

Julie Bindel, *The Pimping of Prostitution: Abolishing the Sex Work Myth*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2017, pp. 353.

Based on an impressive body of testimony and accumulated knowledge, Julie Bindel's book *The Pimping of Prostitution: Abolishing the Sex Work Myth* exposes the scope and the main tenets of misinformation and mythology associated with the sex trade. Relying on first-hand accounts from experts, scholars, law enforcement, activists, pimps and madams, and most importantly, victims and survivors of sex trafficking and the sex industry, the author convincingly argues in favor of discarding the legalization and decriminalization approach to prostitution and abolishing it once and for all.

According to Bindel, in the last decades, the neoliberal stance on sex trade has been becoming increasingly vocal and popular. By depicting prostitution as the result of women's free choice to sell their bodies, the proponents of this position essentially try to normalize prostitution and sex trade through legalization and decriminalization policies and practices. The author claims that this approach is harmful and should be done away with for three main reasons.

Starting from the most "practical" argument, not only do legalization and decriminalization not work, they have actually failed in those countries that decided to adopt such policies. In The Netherlands, Bindel reports, legalization has been described as an "abject failure" (p.92), as trafficking in women into the country and drug dealing have increased. The author also discusses numerous cases where decriminalization in New Zealand did not eliminate abuse and trafficking from its sex industry (p.114). Decriminalizing practices often allow for an even more serious and painful exploitation of women by traffickers and pimps – this is why the latter are among the most vocal supporters of the neoliberal view of prostitution as a manifestation of free choice.

Bindel's second argument, which we could think of as more "philosophical", is embedded in her attempt to change the essence and the direction of the discussion of prostitution as a phenomenon. Why instead of trying to prove that women feel empowered and free when deciding to sell sex, we do not ask why men can buy and sell these women, Bindel wonders. In this sense, prostitution exists because men can and wish to exploit women, driven and encouraged by "institutionalised oppressions of gender, race and class" (p. xix) and institutionalized power relations.

Thirdly, and most importantly, legalizing and decriminalizing prostitution does not alleviate women's suffering. On the contrary, as the sex trade flourishes, they are more exposed to physical and psychological violence, harm, and diseases, often not sure how and where to seek help and assistance. Bindel's interviews with victims and survivors clearly demonstrate this – in fact, interviewees share that it is exactly this argument of pro-prostitution activists, about the lack of harm and abuse, that angers them the most (p. 86). Prostitution should not be considered the "oldest profession" of choice but finally acknowledged as a social evil and eradicated.

Talking about the accusations she received, and personal attacks she experienced, Bindel touches upon another grave problem: the difficulties, which women's rights advocates, campaigners and researchers often encounter because of what they do. Thus, the author underscores the significance of their work and the value of building networks of professionals who can sustain and support each other. The voices of the abolitionists should not be silenced, because it is usually they who succeed in making the voices of victims and survivors heard.

Besides being thought-provoking and deeply informative, Bindel's book inspires and calls for critical thinking and looking at the sex trade through the victims' eyes. Therefore, it is an excellent reading for not only scholars, researchers and advocates of abolitionism but also students and those interested in women's rights.

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