

# Walking Through Cabarets: Knowing the Knowledge of Whoring\*

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## Abstract

This article uses narratives about the experiences of sex workers' in three different prostitution zones in the states of São Paulo and Espírito Santo to analyze the relationships and knowledge present in the internal politics of prostitution. To counter perspectives that understand prostitutes as passive victims incapable of producing feminist knowledge and practices in the workplace, Walter Benjamin's politics of narrativity are used as a research method, combined with feminist and "putafeminist" propositions.

**Keywords:** Prostitution, Putafeminism, Narrativity.

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This article is the result of a study conducted in three different fields of research located in zones of prostitution, where one of the researchers also did sexual work. The locations studied have different working conditions and financial earnings. With the objective to rattle preconceived concepts about the issue and to demystify understanding of prostitutes, narratives are presented of shared experiences between the researcher-prostitute and other prostitutes who are interlocutors in this study.

To present the different pluralities and knowledges found in the zones of prostitutions studied, experiences common to sexual workers and differences between the three research fields are narrated. The need to demystify pre-established concepts about prostitution also emerge from the effervescent feminist debates about the issue. Considering the situation nationally in Brazil, which is the interest of this study, feminist impasses and articulations revolve around how sexuality and relations of power and gender are understood by different feminist perspectives.

Linked to a heterogeneous horizon of problematization, these perspectives range from an understanding of sexuality as a potential locus of feminine liberation, to the signification of sexuality as an element used in the objectification of women. At another extreme, more cautious perspectives see sex as a ground of disputes, and recognize the existence of a sexist order; sex from this perspective is grasped as a cultural tactic. This conflict also extends to associating women with sex as a source of power, which in the latter case makes the figure of the prostitute a threat to patriarchal control over female sexuality (Piscitelli, 2005).

In this realm of dispute, prostitution and pornography operate as dividing lines, considering that in these discussions prostitutes can appear as sexual slaves or as subversive agents within a sexist social grammar. Between conceptions of prostitution that range from considering it a form of extreme sexual violation, and of prostitutes as sexual objects who are passive and lack power, and another extreme that sees prostitutes as a symbol of sexual autonomy, are preconceived and fixed ideas that are linked to feminist rhetoric (Piscitelli, 2005, 2013; Chapkis, 1997).

Thus, antagonistic feminist positions are seen, and between them is a feminism that preaches the abolition of prostitution, with the intention of liberating and saving the victims (prostitutes) from the systems of oppression. This mode of comprehension is directly linked to the presumptions of radical feminism. To dispute this, academic productions emerge that together with the demands of sex workers, call above all for the regulation of prostitution, a struggle against discrimination and prejudice, and the right to citizenship and self-representation (Caminhas, 2020). Among studies about this last approach are those of Olivar (2012), Piscitelli (2012, 2016), Barreto and Mayorga (2016), Fonseca (1996), Blanchete and Silva (2018), Barreto (2015); Diniz and Mayorga (2018).

In terms of the relationship between feminism and prostitution in Brazil, Correa and Olivar (2010) indicate that there is a silence and distancing that in principle could lead to the supposition that the state is neutral towards these debates. However, abolitionist voices are the hegemonic discourse in the dispute in the public arena (Tavares, 2015). In the wake of these disputes is also found “putafeminism”, or hooker-feminism, which as the name suggests refers to the feminism of “putas” or whores, who had been demanding the term, long before appropriating it. Monique Prada (2018) affirms that this is a movement that was born from the idea that sexual workers could fight the stigma surrounding them and affirm themselves as feminists who struggle for rights, without needing to give up their work or feel ashamed.

Putafeminism, rose in Brazil as a broad alliance of sex professionals, academics, and feminists – who together with other working-class movements, fight against neoliberalism and especially against the exclusion of the voices of sex workers from feminist circles. It understands sexual work as work (Blanchete; Silva, 2018), as suggested by Prada (2018), to reconsider the structures that compose prostitution.

In convergence with this insurgent movement, in this study, the narratives of the interlocutors of the research cannot be understood as a complement to the analyses that follow. Their narratives are treated as central to the production of informed knowledge based on the perception of sexual workers themselves who are, therefore, agents who produce knowledge.

The research methodology involved the use of Walter Benjamin’s (1987) politics of narrativity as a tool that allows us to conduct a critical reflection of the dominant historiography and question

the universalizing histories about prostitutes and prostitution. This methodological approach allows raising the version of the defeated, submitting the forgetting to a political questioning (Ferreira, 2011).

To link this politics of narrativity to a putafeminist perspective also arose as a way to break from the dominant versions about the past and contribute to the composition of a new “now” about the issue. It thus involves a way of complexifying and debating what is known about prostitutes, and what is understood about sexual work, which allows refuting preconceived notions and presenting to the academic community other histories of the issue. The juxtaposition of the narratives and of putafeminism allows inscribing an anti-history that can open a gap in the knowledge and perspectives that are produced *about* the hookers and not *with* them.

Finally, the experiences narrated follow Benjaminian ideas about their collective character: they encompass a knowledge that can be accumulated between generations and transmitted through stories, fables, and proverbs, for example. In other words, the experiences only gain the character of experience when they are narrated, that is, shared (Benjamin, 1987).

We only narrate experiences that are repeated in the three different research fields, located in the states of Espírito Santo and São Paulo. For this reason, there are textual movements in the study in which narratives are entangled in critical analyses and reviews. Moreover, to not be repetitive, we use the terms “sexual workers”, “prostitutes” and “putas” [hookers or whores] interchangeably, given that, when observing the field of political dispute in which the terms are inserted, we consider it impossible to capture in only one term the multiplicities that compose the experiences in prostitution. The terms “prostitution” and “sexual work” are also used in this way. These disputed terms appear here to recognize prostitution as labor, and highlight the affirmation of the puta in the struggle against stigma.

### **Between three distinct territories: going to the zone**

In a still nearly introductory movement, we present the different territories of the study. The first has a more high-class character. Clients must pay one hundred and fifty reals just to enter the first club, and this cost does not include food and drinks. After passing through the door, there is green grass on both sides, small white buildings, an aura of wealth. The girls say the place exudes luxury. Stunning women pass us by, with white skin and well-toned bodies. There is a murmur among them, but we can barely hear, the noise of a helicopter landing is deafening and intimidating. Walking ahead, wooden constructions are seen, some appear to be haunted, they are small and cozy chalets. The location is enormous, a large and showy green space, which seems more like a country house, another world, a type of paradise of prostitution. To enter this paradise, it's good to have a passport – for the clients, the passport is money; for the prostitutes, the passport is beauty.

Passing through this paradise a nightclub is seen and a pool, as well as a helipad and many Asian men. Night falls and the girls are all dressed up. There are silicone breasts, red lipstick and gazes that hunt their prey. Only a look can be used in the conquest, no words are allowed to hook the nightly catch. The women form a type of line, one next to the other, composing a showcase of their gazes, bodies and exhibitions: they sway their bodies, we need to catch someone's eye. The clients call those who they are most interested in. One by one, two by two, the girls go to the tables, drinking and talking. The look, the conversation and the body can now act jointly, we take the prey to slaughter.

We will devour them, and to do so, some women simulate passivity with an angelic air and an inviting, ingenuous smile; others are more incisive, a deep look and a malicious smile; and there are those who do everything at the same time – a malicious smile and an ingenuous look, for example. There is no specific standard to catch the prey.

Some days the hunt doesn't work. When hours go by and the hunt is not successful, we return to the lodging. A friend called me to go to the bathroom to rest a bit, we open the door and see a colleague sobbing. She seems to not feel pretty and the worst hooker. She gets off the toilet, she is a tall, thin, white woman with green eyes. She is hungry, she hasn't eaten, her light-color eyes were

not able to hypnotize any species that satisfied her. With empty pockets, she returns to the closest lodging.

It's a grim dispute, we estrange and threaten each other with our gazes, concerned with our income. Rivalries and bodies in disputes. In this context, crushed by competition, a re-encounter takes place: Bruna, a longtime friend, with whom I worked at another cabaret, appears shouting and calling me "amor" with a strong "r", to make clear that women from all parts of the country come here to work. Bruna is a white woman, tall and slender, with black hair and a deep gaze; she is also from Rio de Janeiro and quite audacious. This audacious friend smiles and takes me to the club bar where we work, and surprisingly asks me: "Did you see that book on putafeminism that Cléo Pires posted? Now I am curious, what does she really talk about?"

Smiling and walking, she appears to be shocked by the good fame that prostitutes are attaining, now there is even feminism. She turns to the past, nearly three years ago, when we were forced to meet, since we shared a bunkbed. I recall a scene from that time in which Bruna got down from the bed and went to the bathroom shouting "these whores are all phony". Bruna's cries had me recall another moment, when she and I barely knew each other, and were waiting for our first pimp to come get us at the bus station. Standing in long clothes, we walked pretending to be "sly streetwalkers", as she said. The pimp arrived and recognized us, he was wearing lots of gold, and appeared to come out of a Hollywood movie. With an enthusiastic voice, he told us about cautions that should be taken in the district. A few years and experiences later, this care became something like the commandments of prostitution, which can be heard repeated in daily conversations among the workers we know. In these conversations, it is usually said that:

- A whore in love is a poor dumb whore.
- A whore is not another whore's friend.
- If she steals my trick, I'll scratch her face.
- Blondes always earn more.
- Be careful girl, you can be fined.

"Putaria" is a term adopted here to denominate the pain, delights and other various experiences that compose the universe of prostitution. Putaria is thus a locus and a privileged movement for thinking about the conflicts that may occur in a zone of prostitution that can be inhabited by women who, differentiate themselves by race, generation and sexual orientation, among other issues. In this sense, putaria, to borrow the ideas of Brah (2006), can constitute a discursive space where different and differential positions of the subject and subjectivities are inscribed, reiterated or repudiated. Putaria as a place of conflict is thus a space in which the heterogeneous experiences of prostitutes shape knowledges and relational ethics created through an articulation of differences. We will discuss this knowledge and relational ethics.

Amid these politics within prostitution, we will now explore the three zones studied. In this path, it is necessary to not forget our most repeated commandment: a puta is not the friend of another puta, and a puta who trusts another puta is a fool. This commandment was repeated daily by my and Bruna's first pimp.

Returning to the scene, we get out after listening to a repetition of the cursed commandment of putaria along the entire trajectory to the club. In this second territory, nothing is as grand as in the previous one. It is a simple bar, and everything in it is green. It opens to a large pool and is close to the beach. The suites are not fancy chalets and appear more like rooms in a decadent motel. They smell of the sea and lots of sex. Middle class men frequent the place and there are no helicopters – most of the cars are simple. Only rarely does someone appear who stands out. The bodies of the women here are not as well toned, and their skin is not as light. Some have better sales: they are exceptions, redheads or blonds, white women with "angelic" faces. In this zone the hunting weapon is not just how we look at the men: one can offer a siren song, sweeten the voice, until you can taste the prey on the bed.

Manuela enters the scene, she is a colleague who I am not quite as close to as Bruna, but who I met in this zone. She is blond and medium height and entered with her eyes tearing. It seems that she lost her client, another colleague, Luiza, "interfered". To "interfere" with a client is to flirt and

take a client from another colleague. It is considered treason in the zone. Luiza is well known in the zone for “interfering” with men from other colleagues. She is pretty, tall, has black hair and blue eyes, and often says she doesn’t need this, she’s pretty”. A crime of high treason was thus announced, although there was no clear reason for a meeting of five women in the corner of the bar. The oldest puta in the house pointed blame at the hooker who by then was already in a room with a client with whom the crying colleague had been flirting with for hours. “You can’t do that”, one repeated; “It’s not ethical” and “this whore is needy, it’s the only excuse” were other exclamations.

The situation was tense and they complained to the boss about the event. He usually stays quiet, knowing what could happen next. After work, we went to sleep, and in the lodging the conversation continued until everyone fell asleep. Suddenly, there was shouting. I got up in desperation, went downstairs and saw Manuela scratching Isa’s face with her powerful gel nails. The boss separated them. The two girls, with whom I was not close, fought for the same reason as the previous colleagues: Isa had interfered with Manuela. Both were fined, Isa for interfering, and Manuela for hurting Isa, who did not work for a week because of the scratches, which implied losses for the boss. In these observations, I learned the first law of putaria: the lack of respect for a colleague can cost some wounds and fines of varying amounts.

Fights, scratches, commandments, and Bruna reminding us of putafeminism. Manuela, in contrast, shows how some rules of the zone are closely obeyed. In this scene of fights and disagreements, we ask ourselves: how is it possible to think of a feminism of putas, those who scratch each other at times, who fight over clients, and who do not expect condescension from other colleagues?

Everything indicates that in the internal politics of prostitution there is not much space for day-dreaming. Everyone is looking for a prey who offers good income, it’s a race and a competition. Other possibilities are entangled in this putaria: solidarity and affinity, for example. Disputes, competition and solidarity, and affinities: all in a single space.

Thinking of space, lets go to one more space where these experiences are commonly shared: the *inferinho* [a tiny hellhole, as small cheap bars are known]. This is a much less sophisticated brothel where the “tricks” are cheap compared to the last places presented. Entering, a narrow door opens to a corridor with red lights. There is a strong smell of cheap cigarettes and the music is loud.

Red lights are present in the three zones where I worked and refer to districts in Europe in the Middle Ages that were known as “red-light districts”, according to Richards (1993), It is known that these red-light districts were places where governments sent prostitutes to “cleanse” a city, keeping them away from finer neighborhoods.

Not by chance, this small red-light bar is circled by various cabarets, and is located far from the city. Moreover, its walls are painted black, and the rhythm of high heels on the hard floor is heard. When it seems like things are getting fun, uniformed people enter. The clients are searched – the faces of the women who work there are exposed as the lights become brighter; the lucky ones don’t know any of the policemen.

They open our purses on the old pool table looking for drugs. The little bar is accused of being a point for drug sales. Tati, a colleague with whom I was close, and was drinking until then, broke the tension. She looked at the youngest policeman and shouted: “Hey, handsome, come frisk me”. Everyone laughed and the police left.

In the bar, we sweeten the bait to attract clients. We can catch them with a look, a siren song or by quickly being the first one to sit by their side. The colleagues are mostly black women and the clients are mostly poor men who work on nearby farms. Interfere with another puta? It’s better not to try, after all, the tricks in this territory are faster, and the tactic we use most to earn more money is to gain faithful clients.

In this zone there is no shouting or scratching among colleagues, the talk is direct, the conversations face to face, without whispers. The relations are based more on looking someone right in the eyes and asking: “did you say something about me?”. In addition, the looks here appear to be informative: a face that suggests a bad mood and a mean look are enough to insinuate danger. The new prostitutes learn from these looks and understand that speed is important when working. When

we are relaxing, the opposite is true, time passes slowly and we gossip. That night we spoke about the foolishness of a colleague who fell in love with a client who took her from the zone and a week later sent her back. It's the commandment of the district: a hooker in love is a dumb hooker.

### Commandments of *putaria* and relational ethics: notes on circumventing knowledge

To understand the zones and the narratives of the experiences of sex workers as a nucleus of production of knowledge questions the forms with which this knowledge is constructed. *A priori*, it can be seen that the relations established between the prostitutes provide the bases that assure the propagation and reification of knowledge in the zone.

The commandments of prostitution arise from the conflicts and the articulation of the markers of difference of women of different generations and race<sup>1</sup>. In addition to guiding the direction of the narratives, the commandments face a production of knowledge that usually decreases their strength of propagation and assimilation among the prostitutes.

As a first key of analysis, if the imperative that “hookers don’t have friends who are women” was truly assimilated by the interlocutors, any type of network of solidarity would be impossible among them. However, as seen in the narratives, competition and solidarity are interlaced to the relations in a way that other relational ethics emerge amid the disputes.

The conflict that surrounds these relations and therefore forges the approximation of competition and solidarity has been analyzed and placed in relevance in previous studies, such as Olivar (2013), Sousa (2012) and Clarindo (2020), who based on the perception of their interlocutors, refer to this relationship as an interaction based on contingent trust, or “suspicious trust”.

To insert these relations, commandments and knowledge in the arena of feminist debates about prostitution becomes complex to the degree to which the relations among prostitutes not only circumvent the imperatives found in the commandments of prostitution, but also go against some of the feminist didactics about relations among women and notions of power.

Among these didactics, it is seen that some studies, by noting rivalries in relations among women, which are reified by a macho and sexist socialization that educates us to feel fear, envy and hate of each other (hooks, 2015), propose a different relation among these women, which forces a counterpoint to the female subordination. To summarize, for this counterpoint to take place, these relations must take the direction of a policy of friendship among women, which would allow undermining patriarchal culture, and thus female independence and a commitment to the struggle for rights that are not based on internalized misogyny, but on mutual trust (Federici, 2019; Faderman, 1981; Gaviola, 2015; Moralez, 2017; Lamas, 2015).

Shuffling these didactics concerning the relations among women, but still disobeying the imperatives that are linked to the commandments of prostitution, prostitutes creatively engage in modes of relationships that hybridize the commandments and feminist didactics. It is thus at the junction of antagonisms that trust and suspicion go side by side, as well as misunderstandings and reconciliations, followed by mutual care, in which **circumventive knowledge** is born and propagates.

All of the commandments of prostitution announced in the narratives that preceded this discussion, were at some moment avoided, disobeyed or violated, as will be seen in a few scenes produced in the district. In the act of circumvention, and then together with the circumventing knowledge can be seen the opportunities that the interlocutors have for agency, that is, to act before the imposition of norms in the prostitution zones.

To allow considering the circumventing knowledge and how the prostitutes exercise agency, we must comprehend that this knowledge, despite the name, is not constituted by a notion of agency expressed in terms of a necessary subversion or resignification of social norms. After all, if relations among prostitutes provide the bases for production of knowledge of this specific group, and

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<sup>1</sup> We work here with the sociological concept of race, considering the proposals of Stuart Hall who problematize essentialist notions of race, affirming “it as a slippery, fluctuating signifier, that means different things in different times and places”. In this sense, race is closer to language than to biology. In this text, race is therefore understood in the relational sense and not as being essential.

if they do not follow the commandments or the feminist didactics but hybridize them, this form of agency does not respond to the binary model, subordination versus subversion of norms, as seen in post-structural debates (Mahmood, 2019).

Like Mahmood (2019), we are inspired by post-structuralist theory of the formation of the subject, but we took a distance from it as we explored the modalities of agency whose meaning and effect are not found in the binary logic mentioned. Moreover, before entering other scenes that more clearly denote the composition of this knowledge, it is necessary to make explicit what this *knowledge* is.

**Circumventing knowledge:** This knowledge is circumventing in the very expressions that circulate in cabarets, constructing a specific grammar. Not only do they disobey them, but at times they undermine the orders, and at times they obey them. It is knowledge, therefore, of dissimulation and hybridization.

The fusion of obedience and disobedience, suspicious trust, solidarity and rivalry reaffirms the instable junction present in the prostitute becoming: a clear capacity to alternate between a deep silence and a disturbing noise, between the obedience of a geisha and capitalist voluntarism, between grounded ignorance and total cunning, and between a poor victim an insatiable predator and all the intermediaries (Olivar, 2013).

The dissimulation present in this knowledge is thus guided by a refutation of the **truth** that we see associated to the commandments of prostitution. That is, in relation to the commandments that affirm their status of truth to be able to legislate the life of prostitutes, it is noted that they invent new possibilities of interaction and ways of life.

To think of this refutation of truths leads to the Deleuzian proposals that the truth normally emerges as a type of god, composed of a supreme instance. In this sense, questioning our will for truth, Deleuze (1976) suggests that if someone wants the truth, it is not a truth with a view of the world as it is – because, since truth is dependent on value and sense in which we think, it is undetermined.

Making more explicit the way that this knowledge is produced, reified, and placed in practice we present some scenes:

### 1. Scene: speaking of “Maria who Topples Men”

We are at the highest point of that district close to the beach. Marina, a colleague who I am not close too, but who has been in this club a long time, began to gossip about another colleague who goes out with various clients. It seems she feels threatened, that she is losing her clientele. She said that Isis, the one taking the clients, has lots of tattoos on her body, and one on her chest is an image that only witches use. Marina said this woman only gets clients because of her witchcraft. The other girl in the conversation boggled her eyes in fear as Marina began the story of “Maria who topples men”. According to some colleagues, there is a ghost who had been a prostitute who died when fighting with a colleague for a client. The woman was stabbed and killed by the man she was fighting for, and since then she haunts the night looking for women who want to fight to have all the men for themselves.

### 2. Scene: Myth of Asian men

Asian men who frequent the fanciest district tend to prefer very white women who are blond and thin. Brazilian women who do not meet this standard are usually not the target of their gaze and their money. Once, a colleague said to another that she should not be upset for not being chosen, because a friend told her about a prostitute who got pregnant with an Asian man and only realized she was pregnant when the child was born. Then she realized that the child had slanty eyes. When she sought out the father of the child to tell him what happened, the child was stolen because the foreigner did not want to leave the child there. With this story, questions arose: how could she not realize she was pregnant? And the response: they have small penises and for this reason the condoms are loose and fall off. In short: don't be sad friend, have a drink, it's better not to be chosen than to have a child stolen”.

### 3. Scene: avoiding the fines

Two colleagues represent something common both at that small “hell-hole” bar, and in the classy zones and the one close to the beach. Marina told Suelen to be prepared because she heard from the boss’s wife that Suelen would be fined: for talking too much, and for giving her phone number to a client. Suelen decided to switch brothels. They say that Suelen actually married an old rich man who had been after her, and now spends her time traveling the beaches of Brazil’s Northeast. Last week, Marina was able to change brothels, the manager commented with the other girls that Marina was sent out because she had sent the old man’s phone number to Suelen. And last week, Marina met other colleagues and said that she left the brothel to travel. It seems that only now did she learn that her friend Suelen not only left the brothel, but found someone to “keep her”.

### 4. Scene: You can even have friends.

In the expensive brothel, a novice sat down in a chair close to us appearing downcast. Another woman came over, introduced herself and offered a juice that she had earned for having danced with no clothes on. She told the new girl she should be careful, there are no friends here because everyone has big egos. Then she asked about her personal life and questioned the girl’s tastes. The two stayed together for days, talking, and looking for clients and appeared to stay in touch. They are professionals who travel throughout the country, and they told me that sometimes they meet at unknown clubs. There are always reasons not to trust one another and when they gossip, they do so in a low voice that can barely be heard.

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The scenes presented represent common experiences in the different zones studied and constitute prostitution politics. They indicate the conflicts and hybrid character needed for the formation of **circumventing knowledge**, which can be propagated through myths, uncommon friendships, and gossip. The scenes also remind us of the shared character of experiences that as Benjamin (1987) proposed are shared and passed from generation to generation, and protect new generations from known threats and dangers.

The heterogeneities that compose these experiences and that are expressed through the articulation of differences and subjective clashes produced in this realm also shape the different ways by which each prostitute uses this knowledge. In this sense, the scenes, the shared experiences, do not form a homogeneous group through a junction of heterogeneities. The propagation of knowledge and the uses made of it in the face of adversities can change according to the differences existing in each zone, in each subject. In other words, the way one person perceives or conceives of an event varies according to how “she” is culturally constructed (Brah, 2006).

By this logic, the experiences narrated permeate the ways of life and relations that operate in other registers. In our option to question the will of truth that Deleuze (1976) proposed, the **powers of the false** also stands as a form of experimentation of new truths, new possibilities that is,

The activity of life is like a power of falsehood, of duping, dissimulating, dazzling and seducing. But, in order to be brought into effect, this power of falsehood must be selected, redoubled or repeated and thus elevated to a higher power. The power of falsehood must be taken as far as a will to deceive (Deleuze, 2002:102).

To magnify the world as error, to trick truths and sanctify the lie: this is the high powers of the false (Deleuze, 1976). In brief, to link the sharing of experiences (scenes) forged through heterogeneities and differences to circumventing knowledge, also relates to the uses that can be made of the powers of the falso in the “zone”.

This is because the hybridization realized at the instable junction between obedience and dissimulation, rivalry and solidarity, allows the creation of ways of life that are not inserted in the registers imposed in the zone and even less so in feminist realms. The powers of the false thus



cannot be understood as the opposite of truth, as something dichotomous; it is not a dualism, a lie versus truth. Exempt from subordination to the truth, it is truth itself, another truth (Deleuze, 1976).

In our case, we thus understand that there is no knowledge created through the subversion of the truth of the norms imposed in the prostitution zones; there is the creation of modes of relations and knowledge that exercise, between submission and subversion, an impact that produces hybrid subjectivities. Based on these perspectives, the scenes portrayed, as well as the experiences narrated, are understood as a nucleus of knowledge.

### **Dismounting possible traps: relations and conflicts of subjectivities**

The analyses conducted may, for some people, suggest that the knowledge inscribed in the zones of prostitution is necessarily linked to a type of political solidarity among prostitutes, even those who are not close to the organization and political movements of prostitutes. In this sense, a type of spark arises that ascends the heat of hope by insinuating that practices of solidarity can emerge undermining the notion that it is impossible to have companionship among the professionals: that a prostitute cannot be friends with another prostitute; that a prostitute doesn't think; must be saved; and finally, that prostitutes cannot act and think as, or be, feminists.

Nevertheless, considering the idea of impossibility of companionship among sex workers can take other directions. Donna Haraway (2009), for example, affirms that there is nothing in the fact of being "woman" that naturally unites women, given that the very idea about what is a woman refers to a complex category, constructed by means of sexual scientific discourses and other questionable social practices. As we saw in the previous discussion, the same is true for sex workers: there is nothing, not even knowledge, that can guarantee stability and union among prostitutes.

The practices that involve solidarity in the research fields, as well as circumventing knowledge, involve less a homogeneous identifying "we", and more relations based on affinities. These affinities are like a driving and propagating force of experiences that are produced, as Sandoval (2004) suggests, by means of attraction, combination and relationships sculpted from and despite differences among the people who compose them. In the sea of differences existing between groups, the capacity for action of these groups that are not based on any idea of natural identification, the conditions for the possibility of solidarity are therefore allied to the conscious coalition of differences.

Expanding the analysis of the relational ethics by affinity, the *mestiza consciousness*, proposed by Glória Anzaldúa (2019:325) can also be considered,

The new mestiza faces all this by developing a tolerance to the conditions, a tolerance to the ambiguities. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be a Mexican from an Anglo-American perspective. She learns to balance the cultures. To have a plural personality, to operate in a pluralistic mode, nothing is put aside, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing is rejected, nothing abandoned. She not only sustains contradictions but also transforms ambivalence into something else.

Given the conflicting points of view, contradictions, cultural shocks and differences, affinities unexpectedly emerge among them. Considering Anzaldúa's (2019) proposal, in prostitution, it is the conflicting information and points of view that generate flexibility in relations. Rigidity is not something useful in the politics of prostitution, after all, the abilities needed to interact with clients require this flexibility amid the differences.<sup>2</sup>

Flexibility, coalition through a clash of differences, also requires a politics of translating perspectives, and in this sense, nothing could take place harmoniously, given that the difficulties caused by differences in race and generation, as indicated in the narratives, emerge without leaving space for any possibility to romanticize these processes.

The differences and their imbrications, by forming affinities by means of production of *mestiza* subjectivities, also hurt, cause distancing, separations. We speak, therefore, of relational ethics

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<sup>2</sup> By referring to flexibility in client-prostitute relations, we are not alluding to submission to violent and offensive situations. It involves more having them think about the flexibility that contributes to the transmissions of values and knowledge from one group to another, where it is necessary to establish a type of translation.

constituted by perspectives not crystalized in fixed identities, and that do not act in an idealist abstraction, but in bodies of flesh and bone; perspectives that are embodied by concrete people, lived at times in a fleeting manner, depending on the relations established; finally, we speak of the perspectives that are the flesh in conflict (Olivar, 2013).

To grasp the modes of relations and knowledge of the zone thus touches the modes of production of subjectivities that operate by means of specific sensibilities, or as Guattari (1981) suggested, in the insuperable heterogeneity of social groups, in which there is no encompassing and fixed subjectivity – various reside.

### Final considerations

The knowledge and politics of prostitution, as we saw, emerge and point to a script of practices and relations that are not adapted to possible feminist didactics about the issue. To inscribe these issues in the current academic debate about prostitution, above all that relating to issues of gender, notions of agency and subjectivities in the feminist field, thus makes it a complex and irremediable polemic.

The questioning that preceded the analyses and narratives that compose this work were thus based on the following question nagging the prostitute-researcher: to what point can and should a prostitute consider herself a feminist? Considering that *circumventing knowledge* can be considered “putafeminist”, given that it refers to analyses about the structures of prostitution, and provides bases for that which Collins (2019) called knowledge of resistance – knowledge developed by and for the defense and interests of oppressed groups – we can question what is needed for putafeminism to gain legitimacy in debates about prostitution.

Concluding our considerations with questionings, while this work served as a means to support the voices of those who research and promote knowledge together with sexual workers, the interlocutors that participated in this study are not concerned if the terms applied to their knowledge and ways of life would be described as feminist, and not because of ignorance, but because of a wise indifference to prescriptions that are not suitable to the needs of their reality.

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