

WHY ARE THE WHORES SHOUTING?

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**-OH CARMELA-
I FEEL STRONGER AND MORE SECURE ALL THE TIME. I DON'T FEEL BAD ANY
LONGER ABOUT RESPONDING BLUNTLY TO MALE SEXIST AGGRESSION. I LIKE THIS
TESTOSTERONIC FEELING, ALBEIT CONTROLLED.**

It is a stifling hot August day, and TV3's mid-day programme is discussing whether prostitution should be abolished. (It still scares me to see the abolitionist turn that's been taken in published opinion over recent years, when at the end of the last millennium we appeared, at worst, to be moving gently towards the labour regulation of economic/sexual exchange in Europe). In the studio today there is a sex worker and two other women whose involvement I don't quite gather. I scarcely listen to five minutes of conversation —if you can call it that. The two ladies don't allow the guest whore on the programme —Cristina— to speak. I'm getting so annoyed that the temperature around me is raising, and so, in the end, I decide to mute the television.

Cristina, with her leonine platinum-blond hair, a vertiginous cleavage you just want to dive into and sweat-pearled skin (the ladies don't appear to perspire) is trying to explain her position. She says she had a good education, comes from a well-off, happy family but that of all the jobs the labour market offered her as a woman, she chose to be a whore. One of the ladies —properly covered up— interrupts Cristina. She chastises her. If that is the case —she argues— if Cristina was not brought up in a sordid, dysfunctional

environment with no future, then despite the fact that she has been earning her living for several years as a sex worker, and despite the fact that she is an activist for the rights of her fellow workers, then she, Cristina, is not representative of prostitutes as a whole, and can't speak as a whore.

Cristina roars back, refusing to be silenced by the others. The lady is offended by Cristina's tone. Whose idea was it anyway to bring a whore to a debate on prostitution? It's

much easier to talk about them when they're not there. «The people who talk about us are still nearly always experts, people who have studied us. They make laws on prostitution without asking us about the real situation on the street. I don't get it. When they were debating the subject in parliament, they called Dolores Juliano, a doctor in sociology. She said she was going to bring me along. The man said: 'Does she really have to come?'», Margarita Carreras, a sex worker and tireless activist in Barcelona told me some years ago.

More of the same: «I find women more reluctant than men to accept me as a representative because I am clean, well-spoken, have an education and the sort of manners people don't associate with a prostitute», says Carla Corso, one of the pioneers of the movement for the sex workers' rights in Italy and Europe. Good, decent women, ladies, the ones who aren't whores, can and must keep the other ones, the ones who have gone astray, silenced: the very survival of their status of legitimate femininity depends on it. That battle between the good woman and the whore is continuously being waged at a social level, but also more privately.

The problem is that the result of this struggle does not depend on the vehemence with which the good woman tries to position herself above the bad one. We know all too well that any woman can be branded socially as a whore—and in far too many circumstances: if she gets separated, if she reports abuse, if she is a lesbian, if she is a single mother, if she has a night job, if her breasts are too big, if she's not white, if she's transsexual, if she defends her rights, if she lives alone, and especially if she's poor... The problem is that when a woman clings to her decency as compared to a whore, she is subscribing to the patriarchal order that takes away women's capacity (her own and the whore's) to designate themselves. All women always have to demonstrate that they're not whores.

Let's go back to the studio at TV3, where we left Cristina defending the idea that, as a sex worker and an activist, she is entitled to talk about what she knows. Does anyone, for one fucking minute, imagine that if Cristina, for example, as well as being a whore, were not a mother, she would disqualify one of the speakers in a debate on maternity on the grounds that the woman had five babies whereas the average number of children per mother is currently 1.8, which means that she is not representative and her experience should not be taken into account? Could we imagine Cristina, as a prostitute, refusing to let another guest speak as an employer simply because she inherited the company from her father, whereas Cristina's figures show that 90% of women running businesses are self-made?

Whenever I think I might be prejudging matters out of pure spite, I apply the world-turned-upside-down test. It never fails. When the oppressed, in an innocent, hypothetical role reversal becomes the oppressor, there is a massive mismatch. There we realise Cristina had already been disqualified long before she came to the studio; that's why she was sweating and shouting. (I sympathise: I always get a red haze in front of my eyes when anyone—and sometimes it's people very close to me and whom I love—undervalues my analysis of some situation of sexist violence just because I survived parental abuse). Cristina's client negotiates with her, recognising her as a valid interlocutor. But the lady who says she's so sensitive to the whores' dignity doesn't.

I can't be a lady, despite the fact that I've never felt I was skilful enough to cope favourably on the economic/sexual market with men; I just wish women would pay me to fuck with them. (A few years ago, a group of friends in Barcelona and I dreamt up the idea of *Horizontal Women*, sexual services by women for women. Diana Junyent Pornterrorista had had a few female clients,

but in general, the project never got off the ground despite the fact that we got a lot of requests over the Internet from women who were interested. Maybe it was because culturally, women have more difficulty paying for sex—and anyway, women aren't normally rolling in money either. Nonetheless, Diana wore her fingers down to the bone on the computer defending herself from the attacks of some decent lesbians and feminists. But we'll keep trying, even if it's just to piss them off).

I repeat; I can't be a lady, despite the fact that I pay my bills decently—and with difficulty—with the money I earn as a waitress. But real ladies try to silence the whores, whereas I love listening to them. I think I can learn a lot from their knowledge of the way the world's clandestine everydayness works. Perhaps that's what gets decent women so incensed about whores: they know what their husbands are hiding. And they know their husbands can be friendlier and kinder to the whores than to them. Indeed, many whores I've read or heard reject the widespread stereotype of abuse from their clients: Nell Kimbal, Virginie Despentes, Verónica Arauzo, Paula Rodríguez, Carla Corso, Margarita Carreras, Lydia Lunch and others.

«Prostitution is a basic mirror for all the women of the world», says María Galindo in the wonderful book she's just released in Argentina with Sonia Sánchez, *Ninguna mujer nace para puta* [No Woman Was Born a Whore]. I think that's what's at the nub of the whorephobia of decent women: they don't want to look at themselves in that mirror: they want to cling to their exiguous privilege as legitimate slaves. «At least there are women who are held in less regard than I am,» the ladies appear to be saying as they shut the whores up. «Research on the distress and misfortune of prostitutes rarely reminds us of the distress and misfortune of women in general, also in the most legitimate of relations such as marriage», writes

Gail Pheterson in *The Prostitution Prism* (essential reading).

As I said, the resurgence of abolitionist discourses scares me, and I'm angered by the fact that more feminist voices are not being raised against this attempt at regression. Have we so quickly forgotten the perverse alliance between anti-pornography feminists and the extreme right in the US in the 1980s, as described by Raquel Osborne in *La construcción sexual de la realidad*, which blew the whistle on that shameful episode? Does any feminist really believe that, as such, the hetero-patriarchal system finds her more decent and more acceptable than her sister whore?

Alright, let's play social monopoly. Let's abolish prostitution. Of course we can't be so politically irresponsible. We can't possibly stop there, leaving such a radical revolution in the female condition, in the servitude of women to the patriarchy, in women's limited sources of income, half-finished. If we abolish prostitution, we have to ban heterosexual marriage too. Would anyone dare?

And just as an illustration—lest anyone should still be in any doubt—of the fact that prostitution and marriage are Siamese twins, let me reproduce some lines from the exciting cyberstory our friend Verónica Arauzo has been sending us in instalments: *Adventures and Misadventures of a Tranny Whore Abroad*. «And I arrive bang in the middle of the school holidays for some typical bank holiday or other, which means a sharp drop in business: it just goes to prove that the foundation of a stable, long-lasting marriage lies in the moments of relief the head of the household gets away from home, in order to be exactly what he is, the head of the household».

The separation between good girls and bad girls is essential in ensuring that all women serve the patriarchy. We're suckers if we

believe that one. The colonisation of the whore's body by the lady (and by the feminist) is one of the most perverse mechanisms through which the hetero-patriarchal order dominates every woman's body.

For some years now I've taken an interest in—and researched—the affects the stigma of the whore has on all women; why and on what grounds many feminist women dress ourselves up as whores (whether or not we have a paid sex job). From the re-appropriation of the insult, from the assumption that all women are treated at some time or other as sexually accostable pariahs, from the daily resistance to getting rid of mini-skirts and corsets in order to be taken seriously or to go unnoticed, from the pleasurable construction of our social character. I've interviewed fellow militants, friends and lovers, and I've built up a hybrid and disparate discourse around the bitch genre.

I am interested in the convergence between the hyper-feminine slut mis-en-scene and the anti-patriarchal positioning, because this is the no-man's land I myself inhabit. In my emotional/political milieu in Barcelona, there are many of us who dedicate ourselves to transqueerdyke postporn; the ones who couldn't pass ourselves off as good girls even if we wanted to; the ones who like to strip off on an average night in La Bata de Boatiné—our queer drinking hole in El Raval—to rub up against each other with our sweaty bodies. (Obviously, we go in packs, we're not stupid). And we're all unconditional bastard daughters of feminism.

Women's bodies (the bodies of queers, trans-genders, emigrants, of all of us who were born or became servants of the patriarchal-capitalist order) is a sexualized body, it is the available and penetrable body of the whore, as Beatriz Preciado reminds us in her enlightened *Testo Yonqui*. You only have to count the number of sexual aggressions a woman suffers throughout her life.

Any response to this continuous and devastating violence is legitimate. Our bitch response is: OK, I have a whore's body, look how I'm enjoying myself, watch me come, watch me rub my whore's body against anyone I want, whenever I want, wherever I want.

Five years ago I had the good fortune to meet Annie Sprinkle, our post-porn mamma, in Barcelona. The MACBA was packed with her admirers and she enraptured us with her *My Thirty Years as a Multimedia Whore*. Listening to her talking about her experience as a porn actress and director, artist and show-woman gave me so much pleasure that I began menstruating right there, like a bitch in heat. For years Annie travelled the world showing her cervix to anyone who wanted to peep in between her legs. She smiled with her legs splayed out. That smile of the whore who is in control of the situation, of the porn actress who says «you want my cunt; well I'm going to show you it right down to the end» is the paradigm of what I think we bitches without collars presume in this hetero-normalized world.

Zehar has proposed that I write an article on the body as an agent of resistance. Body, bodies. When I was small, like all little girls, I used to sneak in to see the porn magazines my dad vainly tried to hide, like all men. In the velvety innards of a blood red armchair I found his *Playboys* hidden amongst the *Punto y Horas*. For those of you who don't remember it, *Punto y Hora* was—if I remember correctly—a very politically committed magazine of the 1980s. I inevitably confused the writhing bodies of the porn stars with the bruised bodies of people who had been brutally tortured by the police. The porn stars and the torture victims wanted to be there, showing the forcefulness of their bodies, for different reasons. For the former, it was a job; for the latter, a painful need to denounce.

I find it aberrant that in the much-trumpeted pre-watershed «children's time» they don't allow pornographic bodies to be shown, though they do invade our homes with helpless suffering bodies. It is impossible to forget the revolting media coverage this August of the plane crash in Madrid. Bodies that don't want to be there: neither on the runway, nor in the hospital wards, nor on the screens of any domestic TV set, nor on anyone's retina. Socially, however, the convention is that we women are the obscene ones: the bitches, the ones who deliberately expose our bodies; the whores and the porn stars. And that is why they veto the voluntary exhibiting of our bodies and try to silence us, even when they're talking about us.