ UNODC, 2020, *Global Record on Trafficking in Persons in United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime*, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf
- ⁸ Amelia Tiganus, 2021, *La revuelta de las putas,* (Barcelona: Ediciones B), 127.
- ⁹ Beatriz Gimeno, 2012, La prostitución, (Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra), 267.
- 10 Rosa Cobo, 2020, *Prostitution at the heart of capitalism*, (Madris: La Catarata), 156.
- ¹¹ Ibidem, 68.
- ¹² CITCO, 2022, *Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings in Spain. Balance Estadístico 2018 2022,* (Spain: Ministry of the Interior)

https://www.interior.gob.es/opencms/export/sites/default/.galleries/galeria-de-prensa/documentos-y-multimedia/balances-e-

informes/2022/BALANCE-ESTADISTICO-2018-2022.pdf

- ¹³ Amelia Tiganus, 2021, *La revuelta de las putas*, (Barcelona: Ediciones B), 58
 59.
- 14 Anonymous, 2012, About 50% of transsexual people exercise "at some point" prostitution, according to a study, La Vanguardia.

https://www.lavanguardia.com/20120906/54347065385/alrededor-del-

 $50\hbox{-}de\hbox{-}las\hbox{-}personas\hbox{-}transexuales\hbox{-}ejercen\hbox{-}en\hbox{-}algun\hbox{-}momento\hbox{-}la-prostitucion\hbox{-}segun\hbox{-}un.html}$

- ¹⁵ Amelia Tiganus, 2021, *La revuelta de las putas*, (Barcelona: Ediciones B), 92 93.
- ¹⁶ APRAMP, 2020, Prostitution: keys to reflect on a problem. Asociación de Prevención, Reinserción y Atención a la Mujer Prostituida in APRAMP, (Spain: Ministerio de Sanidad), p. 54. https://apramp.org/download/la-%20prostitucion-claves-para-reflexionar-sobre-un-problema/
- 17 Rita Segato, 2014, "Sex and the norm: state front, patriarchy, dispossession, coloniality" in *Journal of Feminist Studies*, Vol. 22, n° 304, 608 –609.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292471290_Sex_and_the_norm_State_front_patriarchy_dispossession_and_coloniality/link/5ae20c77aca272 fdaf8fa636/download

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