



# Pimp State: Sex, Money, and the Future of Equality

*Kat Banyard*

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## **Pimp State: Sex, Money, and the Future of Equality** Kat Banyard

Never before have prostitution, strip clubs and pornography been as profitable, widely used or embedded in mainstream culture as they are today. How society should respond to the rise of the sex trade is shaping up to be one of the Twenty-First Century's big questions. Should it be legal to pay for sex? Isn't it a woman's choice whether she strips for money? Could online porn warping the attitudes of a generation of boys?

An increasingly popular set of answers maintains that prostitution is just work, porn is fantasy, demand is inevitable; so fully legalise the sex trade and it can be made safe. Kat Banyard contends that these are profoundly dangerous myths. Sexual consent is not a commodity, objectification and abuse are inherent to prostitution, and the sex trade poses a grave threat to the struggle for women's equality.

Skilfully weaving together first-hand investigation, interviews and the latest research, *Pimp State* powerfully argues that sex trade myth-makers will find themselves on the wrong side of history.

## **Pimp State: Sex, Money, and the Future of Equality Details**

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Author : Kat Banyard

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# From Reader Review Pimp State: Sex, Money, and the Future of Equality for online ebook

## Francesca Pashby says

Depressing? Yes. Fatalistic? No. Showing an alternative future is possible? Absolutely! Hats off to Kat Banyard for writing this important book. Prostitution is not the oldest profession, and it is not inevitable that society needs it (or porn) to 'let off steam'. Legalised sexual assault is not what any society or economy needs for ANY reason.

Kat is preaching to the choir with me though. It is men who need to read this book, the ones that think because they have 'paid' for something it is theirs by right. I am not aware of knowing anyone that has ever paid for a prostitute, but actually, statistically I must have, and many times over. I'd assumed prostitutes were a resource for the desperate and needy, but it appears that there is a whole group of men who might pop in for a 'quicky' on the way home from work, or who are willing to pay for something their female partners don't like to do.

And there surely, is where porn feeds into prostitution, normalising ever more unusual/degrading/violent acts which then people begin to assume are reasonable things to try. What a repulsive world we live in, where someone else's pain/humiliation/suffering has a cash price.

What I'd like to read (well, I wouldn't, because it would be inhumane and very few 'johns' would be prepared to front up about their usage) would be a book of justifications by the men who use these women, men who are very possibly ordinary guys, who have not thought for one second that the people they are abusing are daughters/mothers/wives just like their own family and friends. Maybe if they could acknowledge these women as human beings not commodities, they would think twice about their 'right' to them. But probably not.

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## Pavol Hardos says

This book is a polemic, full of outrageous and harrowing tales, but ultimately it is unsuccessful.

It fails to convince because it tries to prove too much. Most annoyingly, when her argument gets the weakest, the author doubles down on rhetorical bombast and sad anecdotes. Never mind that to qualify as a myth a claim has to be completely untrue, not just something the author disagrees with. Never mind the occasional logical fallacy slipping through (like the text-book equivocation she commits when she tries to dismiss the new phenomenon of feminist porn, but since she is relying mostly on 20 year-old studies and has no data on this, she switches her criticism toward female-directed porn and hopes the reader won't notice). Never mind indeed the very selectivity of the data, or the unrepresentative nature of some of her own 'research' (e.g., ad-prompted self-selected misogynist punters share their reasons, surprisingly they all confirm what the author wants to hear), quick, before you start doubting the logic, the author trots out another Jessie, Crystal or Mia and their tragic tale. You sick fuck, aren't you outraged?

She does make valid points – especially about the dissociative nature of much of the sex work today. But instead of focusing on the fact that this might be due to the horrible, grueling, slave-driving conditions of the

sex workers she is describing, women who don't have enough time to rest and recharge (doing anything for 12-14 hours every day all the time would probably result in serious psychological damage, let alone work this taxing), she insists it is because sex work is necessarily and always abuse, because real consent is impossible when money is in play. This is the core of her argument and it's also where it falls apart.

Either she is saying that whenever commodification enters into human relationship, true consent is impossible and therefore we are witnesses to abuse – which would throw in doubt the entire economic system as we know it, where people do things they normally wouldn't do for money (teachers, miners, nurses, tinkers, tailors, lawyers, actors – none of us do our jobs for the pure joy and benevolence to our fellow humans), or she needs to show that sexual consent is \*qualitatively different\* from other forms of consent, but that argument is completely lacking (and with good reason, I suspect). We consent to actions for various reasons, money being one of them. Background injustice can be a problem, but not the transaction itself.

Indeed, her decision to attack sex work wholesale and argue against it is an example of nirvana fallacy. It's the sad equivalent of describing early factories and the poor working conditions there and concluding that we need to abolish capitalism. It ignores the realistic options of dealing with much of the tragic problems she describes so vividly and shoots instead for the pie in the sky.

The book could have shown how sex work and conditions surrounding it (drugs, trafficking, violence, crime, etc.) are in dire need of more oversight, regulation, protection of the vulnerable. It could argue for reform – royalties for porn stars, more regulated porn sets (animals seem to have it better in Hollywood, sadly), employment and union rights for prostitutes, health and social services, committed work towards eliminating the 'background injustices' that let women be exploited. But that would require a different attitude, one that did not try so hard to make a dramatic splash, one that wouldn't stretch the concept of abuse. Instead she dismisses all of those options out of hand, noting the policy failures in countries that tried decriminalizing and legalizing (but which, as she freely admits, did nothing to regulate and implement protections).

Eliminating sexual inequality and toxic misogyny is hard but worth the effort and no doubt some of pornography and prostitution as it currently exists contributes to these major problems. But – and I am well aware of the horrible "but not all" trope, though this might be the book that makes it apt – not all sex work, not necessarily, despite her repeated and unsubstantiated insistence to the contrary.

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### **Emma Sea says**

review to come, but this is great and you should read it

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### **Kassandra Mavrigiannaki says**

Reading this made me want to throw this book at the face of the leader of my college's 'Feminist Society' group who believes that the sex industry is in fact empowering.

I'm really glad that I found and read this book even though it's very forward with its content, even though at times I wanted to read ahead because it made me feel uncomfortable, I realised that as a female it was necessary that I knew exactly what goes on. Being a woman means that there will be times in your life where

the sex industry will inevitably affect you because it affects the people around you, it has a key role in shaping their beliefs and values.

The "Feminist Society" in my college spent an hour preaching on why England should decriminalise every aspect of the industry and why, as a feminist, *you should want this to happen*. That disagreeing with this makes you an anti-sex prude and that you can't be sex positive unless you agree with it. That was the last session I attended.

I say bullshit to that.

Read this book before you open your mouth and try to speak over the thousands of women who have been exploited by the sex industry.

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## **Steelwhisper says**

Review to follow.

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## **Alexie says**

It's a brave writer who takes on the topic of the sex industry, because both left and right have embraced the idea that if there's a market for something and somebody willing to supply that market, then the buyer and seller should just get on with it. In this worldview, prostitution and porn are simply a 'personal choice' that someone has made, and to interfere with that choice is to be patronising and puritanical.

First up, Pimp State is a polemic and there are voices that are missing from this narrative. It would have been interesting to hear from the increasing number of middle class university students who are doing web cam work, sugaring and other forms of prostitution, and demanding that it's their right to do so. "If you don't like porn, don't look" being the mantra. I also wish that Banyard had spent more time on the economics of porn and prostitution, though she does mention that porn actors don't get royalties. But if she'd taken the time to point out that porn actors have to pay for their own transport, accommodation, makeup artist and 'costumes', the reader would quickly realise that this great empowering career choice is a form of economic exploitation, especially when you consider that the performers have a working life of around six months.

But what Banyard does do is travel to the Netherlands and Germany, where prostitution has been legalised and normalised, to see what happened - and SexWorkLand turns out to be no utopia. Sexual trafficking still happens, violence against women still happens, money is still funneled into international crime, and the number of prostitutes has actually risen. It turns out that legalising it not only makes bonanza profits for the pimps, but it draws people into it who otherwise would be deterred - and once they're in, it's hard to get out.

Banyard has attracted rage by writing this. Her critics need to answer the following questions: why has every attempt to clean up and normalise this trade just increased the profits of the pimps? Why, if it's a normal career like any other, are prostitutes still likely to be on the receiving end of violence? What do you have to say about the fact that porn is becoming ever more violent and aggressive towards the women who perform for the cameras? Why is it that allowing the free market to operate in this field has increased violence and trafficking, not stamped it out?

Banyard's book isn't perfect, but she tackles these questions head on, and the answers aren't pretty.

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## **Robharries says**

An enjoyable feminist polemic against the sex trade, both prostitution and pornography (which Banyard argues is filmed prostitution), which is I believe a currently unfashionable position among the right-on and 'progressive' circles within the UK.

In particular I enjoyed the insight as to how the sex trade has used rhetoric to shift public virtue into some form of acceptance and normalisation and how this is weaponised against feminists such as Banyard, or as they are currently skewered as, SWERFs (Sex Worker Exclusionary Radical Feminists).

As always polemic should be read with a sceptical eye, especially with the deployment of statistics and their validity and interpretation (I did spot one moment of scepticism directed at a statistic that undermined Banyard's thesis but then this was not replicated to statistics that were equally dubious that supported it).

In all this is an enjoyable read that whatever your view will provoke thinking about the subject and may cause you to re-evaluate what you think about the subject. It has done so with me.

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## **Damaskcat says**

I found this book thought provoking, and it has actually changed my own views on prostitution and pornography. The book is primarily about the sex trade and how it harms the women involved in it. There are plenty of quotes from people who have been - or still are - involved in prostitution. I have always thought women mainly became involved in selling their bodies for money because they were drug addicts. Of course I was aware of the trafficking of women for prostitution but had always thought this was a small part of the trade.

This book has made me examine my preconceptions. The book shows that women mainly start taking drugs to deal with their horrific lives in prostitution, instead of turning to prostitution to fund their drug habits. They risk violence and often have no control over their own lives because of the activities of pimps and brothels. The book looks at the ways various countries have tackled the sex trade. I found it interesting that Sweden's approach - criminalising the buying of sex and not the selling of it has radically reduced the number of prostitutes in the country. It has also changed society's attitude to paying for sex and it is no longer acceptable.

It seems that decriminalising the sex trade has the opposite effect from the one intended. It actually increases the violence against the women involved rather than decreases it. This book made me question whether the sex trade is acceptable in a society which considers itself civilised. Prostitution is abuse of women. 'Customers' can do what they want with the women whose bodies they purchase for a period of time. There is no control over their actions.

There are movements to get prostitution accepted as just another job but if you follow that through to its logical conclusion employment law would apply as well as health and safety. How on earth could anyone apply health and safety regulations in practice? How would customers react to giving names and addresses,

being filmed on CCTV, being made to stick to rules and regulations?

There is evidence that pornography and the acceptance of establishments such as lap dancing clubs as well as tacit acceptance of prostitution all affect the attitudes of men and boys towards women in the real world. Most pornography abuses women in the making of it as interviews with former porn stars show all too graphically. The women involved may have contracts saying what they will and won't do but in practice they can't enforce these and they end up being subjected to assaults which in any other context would be assault and rape.

This is an angry book and needs to be read with an open mind. Prostitution and pornographic films are abuse of women. It is possible to change society - as Sweden has demonstrated - to make paying for sex illegal and thus change people's attitudes to it in less than a generation. Being anti-prostitution and pornography doesn't make anyone anti-sex, whatever people who hold opposite views might tell you. Accepting prostitution and pornography is accepting that men have needs which they find impossible to control - is that really true? Do men want to be seen as having no self control?

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### **Chris says**

I wish Banyard had included more studies outside of UK, Canada, and the US, but her parts about legalization in various countries is well worth reading. In particular, her look at all different forms of sex work is really good. She does raise a good point about much of the industry, concerning how much men make off of women selling themselves.

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### **Kate Wyver says**

introduce the sex buyers law (criminalise buying sex, decriminalise selling sex, support and provide exit services to those exploited) & legally view commercial sexual exploitation as violence against women. sorted.

don't agree with everything Banyard argues for, and sometimes her too-casual style is frustrating but this book is important and got me into a fight with a customer today so I'm all riled up.

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### **Kristína says**

Banyard's thesis can be summed up as follows: propped up by free market values and structural gender inequality, the gradual reframing of prostitution as "sex work" since the late 1980's has legitimized and normalized the increasingly violent and exploitative sex industry. What's more – the increased social acceptance of prostitution as a "trade like any other" has sanctioned the exploitation of women's social vulnerability to (and real experience of) gender-based violence on an unprecedented industrial scale.

Banyard argues her point across six chapters, each of which address a specific line of reasoning commonly held up by proponents of the "pro sex worker perspective".

Ambitious in scope, Banyard sets out to debunk the idea that efforts across the Western world to decriminalise or legalise prostitution have somehow made women less vulnerable to sexual exploitation or

that they have made sex workers's conditions safer or healthier.

To illustrate her point, she draws on recent legislation impact in the Netherlands, Germany, New Zealand and Sweden. This was where I would have liked to see more critical engagement with more sources, Banyard would have done well to either narrow her scope or otherwise produce a text that is more extensive and show more engagement each case study.

Pimp State is a suitable gateway-book to understanding the basics of prostitution abolitionism in feminist discourse. Banyard's language is accessible, impassioned and often rhetorical. Her tone can be more conversational than academic, which at times renders her thesis prone to dismissal over frequent use of anecdotes and emotional language. This space may otherwise have been used to showcase additional data to build a more cohesive case (more rigour and detail on the case studies, comparative analysis). Her use of data improves somewhat towards the second half of the book.

Occasionally the reader might intercept an intersectional approach (Banyard is vaguely receptive to classism and racism), still - her analysis is \*mostly\* colorblind.

Crucially, Banyard argues that the concept of mutual consent has been hijacked and distorted by the sex trade and sold to the public as something it is not. The struggle over the meaning of "consensual sex" is a hegemonic battle played out on the political landscape of women's bodies. According to Banyard, the brand of "consent" that is given in prostitution is qualitatively and semantically different to consent given freely and out of desire – as opposed to what she calls "manufactured consent" – consent appropriated in exchange for financial remuneration.

The deliberate reframing of "prostitution" as "sex work" is part of the linguistic and cultural strategy whose function is to give the sex industry an aura of credence and at once to underplay its inherent misogyny. Commodified sexual consent (as opposed to other things people do as work for cash) is qualitatively different due to the often underplayed contextual injustices that underpin (and correlate with) prostitution (pornography, understood as choreographed and mid-wived prostitution is included in this) as a mass industry. The agency of women is also mangled with my pimps, of who coerce the women they are pimping into degrading and unwanted "work" (and yes, the overwhelming majority of prostitutes are pimped by men who also abuse them).

Banyard's deconstruction poses a hegemonic challenge to the dominant, rigidly patriarchal, free-market discourse of women's sexuality (passive, receiving, available, functional, commodifiable).

Some quantifiable realities: the decision of the vast majority of women to enter the sex trade is made on the backdrop of a personal history of sexual abuse, rape, child molestation and domestic violence, often combined with a low level of education and unremarkable socio-economic status. Decisions made with agency, but with extreme vulnerabilities as prerequisites. In other words, the sex trade profits by exploiting existing social inequalities and then contributing to their perpetuation. Finding themselves in desperate situations, women are also a lot more likely to enter prostitution when they are able to do so legally. Many are trafficked into prostitution and are broken to believe that that's all there is for them.

I was somewhat taken aback at the extent to which the consumption (and production) of pornography fuels violence against women, "as well as an array of attitudes that minimize, trivialize and normalize it". This includes perceptions of women's sexuality that contribute to their continued sexual exploitation, as evidenced by "assessments corroborated across methods, measures and samples." It is, I checked.



However one tries to frame the sex industry as “sex-positive” or “empowering” for women, the patriarchal, market-driven power structures within which this trade operates remain in tact (trying to excuse the industry by citing fringe sub-sections of “feminist-porn” is a red herring detraction from the point in case) and will, until dismantled, continue to dictate its content and packaging. Feminism and prostitution, for Banyard, are incompatible.

Pimp State makes a compelling enough case to have stimulated serious reassessment of my conceptual understanding of prostitution, but I plan to read more.

TRIGGER WARNING for survivors of rape/child molestation/gender-based violence:

This book is triggering and I literally had to stop to hyperventilate and sob every 40 pages. Just putting that out there. Understanding the social and legal backdrop of rape culture is paramount to being able to cope with what and why happened to you, yes, but so is being kind to yourself.

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### **Nick Imrie says**

As a polemic, this is pretty perfect: well-structured, well-researched, passionate, unapologetic. It deserves 5 stars, but I'm only giving it 3 for the utterly selfish reason that it isn't the book I wanted it to be. I really want a balanced book, looking at all the evidence, and coming to a measured conclusion, and Banyard is just too obviously partisan. It's not her, it's me.

A couple of examples of things that disappointed me. The first was the entire chapter that Banyard devoted to mocking her opponents. A pro-sex work group drew up a document with instructions on how to fight anti-prostitution advocates, and it included some pretty nasty tactics including brazen lying. I agree that's underhanded, but I really didn't need pages of sarcastic fisting. If the whole of the pro-sex work movement is mendacious then this should be proven with more than one document – if they're not then this was a waste of time. Although, I will add for fairness that I read this at the same time as pro-sex work book *Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work* and that's much, much worse for being snide and insulting about the opposition.

I was also a little disappointed that Banyard claims the harms of pornography to the consumer have been proven without a doubt. I just don't believe this – or at least, I felt it needed a better argument. Pornography is ubiquitous but people are, on the whole, still mostly alright. The rise of pornography correlates with the decline in rape – something that really ought to have been addressed by someone claiming that pornography promotes rape. One of the studies she provided was obviously silly: a study of the consumers of violent pornography which drew some pretty negative conclusions about them but ended in **1995!** That was pre-internet. Back then a person would have to be pretty dedicated to search out violent porn, nowadays, anyone can stumble-upon it accidentally. Can you really generalise from one group to the other? Also, let's all remember that correlation is not causation!

In another instance Banyard referred to something someone had said on Twitter and the reference, when I flipped to the endnotes, was just "Twitter, 2015"! C'mon, each tweet has a URL for a reason! I know this is niggling, but it gets to me.

The great strength of the book is in the discussion of prostitution, where Banyard is on much firmer ground.

She shows pretty conclusively the the legalisation of prostitution in Western countries, especially Germany, has ended up with brothels that are miserable places, like Amazon Warehouses for sex, and that this does some really horrific long-term mental and physical damage to the women who work there. She's also does a better job of arguing against her opponents here: such as the hilarious transcript of the Irish consultation on sex work, where it become apparent that the advocacy group pushing for legalisation had only 10 members, none of whom were based in Ireland!

Overall, Banyard has me convinced that the whole of the sex industry is very often harmful, and almost never beneficial – but I'm still open to contrary argument, if only because I feel that it still hasn't been well presented or refuted.

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## **Daniela says**

The book definitely has a strong message (with facts!) regarding prostitution, porn, trafficking and the entire 'sex work industry'. However, it got a bit repetitive towards the end, with some facts being overemphasized again and again with the same words. That is not to say that they aren't important. Just that it would have been perhaps more useful to illustrate them with more of the interviews with women involved in it all.

Nonetheless, \*\*\*\*.

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## **David says**

This is the most bigoted, ill-informed and ideologically driven book on the sex industry I have ever had the misfortune to read. It is impossible to challenge all the claims and assumptions – that would require another book. All I can attempt here is an overview.

Essentially it is a diatribe against the sex and porn industries, with a call for radical change in the law and the adoption of the so-called Nordic Model, which criminalises men who pay for sex. On the surface it appears to be an erudite piece of work – academic, authoritative, wide-ranging, evidence-based.

So what is the problem? We all know there are huge concerns surrounding the sex industry, to do with coercion, exploitation, violence, trafficking, health and the Law.

The problem is that Banyard is promoting an agenda: an agenda that ignores many of the realities of the sex trade, and all of the saner arguments for reform, in favour of sweeping generalisations and radical feminist theories that have little to do with real human beings and their needs.

Because when you scratch the surface of this book, time and again you find Banyard cherry-picking the evidence, using one incidence in favour of, or against, whatever point she is making or policy she is championing, and ignoring all evidence to the contrary. This is academically dishonest: rather than looking at evidence objectively and then drawing conclusions, she has started out with an agenda then looked for evidence to support it.

But the problems go deeper. Behind her apparent concern for exploited women there is a life-denying, Puritan, anti-sex, all-men-are-rapists sensibility at work. Feminism has been a huge force for good over the last few decades: but like every movement it has its fanatics: and statements such as: the purchasing of sex for money is an act of violence against women are the statements of someone so blinded by her theories that she has completely lost touch with reality. Such nonsense does the whole movement a disservice, and invites the ridicule some people are all too quick to bestow. Worse: this particular claim is an insult to all the people in war-torn countries who have suffered real violence. There are many more equally fatuous statements

sprinkled throughout this book.

Let's be clear. Men have paid for sex since time immemorial. There is nothing wrong with this as long as the people involved are adults and there is consent on both sides. It is a private arrangement between two people, into which the law should not intrude. What is wrong is that this practice is currently marginalised, and exists in a grey area on or beyond the margins of the law. To criminalise an activity that is based on human needs and human nature is not only folly, it is the route to all manner of problems and ills. It creates a criminal sub-culture, where practitioners are vulnerable, where exploitation and coercion are rife.

It does not have to be this way. What we need is sensible legislation, wherein neither sex workers nor their clients are criminalised, where sex workers can work openly and legally, where they can report any threats, violence, coercion or abuse to the Police (along with suspected trafficking) and where sex work can be seen as a valuable, wholesome and respectable occupation fulfilling a real human need. This is what the English Collective of Prostitutes are campaigning for. It is what Amnesty International are campaigning for. It is what progressive, tolerant and liberal-minded individuals support.

But this is not the solution Banyard is clamouring for. Aligning herself instead with religious fundamentalists and other authoritarian and reactionary factions, she is calling for the introduction of the Nordic model, which seeks to criminalise men who pay for sex. Aside from the sheer idiocy of trying to criminalise one party to a transaction but not the other (imagine if trading in potatoes were illegal, but only the buyer, not the seller, ((or vice-versa)) were deemed to be breaking the law), all attempts to criminalise activities based on human nature and human need are not only doomed to fail, but they are doomed to create far more problems than they solve.

And the sex industry is about human need. It is not, as Banyard claims, about men exploiting women, demeaning them, seeing them as nothing more than sex-objects, breasts and vaginas for hire by the hour. Men (and women) visit sex workers because their needs for sex, companionship, intimacy and variety are not being met. They may be lonely and they may be needy: but they are ordinary, decent people – not the monsters caricatured by Banyard – and they usually treat the sex workers with respect and consideration, often returning over and over again, building up a relationship which is mutually beneficial. Yes, at heart it is a commercial relationship. So are the relationships we have with hairdressers, physiotherapists, plumbers and mechanics. That does not preclude friendliness and respect. Nor do we complain that a hairdresser has been exploited and abused because he or she has had to stand on their feet all day. (Though if we were to criminalise one of these trades, as sure as anything exploitation and abuse would follow.)

Yes, of course there is another, uglier face of the sex industry, where abuse, coercion and trafficking do exist. But it is these abuses we should be addressing – not sex work per se. To argue for the Nordic model is a bit like arguing that because there are issues with the third world sweat-shop industry we should criminalise the buying of T shirts. Or to argue that because there are too many fatalities on our roads, rather than improving road-safety we should criminalise people who buy cars.

The argument Banyard puts forward in favour of the Nordic model (which contrary to her claims has been shown time and again not to work) is not just simplistic and illiberal: it is frankly insane.

That is why Pimp State is not only a badly written and badly argued book it is also a pernicious book.

Because if people like Banyard get their way and the Nordic model argued for here is introduced, the abuses suffered by the very women Banyard disingenuously claims to be championing will get worse, the sex trade will be driven further underground, and a tsunami of human misery will follow.

In summary, do not waste your money on this dire book.

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**Manu Schon says**

The new book of british feminist Kat Banyard refutes the common myths about the sex trade. A must-read with a lot of references to important ressources. Reading highly recommended for activists looking for arguments and facts, for people who want to first get informed about the latest research. Kat Banyard travelled around the world to talk with prostitution suvivors, activist, human rights organizations (the real ones not the Soros founded pseudo ones) and other experts.

"PIMP STATE powerfully argues that sex-trade myth-makers will find themselves on the wrong side of history" - Well, yes indeed! Nothing more to add, except:

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams"

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