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Feminismo de las Putas: Sex Workers and Punitive Feminism in Catalonia, Spain

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Abstract

In October 2022, the law “Solo Sí Es Sí” [Only Yes is Yes] came into effect in Spain, to the enthusiasm of part of the feminist movement. Proposed by feminist and Minister of Equality Irene Montero, the law is supposed to address gender violence. However, one of its provisions outlaws online and offline advertising of sex workers’ services, making it more difficult for them to find clients and therefore to work. This criminalization of sex work in Spain is done through a certain feminist discourse that frames sex workers as victims of gender violence and exploitation, and systematically excludes them from participating in political debates. As such, when sex workers stand up for their rights, this feminism adopts a punitive approach, portraying them as ‘pimps’ or the privileged few who ‘choose’ sex work, on the assumption that no one would engage in it voluntarily – i.e. sex work is always sex trafficking. I refer to this as punitive feminism. Drawing on five months of ethnographic fieldwork in Catalonia, including participant observation, interviews, and online and archival research, this paper explores everyday resistances of sex workers which they call *feminismo de las putas* [whores’ feminism/feminism of whores]. I argue that through this *feminismo de las putas*, these sex workers destabilize the dichotomies of victim/agent and criminalization/romanticization, consequently resisting both state regulations and punitive feminist narratives.

Keywords: criminalization; everyday resistances; feminisms; state; work/labor