Reflections of a Proud Anarchist Ex-Whore

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When I was a girl I wanted to grow up to be a prostitute. I bet you're thinking bullshit, no one grows up wanting to be a prostitute. I didn't in primary school, but about two years into high school I did. By then I'd started to become more consciously aware of the disgust I held for most of society. I felt like I just didn't fit in. I mean school, just for starters — it felt like I was being groomed for a life to accept the authority of petty tyrants enforcing arbitrary rules that made little sense. I was a vegetarian and into animal liberation and I couldn't make sense of how my parents and peers, who claimed to love animals, were just fine with industrialized animal torture. The sexism, it was a complete onslaught, everywhere, everyday. In the home, on the TV, on the way to the shops. The blatant racism, racism had barely begun to be thought of something that needed to be questioned back then in early 80s white, suburban Australia. All this small-mindedness laid out ahead of me like a road into a preordained banality featuring death by a thousand cuts to the soul, if the boredom and tedium didn't kill me first.

When I was fourteen we lived around the corner from an upmarket brothel. I'd see the women enter and leave and they looked so glamourous and self-possessed, they seemed to me to be living the perfect kind of fuck-you lives. By then I had begun to be sexually active and getting paid for sex seemed like a smart thing. Around the same time, my sister and I were walking down the street and this random man offered us $50 (which was quite a sum back then) if we could stand on him while he just laid there on the nature strip completely impervious to all the cars going past. The condition of payment was that we both had to stand on him for five full seconds without falling off. This was a bit of a lightning bolt. I mean who doesn't want easy money?, and if men are this desperate and easy to please, get out the proverbial pen and sign me up! Needless to say, upper-echelon brothels weren't my destiny. As my tastes refined over time, I found myself drawn to the tawdry glamour of the less salubrious establishments and houses off ill-repute. The kind of places other people would walk by and wonder what kind of people could possibly work there, these were the places that made me intensely curious and sought initiation into. Working on the street was intimidating at first, but like all first times, once you transgress a boundary and you really push yourself outside of your comfort zone, that transgression can feel incredibly liberating. I worked in brothels and seedy strip-joints in the Cross, resplendent with their garish kitsch decor. I got a kick out of the high strangeness of peep shows and eventually settled into BDSM houses with interiors designed to intimidate even the most seasoned punters.

I never worked terribly hard, in fact I worked the bare minimum I could get away with. I don't think I was ever particularly good at it either. I kept my heroin habit to a minimum, in line with my ethos to work as little as possible. It was (relatively) easy money and being a junkie whore was exactly what I wanted to be. And it was FUN. I had so much fun at that time in my life and it gave me the luxury of time for all my other pursuits that I was interested in. So much of my life was like a party, squatting with friends, building community, learning more about living outside the system, making art and making mischief. It also afforded me the opportunity to take courses in subjects that interested me. However, like anything else, if you do it long enough it develops into a tedium. It's in my past now. I'm older and my health is poor but those choices I made, to do sex work, made me who I am now — a proud, unrepentant, ex-junkie whore who is still at war with almost every value this hypocritical capitalist society espouses. It's hugely shaped my identity as an Anarchist. My Anarchism embraces social war, unlike the male-dominated workerist-anarchist strains espoused by the largely socially conservative, moralizing and respectability-seeking types that are so common within the Anarchist landscape in this country…the type that see their role as a worker as their primary function in society and view the challenging of capitalistic patriarchal social norms as an irrelevant distraction from seizing the means of production. Or the reformists who mimic NGO culture and it's attendant dependence on respectability and it's reliance on clout-chasing social media personalities who themselves live well within the margins. Why can't we have it all. Yes, fuck capitalism, but also fuck the capitalist's social cultural policing that inevitably becomes so ingrained as to morph into the proverbial cop that lives rent-free inside your head.

I'm proud that I stood firmly in that space in which reviled women (and people of other genders) stand. I've always despised work culture — the ludicrous professionalism assigned to tasks with all their attendant hierarchies. All the petty competitiveness along with the absurd class judgements over what one does. So, it was my good fortune to largely escape all that nonsense for most of my working life and to have colleagues that stood alongside me outside of respectable society. A refrain I've heard some Sex Worker activists say is that of course no one grows up wanting to be a sex worker, well that doesn't speak for my experience. In fact much of what many Sex Worker activists say doesn't resonate with me, especially when it comes to making Sex Work respectable. I'm all for decrim of course, the less cops and courts you have to deal with the better. However, increasingly Sex Work orgs are seeking to destigmatize Sex Work, so much so that Sex Work is now as respectable as say a professional masseuse or a therapist is. I get that stigma causes great harm to people. However, personally I'm just not ready to let go of prostitution's glorious outsider status just yet. Investing yourself in mainstream society and it's values causes it's own great harm too. It's a fraught issue I know. Also, call me weird, but winning the right to pay tax is not my idea of liberation. Some of us want to live on the margins. How can Sex Workers continue to evolve politically to oppose this capitalist, patriarchal, colonial, fucked-up system we're living under if their primary concern is being socially accepted by that very same system? How can Sex Worker orgs funded by governments in affluent countries keep, nurture and reflect these impulses within their communities while also satisfying the demands of their funders? I'm convinced that this must be possible, though not without a high degree of conscious awareness, determination and finesse at straddling both these opposing forces. Sex Workers do not all share the same voice. It's up to those in Sex Worker orgs to not allow the voices of radically political whores (the very same radicalism that defines our organizing history) to be subsumed under the goals and myopic-inducing bureaucracy that are driven by government funders.

As a proud, ex-whore, I implore younger Sex Workers to reject the building of social capital, embrace your rejection of mainstream society, radicalize yourselves as fully as you can, question all the political and social values we've been indoctrinated into, read politically radical texts, learn from radical history, get together with your friends, fellow outcasts and comrades and make trouble, cause mischief and go fuck shit up. Be proud to be a card-carrying member of society's beautiful and courageous rejects. Be proud that whores have historically embraced all the other radical movements around them and have led the charge for not only sexual liberation but TOTAL liberation. For it's on the margins of society where we not only love, dance and fight, but this is our true power — living on the margins. The most effective enemies of the State are those with nothing left to lose. And once we lose it all we have the whole world to gain.

— Zuni

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‘Cum Rag’ issue 1. <vixen.org.au/the-cum-rag>
This is a transcribed & slightly edited version of an audio segment that was part of the radio program Music for the Global Intifada’s special episode commemorating the June 2nd International Whores Day that aired on Melbourne’s / Narrm’s community radio station 3CR in 2020. In December 2022, this essay appeared in print for the first time in the inaugral edition of ‘Cum Rag’, a Sex Worker zine produced by Sex Workers in so-called Australia & published by Vixen, the Victorian peer Sex Worker organization.

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