

PROSTITUTION, INCOMPATIBLE WITH A DIGNIFIED LIFE

Kajsa Ekis Ekman

Journalist, activist, and writer. She has worked in the struggle against prostitution for seven years in Sweden and at international level.

ekis@europe.com

WHY IS PROSTITUTION INCOMPATIBLE WITH GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY? THE MOST EFFICIENT AND FAIR WAY TO STRUGGLE AGAINST IT IS BY FOCUSING ON THE CLIENT: THE SEX BUYER, ACCORDING TO THE SWEDISH MODEL WHICH HAS ALREADY BEEN ADOPTED BY NORWAY, ISLAND AND FRANCE.

KEY WORDS: PROSTITUTION, GENDER, TRAUMA, SWEDEN, LEGISLATION

Prostitution can adopt many forms. It can be direct, as the routine street prostitution: twenty pesos, a hotel room reserved for an hour, money paid, penetration, next client. It can be very subtle: an alleged love relation in which money hides behind gifts, travels, perfumes, drinks, meals... It can adopt very brutal forms, as human trafficking, which is the modern slavery. It can be seemingly voluntary, as advertisements of luxurious escorts who are really "students" prostituting themselves in their free time.

However, prostitution differs from other relations. It is a very specific form of human relations: the marketed relation.

Prostitution involves two persons. One who wants sex, feels attraction, desire and excitement. But this is not so for the other one. The other person does not feel desire, or love, or attraction. And then, here comes an economic transaction.

Two criteria must be present in any transaction: a person who wants and a person who does not want. Mutual desire requires no transaction. The transaction begins when there is a desire inequality. Payment for compensating the missing desire only takes place when one of two persons does not want to have sexual relations. Save for the money, she will not be there. This is the basis of prostitution: the absence of mutual desire.

Today, it is quite frequently said that prostitution is one's own decision, a free will decision. However, it is not sex what the prostituted person wants, but money. Sex for the sake of sex, is unwanted sex. Therefore, prostitution is the enemy of free sexuality, gender equality, and mutual desire.

STATISTICS ON PROSTITUTION

In Sweden, many researches on prostitution have been conducted during the last thirty years. In 1977, scientific studies overruled the state research published in 1981 entitled Prostitution. Beskrivning. Analys. Förslag till åtgärder (Prostitution. Description. Analysis. Suggestions for actions) (1). Before, prostitution was seen as delinquency issue and, consequently, social delinquency theories were applied, since prostitutes were considered marginalized beings. In mid-1970s, the political climate changed and researchers began to study prostitution as part of the society. Once they found that clients were not marginalized beings, for many times they were high-class men (politicians, entrepreneurs, lawyers...), prostitution could no longer be considered a separate issue, but an integral phenomenon of society: a phenomenon affecting society at large.

Following, some characteristics of prostitution at national and international level:

- Those who buy, almost in all cases, are men. Most of them have a steady job and life and belong to the middle or high-middle classes (2). In most
-

cases, ages range between 30 and 50 years; most of them are married and have children (3). Some buy sex for the first time when their wives are pregnant. The Swedish researcher Jari Kuosmanen, specialized in prostitution issues, divides persons buying sex in three categories: the one who buys sex because he is obsessed with sex; the married man who buys sex because he has no sex at all within marriage; and men who do not know how to establish relations with women and who, in fact, are looking for a love relation (2).

- The one who sells is, in most cases, a woman or a girl (4). Reportedly, between 2 and 10% are men or transvestites. Studies have shown an increasing number of young boys selling sex (5). Frequently, they enter prostitution when they are very young: mostly when they are 14 years old, according to Swedish and American studies (6). In some parts of Asia, the prostitution age is even shorter (7). This shows that prostitution is a gender phenomenon and must be analyzed within the framework of the historical oppression of women.
- Those entering prostitution have many things in common. Poverty is one factor; the abuse history is another one. According to researchers Mimi H. Silbert and Ayala M. Pines, 70% of interviewed prostitutes had been victims of sexual abuse during childhood and believe this was an important factor in choosing prostitution (8). They looked for a way to escape from home, either because of abuses, poverty or simply because they were abandoned or maltreated by their families.
- The most comprehensive study of prostitution at international level was conducted in 2003 by a group of psychologists from different countries, led by the American psychologist Melissa Farley. They interviewed 800 prostituted persons from 9 countries and found that 71% had been victims of physical abuse within prostitution; 63% had been raped within prostitution; and 89% wanted to quit prostitution (9).

These facts show that prostitution means a significant inequality involving:

- gender (she woman, he man);
- age (she minor, he older);
- economic situation (she poorer, he richer);
- psychological (she unstable, he stable);
- origin (he from a wealthier country).

GROWTH OF THE SEX INDUSTRY

During the last thirty years, prostitution has increased across the world, thus becoming a true sex industry. Since 1998, when the International Labor Organization (ILO) recommended, through its office in Asia, the legalization of the sex industry, so that countries could impose taxes, several countries adopted it (Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, parts of Australia...). In Germany alone, the sex industry was generating six billion euros every year during the 1990s (10). Multinational corporations have entered the sex industry and, in Australia, they are even represented in the stock market. Even the mafia delivers merchandises—women. The United Nations and ILO estimate that between two and four million human beings have become victims of human trafficking (4).

Several countries approved the legalization of prostitution under pro-feminist arguments: it will facilitate the legal status of prostitutes and help them receive a social security, pay taxes and escape from stigmatization. However, this has not produced the expected results. In 2007, Germany conducted a study and concluded that legalization had not protected women from violence or improved their situation

and had not reduced prostitution-related crimes (11). Less than 1% of prostitutes had a fixed job and 60% did not want to be employed by the sex industry, since they wanted to quit prostitution and find another job, if possible (12).

MYTHS AND SPEECHES ON PROSTITUTION

Prostitution has been always surrounded by myths. Any society branded by prostitution devises its own justification to avoid facing it. Those myths can turn prostitution into something trivial, as in jokes; eternal, as in the phrase "the oldest profession in the world"; amusing, as in "the happy whore"; romantic, as in films and literature; inevitable, as in the idea that "if forbidden, it only disappears from sight, but it will still be the same."

All these myths insert prostitution in a bubble that prevents us from seeing the tragedy of a human being buying another. A human being is turning another human being into an object, merchandise: "I'm buying you. You exist to please me."

In the last one hundred years, the narrative has been changed or, better to say, modernized. As any other industry compelled to adapt its publicity to the time, in order to sell its products, the sex industry has to do it too.

A century ago, in Europe, prostitution was common and legal. Then, it was called regulation. Prostitution was justified as a natural, necessary and biological phenomenon. The theory worked out by the French hygienist Parent-Duchâtelet at the end of the 19th century and the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso at the beginning of the 20th century stated that men needed prostitution. If a man had no access to prostitutes, he will lose control and rape decent ladies, causing the collapse of both civilization and marriage. Parent-Duchâtelet called it "the drainage model," like a house requiring a drainage system to keep it clean, prostitution was the drainage of civilization (13). Prostituted women would channel all men's dirty desires. Regarding the prostituted woman, she was considered biologically inferior, of another race, weaker, less intelligent than other women, good for nothing. But, as Lombroso said, "the more they fall, the more they help society" (14).

This myth is similar to the theories used to legitimate slavery and colonization: there is no need to grant the same rights to an inferior race.

As evidenced, at the beginning of the 20th century this model had already failed. Human trafficking increased by the year. In the big European cities, at the train stations, pimps were awaiting the arrival of young females coming from the countryside to the city looking for a job.

At the beginning of that same century, European countries were forced to investigate the root causes of this trafficking. The League of Nations, predecessor of the Organization of United Nations, UNO, conducted a study which concluded that the legal prostitution had resulted in this trafficking. From that moment, country after country relinquished this regulation. Holland was the first country in doing so in 1910 (15). Since then, prostitution has been fading away.

Since the 1980s, prostitution has been increasing again in Europe. Today, it has become a global industry generating juicy profits, and has been associated not only with pornography, but also with the mafia and arms and drug traffickers. Underdeveloped countries report that their young women are harassed by the sex industry and sex tourists from the Western world. In the case of Thailand, the large sex industry has affected even the concept of Thai women who, in Western countries, have become synonym of "prostituted women." The same is true for Russian women, who are known as "the Natashas" in the Middle East.

However, justification is different. Times have changed. There is no longer any reference to the biological inferiority of prostitutes or to men's natural desires.

Now, reference is made to sex workers. "She is not a victim. She is tough! She is a modern and capable girl, she knows what she is doing, and she sells what she has."

This myth has been consolidated by a policy adopted in Holland, whose government is again taking actions to legalize the sex industry adopted in 1999, establishing several organizations to convey the following message: prostitution is like any other job. The sex industry represents approximately 5% of the domestic product (16). Its sex industry is visible in cities like Amsterdam, where women for sale are exhibited in shop windows. In Holland, most prostitutes are not natives, but foreigners. According to a study, 80% of the prostitutes are from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America (17).

The "sex work" discourse combines modern concepts and, especially, discourses from the class struggle and feminist movement. According to this discourse, any talk about prostitution sounds bad, outdated, and tragic so it is replaced by "sex work." This term combines two concepts that have been essential in women's struggle: the right to work and to free sexuality. In a very cynical way of manipulation, these two modern terms are associated with prostitution.

In particular, this myth tries to raise the prostitute figure to the same level. She is no longer considered weak: she is like other girls; she is strong and knows what she is doing. She sells, she is an entrepreneur but, for this myth, it is important to establish that she is not selling herself. She sells, but she is not for sale. She is an entrepreneur, not merchandise.

But, then, which is the merchandise? What has become an object in this discourse is the body. According to this myth, she is selling her body, as if she herself and her body were two different things. As if her body does the work while she is behind counting the money. As if her mouth, sexual organ, arms, belly and breasts were not part of her.

It is also said that "she sells sex," as if sex were another's sex: "Look, I'm giving you three kilos of sex. I'll send you the bill." In fact, sex is still an act in which the person has to be physically present.

The testimonies of prostituted women from different parts of the world have something in common: women in prostitution speak about self-defense strategies.

S., a Swedish woman who practiced prostitution for two years, says:

During sexual relations, I put my body in my head. Since then, I enter into another reality. Then, I sensed I had no body. I felt no sensation. I escaped completely. They could do whatever they wanted because I felt nothing [18].

E., a French woman, says:

I always make a distinction. In bed, there is always a sheet separating the client from what is mine. I never allow him to sleep on my sheets. My sheets are mine; I sleep on them, I feel my smells. This can seem awkward because his skin is in contact with mine. You might think that my skin is closer to me than the sheet, but this is not so. The body is not the same body: I give the client another body, not mine [19].

Without any communication among them, prostituted women adopt defense strategies so as not to feel the unwanted sex. A Norwegian study identified six self-defense strategies:

- escaping (to think in something else or consume drugs/alcohol);
 - establishing physical boundaries (to forbid the client from touching some parts, as the mouth or arms);
 - restricting time;
 - hiding her own self (to use another name, wear another kind of clothes, say nothing about her personal life);
 - cheating the client;
-

- avoiding clients whom she can like a lot (20).

Jorge Barudy, a Chilean psychiatrist, has stated, "Prostitution is for the society, what incest is for the family."

THE SWEDISH LEGISLATION

There is a third choice different from legislating or ignoring prostitution: focusing on the demand. During the last fifteen years, the international debate has been paying an increasing attention to the demand. It derives from the perception that prostitution does not depend on who sells, but on who buys. This is a different answer to the question: who is prostitution? Instead of answering as usual: the prostitute, this approach answers: the client. The client is the origin of prostitution; his desire to buy turns women into prostitutes. In fact, the client has free will to do it. And, more important, the client is the one who can really put an end to prostitution.

The approach on demand has different forms, in keeping with the country and region. England and parts of the United States have established the John Schools, centers for clients' reeducation. The program includes information on the consequences of prostitution, a paper presented by a former prostitute, HIV risks, and debates on equality of men and women (21).

In 1999, Sweden became the first country in the world to pass a law prohibiting the buying of sex. This law was the result of thirty years of struggle waged by the feminist movement. This law is based on the idea that prostitution is incompatible with gender equality. It punishes the client, who has to pay a fine or can even go to jail, while the prostitute goes unpunished.

Fourteen years after, this law has been very effective in reducing the demand. According to a state research, the number of men paying for sex has dropped from 1/8 to 1/13. In Germany, men buying sex account for approximately 1/4 (22).

Although before just a minority of Swedish agreed with the law, today 80% of the population supports it. The law has succeeded in changing the norms of society: buying sex is not a right.

It is not just only the effect of law: a lot of work has been done to inform the public and educate the police. Three centers have been created to receive and help prostituted persons. These centers have already been established in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. They provide free-of-charge services in therapy, midwife assistance, gynecology and social support. Prostituted persons are not forced to attend these centers. They are not re-educating centers, but provide those services required by women. Quitting prostitution must be a personal decision.

Since 1999, Norway and Iceland have adopted similar laws, and France and Germany are now considering this issue.

CONCLUSIONS

- Prostitution is based on desire inequality: a person who wants, and a person who does not want.
 - Poverty, gender inequality and, in general, a history of abuse or abandonment are at the bottom of this problematic.
 - In the last thirty years, the sex industry has increased and commercialized so it has had to resort to slavery in order to meet the demand.
 - The legalization has not managed to put an end to slavery nor protect women from violence.
 - The current justification for prostitution is based on the "sexual work" concept.
 - The body has been turned into merchandise.
 - On many occasions, the prostitute devises self-defense strategies to survive within prostitution.
-

- These strategies lead to the human being's alienation.
- The most efficient way to reduce prostitution is by focusing on the demand.
- Prostitution is not compatible with a dignified life and a free and mutual sexuality.

REFERENCES

1. Borg A, Elwien F, Frühling M, Grönwall L, et al. Prostitution. Beskrivning. Analys. Förslag till åtgärder. Liber Förlag; 1981.
 2. Kuosmanen J. Male clients of prostitution in Sweden. Gothenburg University; 1999.
 3. Människohandel för sexuella ändamål och prostitution. Länsstyrelsen Västra Götalands län; 2011.
 4. A Global Alliance against Forced Labour. Global Report under the Follow-Up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. ILO; 2005: 10, 14-15.
 5. Sexuell exploatering av barn i Sverige. SOU 2004 Jun 22; 71.
 6. Mårtens T, Frankel M. Vad har mitt liv med Lilja att göra? Atlas 2004.
 7. Weisberg DK. Children of the Night: A Study of Adolescent Prostitution. Lexington Mass., Toronto; 1985.
 8. Silbert MH, Pines AM. Early sexual exploitation as an influence in prostitution. Social Work 1983.
 9. Farley M, et al. Prostitution and trafficking in nine countries: An update on violence and posttraumatic stress disorder. In Prostitution, Trafficking and Posttraumatic Stress. Haworth Press; 2003: 33-4.
 10. Ackermann L, Filter C. Die Frau nach Katalog. Herder Verlag; 1994.
 11. Report by the Federal Government on the Impact of the Act Regulating the Legal Situation of Prostitutes. Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. BMFSFJ 2007: 19.
 12. Ibid: 17.
 13. Parent-Duchâtelet A. La prostitution à Paris au XIX^e siècle. Seuil; 1981.
 14. Lombroso C, Ferrere G. Criminal Women, the Prostitute and the Normal Woman. 2004.
 15. Jeffreys S. The Idea of Prostitution. Spinifex Press; 1997.
 16. Poulin R. La légalisation de la prostitution et ses effets sur la traite des femmes et des enfants. Sisyphe; 2011.
 17. Louis M-V. Le corps humain mis sur le marché. Le Monde Diplomatique 1997 Mar.
 18. Nagata M, Lundbom S. Att leva med prostitutionserfarenhet – kvalitativa intervjuer med fyra kvinnor. Stockholms Universitet; 2007.
 19. It kind of kills you but it's over fast. In Jaget C. Prostitutes—Our Life. Falling Wall Press; 1980.
 20. Hoigård C, Finstad L. Backstreets. Prostitution, Money and Love. Pennsylvania State Press; 1992: 64.
 21. See, for example, <http://www.demandforum.net/john-school/>
-

22. See <http://www.kvinnojouren.se/fakta/mans-vald-mot-kvinnor/prostitution-och-sexkop>

BIBLIOGRAPHY TO BE CONSULTED

Cacho L. Esclavas del poder. Editorial Debate; 2010.

Mam S. El silencio de la inocencia. Editorial Destino; 2006.

Moran R. Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution. Spinifex Press; 2013.

Rapport mondial sur l'exploitation sexuelle—La prostitution au cœur du crime organisé. Fondation Scelles; 2012.

Raymond J. Not a Choice, Not a Job: Exposing the Myths about Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade. Spinifex Press; 2013.
