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The pimping of prostitution. Abolishing the sex work myth

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Review

Bindel, J. (2017). *The pimping of prostitution. Abolishing the sex work myth*. Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN-13: 978-1137558893

Julie Bindel is an investigative journalist that has performed huge research on prostitution. Bindel considers prostitution as the highest expression of gender violence and the root cause of sex trafficking. In her book, “The pimping of prostitution. Abolishing the sex work myth”, the author describes a well-assembled sex trade industry, with many ramifications in political power, but surprisingly also in some academic research and feminist approaches as well as in several social movements and NGOs. The author reviews the role of the client, the traffickers, the NGO, and academia. Bindel complements this review incorporating the stories of sexual trade survivors, that are very different from what certain researchers, traffickers, and clients tell.

The author explains that in society is frequent to find a social imaginary of the prostitute as a woman who exercises the right to use her body freely. According to Bindel's contributions, the reality is far from this: prostituted women are commonly girls who are forced into prostitution maybe at 13 years old, they are physically, psychologically, ideologically or legally prevented to leave it. They are at severe conditions of exploitation, such as having to perform 30 or 40 services per day during six or seven days a week; compelled to perform sexual practices that they do not desire with whom they do not want to; coerced to have sex without condom; they are exposed to suffer physical and psychological abuse by clients and pimps, they can be even murdered; they only keep a small part of the money since they must give most part to traffickers and brothel owners.

Bindel explains that all this happens regardless of the legislation model in which victims are, decriminalization, legalization, abolition, or prohibition. This generates many questions for Bindel which attempts to

answer in the book. For instance, how can an NGO as Amnesty International and international organizations like the United Nations defend decriminalization, which favors the interests of the lobbies? To what extent the powerful trafficking lobby influences all of this? Is there some kind of theoretical disorientation? Raising these relevant issues justifies the work of the author.

The author states that some pro-prostitution or pro-decriminalization academics are powerful activists who use their position to influence politics on prostitution. This leads the readers to ask what systems, university departments, research groups, thesis supervisors and research tutors, thesis tribunals, founding foundations..., what kind of academic knowledge, in the end, allows or encourages this?

The author maintains that feminism has led to great advances in many fields but not in prostitution and that human rights do not stretch to women in prostitution (Bindel, 2017, p. 166). Despite the growing number of survivors, there is a predominant speech that presents prostitution as a matter of choice and women's agency. Blindel argues that the pimp lobby plays with the argument that doing what you want is freedom and that it is feminist. Regardless of whether this "doing what you want" harms you or not, it is fair or not, it is repeatedly the only option given the lack of alternatives.

The current abolitionist movement is formed by many prostitution survivors and other forms of sexual violence, as well as women and some men who recognize the damage that the sex trade causes to society. Frequently, abolitionists suffer from bullying, defamation and even ostracism of many organizations that claim to be feminist and left-wing. Blindel asks how is it possible that the liberal left supports sex trade when it is based on the inequality and the absence of rights of the poorest and most vulnerable women and children in the world? Following an analysis that would remind readers of Marx's contributions, Bindel describes a patriarchal elite who easily agrees to present prostitution to women as the only alternative to poverty, while at the same time that sells it as a right, freedom and a milestone. To conclude, Blindel's book is a work worth reading.

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