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**Imperial Subjection and the Orientalist Gaze:
Turning Asian Women's Bodies into Entertainment**

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University of San Francisco
Master of Arts in International Studies

**Imperial Subjection and the Orientalist Gaze:
Turning Asian Women's Bodies into Entertainment**
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS
in
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by **MIRIAM AHN**
May 1, 2020

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

APPROVED:

Capstone Adviser

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the structural factors that provide meaning and space to performances where violence is served as entertainment. What are the structural conditions that turn gendered and racialized violent forms of display into enjoyment? By exploring the sex tourism in Thailand, particularly ping-pong shows, I will analyze aspects of international political economy and feminist studies to address forms of display based on the abjectness of the other. I argue that sex tourism in Thailand is not part of local culture but is upheld by imperial hegemonic perceptions of the colonized and gendered bodies. The perspectives of Orientalism, patriarchal systems, and neoliberal dynamics between Global North/South are the factors that justify exploiting tourism and performances. This thesis ultimately addresses not only Thailand but worldwide responsible tourism and politics that, by not approaching social problems as an intersection of economy, race, and gender, will continue to stigmatize and exploit vulnerable groups.

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PART ONE

Introduction

A personal report

The idea of this thesis started in 2015, on a visit to Thailand when I found myself riding one night in a Tuk-Tuk with two other tourists - one from Canada and the other from Brazil - on our way to Bangla Walking Street, the downtown area in Phuket. My brief stay in Phuket was during the summer break in South Korea where I was concluding my bachelor's degree; my purpose for visiting Phuket was to see the famous beaches in Thailand. After meeting two backpackers on my first day in Phuket, I learned about Bangla. According to many tourists, hotel staff, books, and websites about Thailand, that was the main area to visit at night; and so we headed there.

Bangla is wide, filled with bars, restaurants, and alleys on both sides that stretch as far as the eye can see. Every establishment was covered with neon lights and discharged very loud music that boomed the streets. It turned out I was in one of the most famous red-light districts in Thailand. Most bars on Bangla have no doors and everything inside is displayed as huge windows of entertainment. Pole dancing, lap dancing, and groups of women wearing lingerie filled the bars and sidewalks. As I walked the streets, I felt like I was in a familiar environment, as if I was walking in the middle of a tourist group sightseeing a cultural landmark. I noticed that I was surrounded by groups of friends, couples, and even families with small children in their strollers and moms holding their babies; and mostly from Western countries. It truly felt like sightseeing in a touristy destination.

Screaming and calling out to get people's attention, bar owners were relentless as they tried to draw clients into their establishments. The most persistent ones were shouting, "Want to see the ping-pong show? It's free, come on and see!" And I thought, what's a ping-pong show? Then, with a slight excitement lighting up their faces, my two traveling companions suggested we check it out.

We walked in and were escorted to a table facing a small empty stage. After a while, we heard shouts indicating that the show was about to start. The show was a sequence of women that came on the stage, inserted objects into their vaginas, then spit them out. They all started with ping-pong balls, which they put inside themselves with little ceremony. As the show progressed, I felt confused as I observed the audience reaction; they were not sexual reactions but the audience looked like they could have been watching a soccer match or a circus act. The bar was filled with mixed reactions of amusement or disgust - but still with a charge of enjoyment.

As the show progressed, the items got more complex. It scaled from ping-pong balls to ribbons, then eggs, and finally the main attraction: live animals. One of the women came out to the stage holding an aquarium filled with water and a fish the size of an egg swimming inside. The audience seemed to increasingly produce reactions of excitement and astonishment. She took the fish with her hands and manually inserted it in her vagina. After around ten seconds, she expelled the fish back into a bowl. The fish was still alive. Another animal part of the show was live birds fluttering their wings before and after insertion.

Initially, the performance was jarring as it was nothing like I have witnessed before. But my shock was not toward the women's actions but the establishment of a show based on precarious human conditions masked as entertainment. What were the implications of that act for

women's health? What were the exploiting conditions in which those animals were kept? What was unsettling was the crowd's reactions of laughter, disgust, amazement - different reactions that formed a unison amused audience.

The reason why they were performing was that it was a full house of paying tourists having fun. The fact that most of the people watching were from Western countries was also unsettling. As I mentioned, this show was nothing like I have witnessed before because it would be unacceptable in Western cultures, such as in Western Europe or the US, as forms of mainstream tourism. However, that bar was filled with Western tourists and no locals were watching. And this was the same in all the establishments in that area. The same goes for the most famous red-light districts in Thailand - Patpong, Pattaya, Soi Cowboy, Nana Plaza - which are mostly catered to tourists.

This entertainment that has become a tourist attraction is widely promoted by tourist guides, books, and popular literature and media. Thailand is known for its "sex capital of the world" reputation, a haven for foreigners to enjoy sexuality in a way they cannot enjoy in their country of origin. This reputation normalizes the sex industry in Thailand and turns it into a pseudo local tradition that is fictitiously in line with the faculties and values of the Thai people, particularly Thai women. The objective of this thesis is to challenge this reputation and to investigate the structures that make the existence of the performance I saw possible.

Research Question and Methodology

The mainstream red-lights districts in Thailand are catered and enjoyed by tourists, many of them from Western countries; a common idea among Western tourists is that "there are no

rules in Thailand”. Ideas such as this fuel the notion of red-light districts as part of local culture and existing before the Western influx, physical and economic domination. The dynamics we see today in Thailand are widely acceptable tourism that integrates the sex industry, including ping-pong shows, in the itinerary for sightseeing destinations to be enjoyed with families and friends. My research questions challenge the normality that sustains this dynamic. How do public performances such as the ping-pong show are received as entertainment? What are the structural conditions that turn gendered and racialized violent forms of display into amusement? The objective of this thesis is to analyze the factors that ground performances where the sentience of the displayed is reduced.

This thesis argues that the amusement aspect of sex tourism in Thailand and its perception as part of local culture and sightseeing destination results from the intersection of historical, ideological, and political economy conditions that justify the enjoyment of Thai women as objects. The premise of this thesis is to acknowledge that sex tourism in Thailand and the practices performed are not solely a matter of gender inequality. To address this industry without acknowledging the intersectionality of racial, political economy, and social aspects, it would not explain the differences between red-light districts in Thailand and other countries. Only through a political economy multidimensional approach, can we understand the complexity of the unequal relation of power. It is necessary to intersect the political economy approach with colonial hegemonic ideas of race, gender, and social class in order to comprehend that it is not enough to determine if sex workers are “happy” and justify visitors’ actions.

I will build my argument from broad to specific aspects to Thailand by laying out the three folds that create enjoyment towards ping-pong shows and alike. The first structural

hegemony of analysis is the political economy aspect. In this section, I will explore the relationship between Global North and South states, which includes the colonial legacy of racial and gendered discourses, the economic dominance of imperialist states over colonies' resources and labor, and finally neoliberal systems that encourage tourism sectors in Global South countries and the selling of bodies from vulnerable groups. This political economy approach is an analysis of how, on one hand, the global and historical factors complicate Asian women's position in their society and, on the other hand, imperialist western perspectives and economic relation of power buy them as commodities.

Focusing on Asia, next I will discuss gender roles and how people are categorized into the constraints by which one controls the other. This will lay the grounds on how gender othering affects women and men, and their position in society. The understanding of gender of a specific society enables a structural comprehension of the gendered relations of power that reflects on society, from interpersonal relations to the market value such as feminized labor, in this case, the sex work. The third concept of analysis is orientalism, the tourists' gaze structured with layers of stereotypes and categorizations of Asian women. The perceived idea of sexual freedom in Thailand masks the underlined Western perception of Asians, specifically of women, and serves as justification to explore local bodies. I will illustrate the Asian women's imagery through Western discourses and popular media and how this race and gender-based perspectives perpetuate and shape the gaze of visitors in Thailand.

With the three-fold structural conditions established, I will examine how certain performances operate within this structural violence and what are the elements and actors in play. All previous concepts underline how violence as entertainment has been a long type of

amusement throughout time and in different locations of the world. Through intersectional analysis, not only we can understand the structure that ground the sex tourism in Thailand but also other instances of public performances based on racial, political economy, and gender aspects that sell abjected bodies. Therefore, I will present other examples of public displays that, even though they are different from one another in terms of their location, time, and context, they are all performances made acceptable due to the dominance over the displayed body stripped from their sentience. The objective of this thesis is to not limit itself to Thailand but to expand its analysis to comprehend the main focus of this thesis, that is, the intersectionality of factors that make up the amusement aspect of public performances that explore the othered and exposed body.

To conclude, I will present a dedicated section on recommendations and how responsible tourism and a bottom-up approach from policy-makers can provide better solutions to social matters. Problem-solving measures that take into consideration different perspectives and voices from vulnerable groups, that understand the intersectionality of gender and race with political economy, will be able to address structural problems and not only provide superficial solutions. Only then we can start talking about changes.

In order to address the intersectionality that structures Asian women's lives, their market value, and meaning in the political-economic system, as well as other displays of abjected bodies, I draw my research from several and different sources. The first source was literature-based research. This theoretical analysis grounded the frameworks related to the topics of this thesis, that is, the analysis of the historical impacts of imperialist discourses, neoliberal political economy dynamics, and feminist analyses. In addition to literature-based research of

experts in their respective fields, I drew sources from mainstream media that grounded my analyses as practical evidence of the theories discussed. These sources served as evidence of discourses widely broadcasted in Western societies that perpetuates and fuels gendered and racialized discourses of hegemony. The importance of these sources is their power to channel and broadcast discourses that shape tourists' and policy-makers' perspectives and meanings towards the sex tourism industry and their interaction with Asian women's bodies.

Another source of research was informal interviews where I was able to interact with people, either tourists or Thai people that are directly or indirectly impacted by tourism and sex tourism in Thailand. My interviews had an informal setting and discourse, which provided me casual exchanges of ideas concerning the main topic and the possibility to further expand to other topics, according to the interviewees' willingness to share information. These interview processes were deeply meaningful for their natural exchange of information and interaction that allowed me to understand people's personal relationships and reactions regarding this thesis's topic.

The third method of research was fieldwork conducted in the city of Bangkok, specifically in two of the main red-light districts: Nana Plaza and Patpong; in addition to data collected from my visit to Bangla Walking street in Phuket. My fieldwork helped me observe tourists and their reactions in the red-light districts scenario, their discourses, and reasons to be part of that experience and place. As a visitor, I was able to understand the extension of sex tourism in Thailand, which is sold to every tourist as a local sightseeing destination. As an observer, I was able to obtain the reactions of the tourists analyzed herein, without compromising their immediate response to the situation. Staying at hostels also provided me closer interaction

and contact with a variety of tourists' purposes of travel, age, and gender. The analysis of tourists' reactions and interactions with local establishments and people was a compilation of third parties' reports - interviews and scholarly sources - as well as my observations in the field.

The conceptual and theoretical findings on colonial discourse legacies, neoliberal political economy dynamics, and feminist studies on orientalism and gender-based violence served as a conceptual base for my interviews, observational findings during my fieldwork and media-based research. Concurrently, the latter set of research sources grounded the theoretical studies as facts and practical examples of the concepts and ideas discussed. This collection of research is the historical and conceptual framework and social evidence that structures the phenomenon of abjected bodies viewed as sources of entertainment.

Deconstructing the framing of victim and victim's accountability

This thesis is not about the perspectives of Thai sex workers and their responsibility within the dynamics in this discussion. The idea is to focus on those who fuel the sex industry instead of determining the sex workers' agencies and their reasons and choices. To limit any analysis to whether the sex workers' practices are consensual or if they are victims without agency is to attribute accountability to the sex workers and to abstain the visitors from any responsibility or participation in the establishment of such dynamics. To determine either way is to generalize women's choices and agencies. Morality and legality have placed sex workers either as the single accountable for their actions or as helpless victims of the system, with nothing in the middle. Either way, they are portrayed as fallen humans - according to neoliberal moralist discourses - or as poor victims that had no choice. Any option in the middle, whether it

was their choice or they had limited choices, societal discourses and policies force them into only these extreme options.

It is very clear that many women are taken to the sex industry, through trafficking or coercion, and others choose to work in this industry. However, to focus on if sex workers are victims of a socio-economic structure or responsible for their choices and have full agency over their actions, it is to obstruct the analysis of factors' intersectionality that affects the bodies involved, thus failing to address the accountability of tourists and their discourses that fuel the industry. Chandra Mohanty explained the problems of categorizing a group and assigning them generalizing characteristics. "If shared dependencies were all that was needed to bind us together as a group, third world women would always be seen as an apolitical group with no subject status!"¹

There is an extensive body of literature that analyzes the morality of prostitution and sex work-related, and they are divided between feminist groups and governments that believe that prostitution should be illegal and other feminists and social activists believe in the legality of sex work. Abolitionists like Doezema and Josephine Butler argue that women sex workers are victims of the unbridled lust of men whereas no women would ever truly consent to prostitution². The second group, more in line with the sex workers' perspectives, advocates that maintaining sex work illegal stigmatize sex workers by taking away their agency and categorizing them as victims, which further increases risks and hazardous work environments. Susan Dewey explains

¹ Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary 2*, Vol 12/13 (1984): 339.

² Cited in Randolph B Persaud & Christine BN Chin, "From sexation to sexualization: dispersed submission in the racialized global sex industry," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29, 1 (2016): 15.

how increased government intervention criminalized prostitution in Mexico that “relied on discourses of public health and morality that continued to hold women responsible for policing their own sexual boundaries.”³

Analyses on sex industries or even on gender-based sexual violence usually focus on those who receive the violence and little on who performs it. To focus on the responsibility of the sex workers for their choices may result in ignoring different levels, from the individual to social categories, and systems that shape privileges and oppression⁴⁵. Furthermore, it sustains the moralist judgment and mindset that continues to oppress vulnerable groups.

PART TWO STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

1. Political Economy and Sex Tourism

Imperialism and the Globalized World

Sex tourism in Thailand is part of the global trade of products, destinations, cultures, and people. The political economy approach explains the global structure that moves these actors and their international market value. Colonialism, the global structure that established regions of dominance and created hierarchies of power and influence, led to the division of the world regarding economy, political, social, racial, and hegemonic ideologies. From the Age of

³ Susan Dewey, “The feminized Labor of Sex Work: Two Decades of Feminist Historical and Ethnographic Research,” *Labor* 9, 2 (2012): 126.

⁴ Jacqui True, *The Political Economy of Violence Against Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵ Susan M. Manning, “Intersectionality in resource extraction: a case study of sexual violence at the Porgera mine in Papua New Guinea,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, 4 (2016).

Discovery in the 15th century, colonialism constantly repeated itself, economically seeking areas of influence to impose policies of monopoly, along with systematic or brutal extraction of resources. Therefore, part of the colonial project to establish dominance and authority is to impose the metropole's religion, culture, morality, customs. It is the imposition of ideologies that establish race, gender, class hegemony, and justify its exploitation.

At the turn of the 20th century, capitalism established a structure of power where free competition led to economic monopoly, which in turn created a surplus of capital, once the appropriation of production is concentrated among a few. This resulted in a demand for seeking new markets where labor is cheap, the raw material is abundant and rules of monopoly can be easily imposed once it is new territory. All these parameters were characteristic of the colonies, which each would only practice trade with their metropole or any other nation that the latter may determine. "The more capitalism is developed, the more strongly the shortage of raw materials is felt, the more intense the competition and the hunt for sources of raw materials throughout the whole world, the more desperate the struggle for the acquisition of colonies."⁶

Lenin explains how capitalism structured a capital monopoly that, along with financial oligarchy, created a world market, only possible by means of international political alliances in order to establish power over any enterprise or nation, determining the rules of politics, trades, and market. "Colonial possession alone gives the monopolies complete guarantee against all contingencies in the struggle against competitors, including the case of the adversary wanting to be protected by a law establishing a state monopoly". This quest for colonies has led to the struggle between nations to spread their sphere of influence. A division of the world occurred,

⁶ V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Chippendale: Resistance Books, 1999), 98.

again and continuously, according to the capital wealth of the capitalist nations, an action practiced according to the degree of influence and again a practical application of power. Monopolies brought economic and political institutions under a single system of subjugation, determining every aspect of national and international actions.

Today, the states that are “rich” and “developed” are assigned as First World countries, and “poor” or “developing” states are assigned as Third World countries. All these terminologies are misleading, therefore incorrect, as these terms do not recognize and hide the history of systematic exploitation of resources and bodies. The global colonization led to racial, gender, and class hegemonies during the establishment of countries’ economic interdependence and politics, and which shapes people’s lives until today. To determine that these countries’ differences are solely a matter of development injection, not only deepens the marginalization of 1st against 3rd but also creates new ways of economic and social global exploitation.

Neoliberalism: The Interconnected World of Free Domination

Neoliberalism, under the principle of free-market policies and the pretext of aid to Global South countries through monetary injection, was a new system to transfer, once more, wealth from “developing” to “developed” countries. Under the threat of sanctions and facing economic crisis, Global South states were again the source of cheap labor and resources in the context of IMF and the World Bank financial aid and development discourses. Loans were given under the conditions of compliance with IMF rules, such as privatization of state services, low foreign corporation taxes, currency devaluation, and cheap labor. Consequences of these economic and political adjustments in Southeast Asia were high-interest rates which led to the bankruptcy of

national businesses, critical unemployment rates, and massive entry of foreign corporations, aggravating even more the 1997 financial crisis in Thailand.

Socially, the decrease of state intervention deteriorated education and health services, and without a safety net for labor conditions and rights, vulnerable groups are increasingly marginalized. A system that seeks cheap labor and operates with relatively low state supervision takes advantage of women's lack of resources for justice, social status, visibility, and human rights. Within this context, women are susceptible to precarious work environments, unregulated working hours and conditions, no access to labor rights, and so on. They work at an unsupervised location where their conditions are valued under the neoliberal system that aims for profitability. The decrease in state intervention such as lack of social spending, deregulations, and the consequential privatization, further gives way to structural dynamics currently existing in societies, for example, gender inequality and exploitation. In a system where cheap labor and deregulated work policies and environments are valued, women become assets in this system for their vulnerability and sexual attributions exchanged as currencies.

In my interview with Tipparat Udmuangpia, a Thai doctoral student in nursing, she said that after engaging in the business, women often become trapped in the industry. Labor rights don't apply to them since their job is technically illegal. "Many of these women suffer all kinds of violence – sexual, psychological, and mental distress from their bosses and clients," said Udmuangpia. "Some of the consequences are unwanted pregnancy, injuries, sleep deprivation, depression, and [becoming] HIV positive. But under debt bondages and deceptive contracts, this work is their only choice"⁷.

⁷ Tipparat Udmuangpia, Online interview by the author, October 27, 2019.

Furthermore, the neoliberalism influence and systems of operations beyond the economic implications are its discourses that shape the social and political realms. “The founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as ‘the central values of civilization’”⁸. Neoliberalism is not limited to economic reforms but is a set of ideologies that undergirds current morals and discourses. Neoliberal principles - individual freedom and accountability, and free markets - became unquestionable truths, and at the same time, fluid depending on the circumstantial meaning of freedom. Demand for less state intervention is one of the cores of neoliberal thought, whereas a greater, and at many times brutal military intervention in the name of national security is perceived as aligned with the citizen’s right to freedom. It is this mentality that shows that freedom is not for everyone but a specific portion - whether regarding race, gender, and/or class - of the domestic or global societies. The same applies to the morality that underpins neoliberal policies and political reforms. In line with national security discourses, racial/gendered discrimination plays a crucial part in shutting down borders, declaring sex work illegal and criminalizing vulnerable groups and minorities, leaving them to figure things out on their own in a system where stigmatization serves as a moral compass.

However, sex tourism is a core source of tourism revenue in Thailand. The promotion of the tourism sector is part of Global South dependency on foreign currency as well as Global North dependency of “developing” countries’ resources and market. The popular ping-pong show, for example, was introduced in Thailand solely to entertain foreigners and remains a visible mainstay of these districts today. Ping-pong shows started only after the establishment of

⁸ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

the U.S. Air Force bases in Thailand during the Vietnam War. Operating under a “gentleman’s agreement,” Thailand was treated as an important U.S. ally and, in return, U.S. members of the military used it for rest and recuperation (R&R). After the war ended, in 1976, the Air Force left Thailand in response to the Royal Thai government’s demands. But the atmosphere of plenty, when it came to sexual opportunities and entertainment for foreigners, remained. Since then, the most famous red-light districts in Thailand such as Bangla Walking street in Phuket, Pattaya, and Patpong in Bangkok are mostly catered to foreign tourists. Today, tourism represents 20 percent of national GDP or an estimated \$100 billion.⁹ The impacts of this dependence on mass tourism are now becoming clearer, reflected in Thailand’s burgeoning sex industry to meet the demands of the visiting population. The country’s main red-light districts – Patpong and Nana Plaza in Bangkok, Bangla Walking Street in Phuket, the city of Pattaya – are examples of places that now cater explicitly to tourists.

And as part of this lucrative tourism sector, the sex industry contributes to the global tourism industry. “Now tourist brochures, airline advertisements, and hosting states’ enticements regularly feature a new Orientalism in constructing both tourist destination states and their women”¹⁰. Airline companies and the hospitality sector, part of the international political economy, are factors integral to the increase of sex tourism. Jacqui True explains that the power structure “operates not only through direct coercion but also through the structured relations of production and reproduction that govern the distribution and use of resources, benefits,

⁹ Lawrence Westfall, “Thailand expects 3.18 trillion baht tourism revenue in 2020,” *Business Traveller*, December 31, 2019, <https://www.businesstraveller.com/business-travel/2019/12/31/thailand-expects-3-18-trillion-bah-t-tourism-revenue-in-2020> (March 2020)

¹⁰ Jan Jindy Pettman, “Body Politics: International Sex tourism,” *Third World Quarterly* 18, 1 (1997): 97.

privileges, and authority within the home and transnational society at large¹¹”. The choice to enter the sex industry is one of the results of a complex structure of power of local and international actors that are part of the Global North/South imperialist relation and international neoliberal system.

Sex tourism such as in Thailand is part of the Global North/South relation where “poorer states have promoted tourism as a development strategy, seeking foreign exchange in the face of growing indebtedness, trade liberalisation and pressure from the World Bank and IMF to 'open up the economy'.”¹² It is the international demand for exotic leisure destinations, racialized sex tourism, and supremacy and racial dominance that busters the purchase of Asian women’s bodies; “(...) sex industries do not ‘simply follow existing flows of finance and business’; they are ‘one of the drivers of the global economy’”¹³. This industry is the market and resource of marginalized bodies that Global North countries are able to purchase from Global South by means of a neoliberal system of financial aid.

What Persaud and Chin call sexualization (“the ‘industrialization’ of the sex sector or economy, meaning its transformation from a predominantly localized set of activities to the mass-produced global ‘product’ that has become important to the global tourist, hotel and airline industries and to the economies of a number of countries.”)¹⁴, Asian women’s bodies became the commodity sold in the international exchange of tourism, leisure, cultures, which in turn shapes politics and economy concerning social measures, access to justice, and their value. The

¹¹ True, *The Political Economy*, 30.

¹² Pettman, “Body Politics: International Sex tourism,” 96.

¹³ Persaud and Chin, “From Sexation to Sexualization: Dispersed Submission in the Racialized Global Sex Industry,” 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

neoliberal global system laid ground to the selling of Global South women's bodies.

Then how the massive influx of foreign investment and currency through sex tourism was conciliated with the neoliberal morality of sex work as promiscuous and women's social vulnerability? Hence sex work becomes a moral dilemma where sex workers are accountable for the continuity of the sex industry in Thailand whereas it corresponds to a large portion of national revenue. To legalize sex work is the normative and moral modalities which satisfy the neoliberal conundrum; it sets the ground for deregulated and cheap labor whilst stigmatizing sex workers and depriving them of legal resources and proper work conditions. "The demand for sex work rarely receives attention, but the supply side is constantly constructed as illegal and illegitimate (...) men are not punished for consuming sex, but women are for providing it"¹⁵.

In this section, two main topics were addressed that are worth reiterating. The sex tourism in Thailand is not an ahistorical phenomenon fostered solely by individual-level choices; it is an industry boosted by neoliberal concessions and the demand from foreign states and tourists. To assign moral accountability to sex workers is to maintain the status quo of imperialist racial and gendered domination. Secondly, vulnerability is not synonymous with victim. The description of imperialist influence and restrictions that neoliberal systems impose on Global South countries, particularly on vulnerable groups, does not take away people's agencies, let alone means that they need "saviors". It is the understanding that states are interconnected in structures of racial, gender, and class discrimination which shapes people's lives. Sex tourism is a reflection of foreign demand and political economy systems; not the resonance of an individual's morality or

¹⁵ Dulcey Simpkins, "Rethinking the Sex Industry: Thailand's Sex Workers, the State, and Changing Cultures of Consumption," *Ann Arbor, MI: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library* 12, (1998).

helplessness.

2. Gender Construction and Violence

Building Bodies

Otherness will be the basis for comprehending the categorization of groups of people and their values that underpin entire systems of domination and subjugation. Women as the Other is a broad structural perception that underlines the construction of a gendered group opposite to the considered “normal”, the male. Societal structures and organizations such as the family unit, policies, and discourses are considered to be gender-neutral, even though social construction has always been and until the present day is built by men. Therefore, not only men are considered to possess positive qualities, but they also are considered to be neutral. In turn, women, as the opposite of men, are viewed as their negative¹⁶. This discourse created the idea that being a man is not a particularity; a man is in his right by virtue of being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong¹⁷. Therefore, women are viewed in society as the sex, as women are categorized by their biological attributes. This concept is an important perspective for it analyses the masculinity/femininity dichotomy that reinforces the placement of women into a category inferior to men. Masculinity is understood and built based on its opposition to negative qualities that are thrust upon women.

This binary perspective is a broad perspective of gender that does not take into account other factors that influence societies in specific contexts, time, and culture. However, this

¹⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1947).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

analysis is important to understand precisely the weight and meaning of genders within societies and cultures, which has extensive impacts on politics and the economy.

The division of genders and their fixed properties and values are one of the main discourses that lead to wartime sexual violence. Studies of the Rwanda genocide and concentration camps in the Bosnian conflict in 1992 show that the perception of women for their physical features and appropriation of their bodies gain the meaning of recipients of a nation's honor and values during wartimes. Megan Mackenzie points out that patriarchal norms and structures such as the family unit and marriage give meaning to rape as a weapon to destroy the conjugal order, not only the female body but also the embedded and engrained social norms linked to national identity and security¹⁸. This appropriation gives meaning to gang rape as a way to dominate and exterminate the enemy¹⁹. Therefore, it is important to note that the causes for violence against women (VAW) during wartime are rooted in the societies' patriarchal structure; in other words, VAW is not just spoils of war but, on the contrary, is widespread in societies before and after wartimes - in peacetime and the so-called domestic realm²⁰.

In a patriarchal society, in addition to VAW, structural violence limits women's access to resources. Some of these limited resources also include feminized labor - jobs that are socially associated with women which are underpaid, undervalued, and in most cases, not paid - a situation that exploits their gender and induces their lack of opportunities and choices. Following the patriarchal system of assigning meaning to gender, the sex industry is another consequence

¹⁸ Megan Mackenzie, "Securitizing Sex?," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12, 2 (2010): 203.

¹⁹ Miranda Alison. "Wartime Sexual Violence: Women's Human Rights and Questions of Masculinity." *Review of International Studies* 33, 1 (2007): 75-90.

²⁰ Sahla Aroussi, "Women, Peace, and Security and the DRC: Time to Rethink Wartime Sexual Violence as Gender-Based Violence?," *Politics & Gender* 13, 3 (2016).

of the appropriation of women's bodies. Sex work, in many ways, is similar to feminized labor as unpaid, unregulated, and mostly attributed to women, for they are sexualized humans under the patriarchal system. Susan Dewey makes this parallel claiming that "The very same social values and economic practices that devalue feminized labor also function to marginalize sex workers²¹."

The construction of the colonized body is also a process of othering groups for subjugation. Imperialist states dominated their colonies through the discourse that defined themselves as righteous and universal, whereas the others as subcultures that needed to be saved. This discourse of undermining colonized bodies legitimized genocides and the destruction of their culture, beliefs, and social systems. Part of the colonization project to justify exploitation and imperialism was the creation of the colonized image of being ignorant and savage. This image created the sense of responsibility of Western cultures toward "Third World" countries, once the latter is perceived as ignorant and dispossessed of knowledge and virtue, and thus, entitled to dominate. As Frantz Fanon describes, domination over the colonies were built on the project of othering the natives:

The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces²².

These examples show the effects of othering and how it creates perceptions of exception

²¹ Dewey, "The feminized Labor of Sex Work: Two Decades of Feminist Historical and Ethnographic Research," 116.

²² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963), 41.

and hierarchies between groups, which in turn, justify domination and exploitation. Only by means of ideological justification, dominance and social constraints are implemented in societal dynamics. The binary women/men in Thailand, just as the concept of otherness, determines each person's roles according to their gender, and that impacts on every social aspect as their otherness justifies their marginalization. The one-dimensional concept of women that categorizes Thai women as good wives or sex objects determines their value and takes away the notion of self.

This otherness has social meanings and consequences to Thai women that shape their access to resources, societal roles, and economic options. In order to be a good woman, one must be a devoured daughter and wife, married, and many other responsibilities and values that are gendered, that is, they are not universal values and do not apply to men. A daughter's responsibility and duty to her family to provide, the *bunghun*, applies while women have less access to resources than men, such as education, and status if she does not comply with all the requirements. Among the daughters' responsibility also includes their duty to provide for the sons' education at the expense of their own if necessary.

The *bunghun* is also a double burden where the woman is responsible for her family but is not considered the breadwinner in a marriage. Her family, properties, and debts in her name depend on the husband's performance. Whereas, other socially acceptable norms apply to men such as drinking, gambling, and domestic abuse. However, being a widow in Thailand or divorced is a social taboo, which results in stigmatization, affecting them economically. Divorce being a reason for stigmatization, many women feel trapped in their marriage by society. In addition, the women's families play a significant part where they convince them to be patient and

to think about their children²³.

In all of these scenarios - provide for the family, divorce, abusive marriage - the causes and consequences are all placed on the woman's responsibility and fault. Sex work is presented as an accessible option amid gendered duties and the lack of equal access to resources. It is also a viable option against gender constraints and an option perceived to have more flexible hours and opportunities for economic improvement. In my interview with Phurita Blish, program coordinator for the Brighter Thailand Foundation, she described that many girls in poor communities are convinced that entering the sex industry is their best – and in many times their only – economic option. “In small rural communities, everyone knows everyone. One day, a woman comes back to her village showing how her life has improved because of her work in the city, and that affects other girls,” said Blish²⁴.

These local gendered roles and constraints are not limited to localized consequences but have further effects and meaning in contact with Global North states where ethnicity is also part of discriminatory interactions. “Colonized women, before the intrusions of imperial rule, were invariably disadvantaged within their societies, in ways that gave the colonial reordering of their sexual and economic labor very different outcomes from those of colonized men”²⁵. Even though Thailand was not occupied as a colony during the European territorial expansion in Southeast Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries, it was part of imperialist domination, particularly by Britain, France, and the Netherlands. Thailand was able to be free from colonization in exchange for

²³ Somporn Rungreangkulkij et al., “Gender Inequality Identified as an Underlying Cause of Depression in Thai Women,” *Journal of International Women's Studies* 20, 7 (2019): 405.

²⁴ Phurita Blish, interview by author, Bangkok, July 17, 2019.

²⁵ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 6.

trade market concessions and to serve as a neutral zone where military bases and Rest and Recreation (R&R) zones were established. Western military presence and recreational activities created the demand for feminized and sexualized labor as part of “Friendly zones” recreation for soldiers in neighboring countries under domination, particularly Vietnam.

The victimization of women in the colonies and their categorization as a single group are hegemonic systems of oppression of the West over the other and even by Western feminist scholars that, once they ignore intersectionality, as Mohanty stated, they “colonize the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes in these countries”²⁶. The fact that Thailand was never a colony does not entail that they were not economically bound to the international system and discursively free from imperialist racial and gendered domination.

This section explained that to understand domination and marginalization, one must explore the discourses and perceptions that go through a society regarding the dominated group in question. These discourses are the ideological basis that justifies exploitation and reinforce characteristics of the dominating group, creating further distance between them.

Construction of Masculinity in Thailand

In order to understand the particularities of the sex industry in Thailand, there must be an understanding of the local context and what leads it to sell women’s bodies as commodities. Again, the meaning attributed to women is the core that justifies the performance shows and alike practices. Here we will understand the importance of not only discussing women’s roles

²⁶ Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” 335.

and meaning but how its opposite masculinity plays a crucial part in the hegemonic dynamics. On the opposite side of the dichotomy femininity/masculinity presented, the concept of masculinity also creates and maintains a gender-based exploiting structure. It is by means of a hierarchical and hegemonic gender relation that masculinity is preserved, that is, by distancing itself from the feminized.

To understand gender-based violence is to analyze both sides of the dynamics. Whereas the deprivation of economic and social resources, the morality surrounding marriage and family unit, and gendered assigned roles before society thrust upon women are gendered constraints focused on femininity, masculinity is the other side of the dynamics that redirect and reallocate this power. The very same behaviors that disempower women such as the mentioned drinking, gambling, and domestic abuse, are the behaviors expected from Thai men, or at least not harshly judged. Women's expectations to be docile and submissive are in close and immediate relation to the societal expectations of aggressive and sexual masculinity. Rape or sexual abuses are somewhat overlooked for it is believed that men have a sexual drive that it is natural, and thus, out of their control, and that sexual aggressiveness is a praised conduct of heterosexuality through the lenses of Thai masculinity²⁷. It is these standards of masculinity that normalized men to seek sexual experiences with sex workers. It is constructed as a binary where men are humans with uncontrollable sexual urges that must be satisfied and women as sexual objects are used to accommodate such desire.

Furthermore, Thai masculinity or Asian masculinity, in a larger perspective, has also been impacted by imperialist perceptions of male Asian. The image that the Western men have

²⁷ Sam Pack, "'Where Men Can Be Men': Resituating Thai Masculinity," *Asian Social Science* 7, 9 (2011).

from colonial legacies as modern, wealthy, and different contrasts with the local men's masculinity. An increase preference for foreign men, especially from Global North countries, creates an inclination for women to pursue them through the sex industry encounters. This emasculation is also constructed through the colonial lenses where Asian men are viewed as less masculine: more feminine features, small male genitals, and alike stereotypes. Local stigmatization of Thai men as drunk, irresponsible, and lazy creates an aversion of local men and women's preference for foreign men²⁸. Simultaneously, these two processes further reinforce women's gendered exploitation and entry in the sex industry.

3. Orientalism and Colonial Hegemony

The Exotic and Erotic

The oriental woman is a machine, and nothing more; she doesn't differentiate between one man and another. Smoking, going to the baths, painting her eyelids and drinking coffee, such is the circle of occupations which make up her existence. As for physical pleasure, it must be very slight since they cut off that famous button, the very place of it, quite early on. And for me, this is what renders this woman so poetic, that she becomes absolutely one with nature...

We are thinking of her, but she is hardly thinking of us. We are weaving an aesthetic on her account.²⁹

Writers like Flaubert, among many other representations, have described Orient women as vessels emptied of humanity and filled with sexuality and mystery. A description such as this turns Orient women into mere objects, and thus, more pleasurable and justifiable to fulfill any

²⁸ Ibid., 5.

²⁹ Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 75.

desire and fetish with this empty body with the sole purpose of sex. This gaze is the third aspect analyzed to understand the structure of public displays of othered bodies.

Said named this discourse and “series of interests” about the orient as Orientalism. For him, it is “a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment (...) a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness”³⁰. These imageries operate within societies and are sustained by institutions, culture, and influences of ideas. It created a limited and stereotyped Orient body. Though much has been developed on this subject since Said’s conceptualization of orientalism, what I will explore is his approach to orientalism as the monolithic gaze that shapes the perspective of the West of Asian women. As Said explained “... as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West”³¹, concepts of Orientalism is structural racism that creates “reality” of the other.

Through the process of othering, the Orient represents the opposite to the gazing spectator West and it becomes the latter biased experience of the East, “(...) the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.”³² And this became the underpinning conceptualization for the West hegemonic project to impose its culture, influence, and trade privileges, “(...) in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”³³ In line with orientalism, Prasso describes the selling of Asian women as “‘Asian mystique’ or ‘fantasy of the exotic, indulging, decadent,

³⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 6.

³¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

³² *Ibid.*, 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

sensual Oriental who will indulge you and delight you with the decadence and servility that no women in your culture could.”³⁴

Just as de Beauvoir poses as the construction of the male identity in opposition to women, the image of women in the colonies was created in opposition to women from the Global North metropole. The Orient, specifically, was constantly portrayed as exotic and erotic and these ideas were passed into women’s bodies. This dynamic is built on the concepts of how Asian women are perceived as different from ‘normal’ women and how they, unlike women in their home country, are more sexual, submissive, skilled, and good women that will also take care of them. It is the Orientalist conceptions that give meaning to Western men to pursue Asian women and, as shown above, Thailand’s local patriarchal system provides an appealing scenario to find what they are looking for. Asian women carry both gendered otherness and racial-economic stereotypes; they are viewed as universal objects of gratification that shaped and until today shapes women’s lives. Persaud and Chin name this process of identity creation as *sexation*. The imagery of Orient women is a process of imperialism, global hierarchies and economics, and ideological otherness that characterize them as a monolithic object victim of structural violence.

Asian women’s imagery as oriental, feminized, and the “eroticization of the colonized”³⁵ is created and maintained by media, literature, and diverse discourses that mold perceptions of the other, including their perception of themselves. “The multiple terrains of women’s altered embodiments show that sex workers strategically altered their bodies to construct and reinforce

³⁴ Sheridan Prasso, *The Asian Mystique: Dragon ladies, Geisha girls & our Fantasies of the Exotic Orient* (New York: NY: Public Affairs, 2005), 5.

³⁵ David Spurr. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 170.

ideas of Vietnam's place in the global imaginary"³⁶. The embodiment of fantasies that Kimberly Hoang explores in Vietnam applies to Asia in general as it is the orientalist perception that is sold to Westerners: whether it is the dark skin embodying the poor women in the "Third World dependency" or strategic sexual makeup depending on their embodiment as exotic or sophisticated Asian women from far East. It is the racialized desire that shapes the actors in the sex tourism dynamic.

This imagery is the justification for the West to maintain the status quo where women in their country are recipients of honor, whereas the exploitation of women in the colonies is part of the structure, once it matches that women's image and the colonized culture³⁷. "The Southeast Asian woman becomes a body, not a voice; not a subject, but subjected, available for men's gaze or purchase. She is sexualised, and perhaps a comfort too; more skilled in pleasuring men than the tourist's own group women are."³⁸

Since the colonial endeavors of trade and influence domination, this *sexation* was portrayed in letters and books as the West sees fit and it is also perpetuated in the media, movies, and western literature until today. Today as part of the neoliberal system, this established imagery is perpetuated in tourist guide books and websites to attract Westerners to experience the exotic and erotic. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has released, for several seasons, the "Amazing Thailand" campaigns to advertise Thailand internationally exploring colonial imagery of authenticity and filled with natural heritages. These campaigns focused on

³⁶ Kimberly Kay Hoang, *Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work*. (Oakland: University of California Press: 2015), 129.

³⁷ Persaud and Chin, "From Sexation to Sexualization: Dispersed Submission in the Racialized Global Sex Industry,".

³⁸ Pettman, "Body Politics: International Sex tourism," 97.

the exotic and untouched natural beauty, whilst serving as an open invitation to floods of tourists to explore these very same supposedly unspoiled scenes. “It is also notable that Amazing Thailand materials depict the tourist as someone who can experience authentic Thailand without disturbing the logic of its autochthony. (...) Their role is that of empirical verifier of the way things are”³⁹. The fantasy that tourists, without any footprint, are merely witnesses of local and untouched culture is a crucial selling point; whereas it is the discourses that tourists carry with them that maintain the exploiting tourism alive.

Currently, the media and the tourism industry continue to perpetuate Thailand’s image as the “sex capital of the world,” the reputation of a liberal destination where sexuality and its easy access is naturalized as part of local culture, which is rarely contested. This series of ideas about Thai women are not only within tourists visiting Thailand but it is widespread throughout Western culture and structural concepts of the East. As Thrillist points out: “Thailand's been named the most adulterous country on the planet⁴⁰.” Westerners often visit Thailand’s red-light districts as a part of the "tourism highlights" presented in guidebooks, websites, and by word of mouth. In this case, the red-light districts are not perceived as such, and just as everything else, becomes all part of an exotic place. The Times magazine issue in 1993 portraying a Westerner man holding a Thai woman on his lap and the title read “Sex for Sale”⁴¹ reinforced the

³⁹ G. F. Redden. “The textuality of tourism and the ontology of resource: An amazing Thai case study”, in *Economies of Representation, 1790-2000: Colonialism and Commerce*, ed. Dale, L. and Gilbert, Helen M.. Hampshire (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 93-104.

⁴⁰ Chloe Pantazi, “And the Most Adulterous Country in the World is...,” *Thrillist*, February 18, 2015, <https://www.thrillist.com/travel/nation/thailand-is-the-most-adulterous-country-in-the-world-according-to-statista-report> (accessed March 2020)

⁴¹ Margot Hornblower, “Prostitution: The Skin Trade,” *Time*, June 21, 1993, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,978751,00.html> (accessed March 2020)

one-dimensional sexualized description of Thailand and, as several scholars have pointed out^{42,43}, was an impactful media in shaping the country's imagery.

Movies such as "The Hangover 2", "The Beach", and "Emmanuelle" follow the same patterns of portraying Thailand through exotic locations, Bangkok as an entire red-light district, and Asian women as basic sexual beings. In the movie "The Hangover Part II", one of the characters has intercourse with a sex worker that, on the next day, he finds out that she was a Kathoey (male-to-female transgender or "any male that looks and/or acts like a transvestites and transsexuals"⁴⁴). This scene exemplifies a running joke and one of the most recurrent recommendations in Western websites, that is, for tourists to be careful and not to be deceived by Kathoeyes. This movie shows a one-dimensional Thailand where all the Thai characters are either sex workers, monks, or criminals.

Alexander Klemm's extensive analysis of the movie "Emmanuelle" shows how its legacy of followers and sequential similar movies perpetuated perceptions of Orientalism and West hegemony. Depicting Thailand as a "welcoming destination for free-spirited westerners", it catered to Western males and their fantasies of interracial intercourse and the reinforcement of Asian women as hyper-sexualized and submissive where "Thai women are eager to serve the visitors from the West."⁴⁵ These movies reflected westerners' desire for interracial intercourse and to seek the exotic; red-light districts and Asian women were the bodies that provided them a

⁴² Pack, "'Where Men Can Be Men': Resituating Thai Masculinity," 3.

⁴³ Victoria Betts, "Red Light District: Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia," *Footnotes 2*, (2009): 38.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey Dale Hobbs and Piengpen Na Pattalung and Robert C. Chandler, "Advertising Phuket's Nightlife on the Internet: A Case Study of Double Binds and Hegemonic Masculinity in Sex Tourism," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 26, 1 (2011): 97.

⁴⁵ Alexander J. Klemm, "Thailand in the European Cinematic Imagination: The Phenomenon and Legacy of Emmanuelle (Fr 1974)," *Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, 2 (2019): 88.

way to experience that.

These are examples of a body of literature, media, and discriminated cultural portraits that reduce Asian women to symbols of exotic culture and erotic objects. The image of Asian women in the colonies as sex objects of gratification is part of the legacy of colonization. The three representations of Asian women - sexual body, cheap and vulnerable labor, and exotic objects, are the ideologies that sell them in sex tourism. Literature, cultural media, web-based results, etc, are all means of communication that transmit discourses that transit through societies and shape structural racism. Therefore, it is important to recognize that it is not only sex payers and a specific group of people that this thesis is concerned about. These discourses are broadcasted to general society and thus carried by policy-makers and the general tourists that come to visit Thailand.

The Adventurers

An excerpt from Captain Edward Sellon on his experiences in India clearly illustrates the racist and gendered hegemonic perspective circulated in the West:

I now commenced a regular course of f----- with native women. They understand in perfection all the arts and wiles of love, are capable of gratifying any tastes, and in face and figure they are unsurpassed by any women in the world (...) I have had English, French, German and Polish women of all grades of society since, but never, never did they bear a comparison with those salacious, succulent houris of the far East.⁴⁶

The imagery of Thailand as “sexually liberal” and “with no rules” is a constructed image that draws the desire of tourists to experience, as adventurers, the exotic and erotic. Several

⁴⁶ Persaud and Chin, “From Sexation to Sexualization: Dispersed Submission in the Racialized Global Sex Industry,” 12.

tourists interviewed and generalized discourse in the media share this same notion. Just as Flaubert, several other authors^{47,48} have depicted their experiences in the East as sexual heaven and free from rules and constraints that they would have in their home country⁴⁹. And just as Thai men, Western tourists and expats are also seeking to amend their notion of masculinity. Asian women within the system of racial hegemony and masculinity are utopian conducts to achieve masculinity that is being contested in their home countries⁵⁰. As a way to escape from ‘normality’, Thailand and Asian women’s bodies are perceived as ‘places’ of freedom from norms where “anything can happen”⁵¹. Sigh and Hart explain “sexscapes, where sex tourists can live out their racialized sexual fantasies that “often arise out of associations between nationality and race which are rooted in colonial racist discourses, and, more recently, are fueled by media depictions and Internet discussions and photos”⁵²”. A meaningful proof of this running imagery could be found in The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture of 1993 that defined Bangkok as “a city where there are a lot of prostitutes”⁵³.

The sex tourism scene is not a clear-cut monetary transaction of money in exchange for sexual practices. In Thailand, this scenario is sold as part of local culture and many direct

⁴⁷ Stephen Leather, *Private Dancer* (Monsoon Books, 2005)

⁴⁸ R. D. Lawrence, *The Pole Dancer* (Bangkok: Bangkok Books, 2010).

⁴⁹ Street and Norma, “Sex Tourists in Their Own Country: Digital Media Advertizing of Asian Women by the Australian Sex Industry,”.

⁵⁰ Lisa Lines. “Prostitution in Thailand: Representations in Fiction and Narrative Non-Fiction.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 16, 3 (2015): 85-100.

⁵¹ Tatum Street and Caroline Norma, “Sex Tourists in Their Own Country: Digital Media Advertizing of Asian Women by the Australian Sex Industry,” *Gender, Technology and Development* 20, 3 (2016): 291.

⁵² J. P. Sigh and Shilpa A. Hart, “Sex Workers and Cultural Policy: Mapping the Issues and Actors in Thailand,” *Review of Policy Research* 24, 2 (2007): 161.

⁵³ Sigh and Hart, “Sex Workers and Cultural Policy: Mapping the Issues and Actors in Thailand,” 158.

customers may not even consider themselves as payers of the sex industry⁵⁴. All of the preconceptions of Asian women as tender, caring and submissive creates the illusion that their relationship is not a paid trade. As Street and Norma explain “Girlfriend experiences occur whenever the woman is enthusiastic about the sex act and makes the john feel special, as though they were in a ‘consensual non-commercial relationship’⁵⁵.”

And even though Western men look for a “Girlfriend experience”, they do not perceive the Asian woman as his partner. The end of this fantasy as violent has been extensively documented when the woman talks about herself and her personal life and/or asks for the man to take any responsibility for her pregnancy. Brennan and Seabrook claim that “overtly racist responses do not surface until the Western client becomes angry with a woman who explains her need to support her family⁵⁶”.

Here it occurs both extremes where one turns into the other very quickly. Where initially they are perceived as ‘great’ women to experience sexual explorations⁵⁷, they are simultaneously portrayed as cunning, not trustworthy, and somehow dangerous.

When men seek multiple sex partners, they are normal. But when women seek multiple sex partners, there is something wrong with them (..) these same women, who are seeking sex, are not to be trusted. They are only after money and they are not "normal" Thai women ("Phuket Town Nightlife"). These women only see men as "walking ATM machines" ("Thai Bar Girl's") and you may "end up being robbed" ("Nightlife Advice and Tips")⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ Pack, “”Where Men Can Be Men”: Resituating Thai Masculinity,” 3.

⁵⁵ Street and Norma, “Sex Tourists in Their Own Country: Digital Media Advertizing of Asian Women by the Australian Sex Industry,” 298.

⁵⁶ Sigh and Hart, “Sex Workers and Cultural Policy: Mapping the Issues and Actors in Thailand,” 161.

⁵⁷ Street and Norma, “Sex Tourists in Their Own Country: Digital Media Advertizing of Asian Women by the Australian Sex Industry,” 298.

⁵⁸ Hobbs and Pattalung and Chandler, “Advertising Phuket’s Nightlife on the Internet: A Case Study of Double Binds and Hegemonic Masculinity in Sex Tourism,” 94.

This is a typical description of a binary perspective of the dominant group. The subjugated group is only good as long as they comply with their stereotyped ideas. The moment that the dominated shows ambition, desires, and goals that go against the other groups' expectations or can somehow harm them, the dominated virtues and humanity are taken away and are reduced to enemies. Several tourist guide websites on red-light districts in Thailand, such as Slumber Party, TripAdvisor, and Bodega Hostels⁵⁹ are constantly fueling this binary imagery. In most tourist websites, red-light districts are depicted as regular touristic destinations and usually added with suggestions on how to be safe because they "are flush with scams aplenty"⁶⁰. Hence, Asian women are constantly portrayed as powerless, submissive, domestic, and at the same time, devious, manipulative, not worthy of trust, and filled with sexuality. Tourism in Thailand becomes synonymous with an amusement park where you must be careful about your own sake; having said that, everything is perceived and sold as at your disposal. This is the image and political economy factors that drive the actors in Thai sex tourism.

⁵⁹ "A brief rundown of Bangkok's red light districts," *Slumber Party*, March 28, 2019, <https://slumberpartyhostels.com/bangkok-red-light-district> (accessed July 2019)
 "Is Bangkok's red light districts safe at night," *Tripadvisor*, https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowTopic-g293916-i3687-k10774466-Is_Bangkok_s_red_light_districts_safe_at_night-Bangkok.html (accessed July 2019)
 Grant Robertson, "Inside Bangkok Red Light Districts: Neon Lights, Not All Red," *Bodega Hostels*, December 26, 2019, <https://bodegahostels.com/blog/bangkok-red-light-districts> (accessed July 2019)

⁶⁰ Leslie Finday, "A Guide to Bangkok's Red Light Districts," *Culture Trip*, April 6, 2018, <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/thailand/articles/a-guide-to-bangkoks-red-light-districts> (accessed July 2019)

PART THREE THE SHOW

4. Violence as Entertainment

The structural analysis in part two sets forth the grounds by which it is established the entertainment aspect of abject bodies in display. It is the intersection of the gendered and racialized global and local interaction that creates violent forms of display into amusement. In this final part, I will investigate public performances that gain meaning based on the intersectional structures presented. Their common factors will clarify the reasons and structures by which these forms of performances are constantly reappearing in different forms, contexts, and time. Consequently, this investigation has the purpose of deconstructing dichotomies of witness/spectator and victim/accountable, thus reallocating accountability. Ultimately, I will address the meaning of sex performances such as ping-pong shows and how they are not mere sexual shows but are built on structural violence and their effect to uphold gendered perceptions of themselves the viewer and the abject body. Finally, the understanding of the actors and dynamics that structure these performances will lay the ground for policies to address structural issues instead of policies rooted in the same gendered and racialized systems.

Bodily Conquest

The abjectness attributed to the displayed bodies on stage is the base level that confers grounds to the performance. It is the assumption that the bodies on stage are less human as their

sentience is simplified. Saidiya Hartman⁶¹ extensively analyzed the staging of “blackness” and how performances such as minstrelsy were popular and widely accepted shows that exploited the subjugation of a group. The black body, defined by law and societal discourse, was capable of enduring more pain than others. “Yet it is the anomalous status of the enslaved that determines the specific uses of the slave as object of property”⁶². In a Minstrel show, actors were to exacerbate the characteristics that defined black bodies for the white audience, thus limiting black bodies’ sentience.

No, the slave is not in pain. Pain isn't really pain for the enslaved, because of their limited sentience, tendency to forget, and easily consolable grief. Lastly, the slave is happy and, in fact, his happiness exceeds "our" own. As a consequence of this operation, the initial revulsion and horror induced by the sight of shackled and manacled bodies gives way to reassurances about black pleasure⁶³.

In these shows, the black body was simplified as the punished, injured, and resilient body. The language of their bodies was associated with extreme brutality, whether receiving it or reproducing it. Only by means of assigning meaning to the subjugated body, the spectator perceived the displayed as monolithic beings; carriers of the essence that concomitantly allows the audience to dominate and to put themselves higher.

Another performance held in public spaces, which was endorsed by civil authorities and celebrated afterward by the exchange of photographs from the event was lynchings in the 19th century. The hundreds of lynching cases and the counted 700 lynching cases solely between

⁶¹ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)

⁶² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 36.

1889 and 1902⁶⁴ in the US, the highest incident period reported, is another example of brutal violence that was viewed and registered by its audience as an amusing performance. Lynching was a practice that was not only viewed by an extreme or specific group of society but was enjoyed by the general public, civilians, law officers, and community leaders. These “performances” reinforced the viewers’ sentiment of superiority at a moment where their hegemony was being challenged, the very same domination maintained through minstrelsy. Black bodies’ execution, particularly through the lynching performative character, was a staging of justice being made for they were perceived as threats to society. It is not by chance that lynching cases predominantly occurred after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.

Public torture lynchings were the most visible, most audacious aspect of a wave of collective violence that emerged in the 1890s as white communities in the Deep South reacted to social, political, and economic changes that had disrupted their ways of life and disturbed the preexisting system of social status and social control (...) These changes prompted white anxieties about status, authority, and personal security, which in turn deepened racial hostility.⁶⁵

Regardless of whether the bodies in display are actors, people being executed, or any other circumstances, these were performances undergirded by the ascription given to the subjugated group and the reduction of their sentience. The same situation was the discourse made by the US national security after 9/11 towards Muslim and Arab bodies, more than a century later, which led to the tortures in Abu Ghraib. To attribute signifiers to Muslim/Arab/brown men bodies as terrorists and dangerous to American lives, justified warfare legislation to change the meaning of torture. As these bodies were stereotyped as evil and

⁶⁴ David Garland, “Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning: Public Torture Lynching in Twentieth-Century America,” *Law & Society Review* 39, 2 (2005): 802.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 799.

enemies, prisoners in Abu Ghraib were not categorized as “prisoners of war”, but just as the US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced, ‘they will be handled not as prisoners of wars, because they’re not, but as unlawful combatants’⁶⁶. By attributing this specific meaning to their bodies, it justified extreme acts of torture once “technically unlawful combatants do not have any rights under the Geneva Convention”. To perceive Muslim/Arab/brown men’s bodies outside the framework of human rights, made it “reasonable” for the US government to take all measures “needed” to fight terrorism. They were reduced to the proclaimed most dangerous enemy against America by the US government at that time.

What the sex industry performances in Thailand differ from the cases shown is that the subjects on stage are somewhat free to decide whether to perform or not (the status “free” is complicated by all the structural factors presented so far). Excluding the cases of trafficked sex workers and child labor, to work in the sex tourism has a certain freedom that detainees in Abu Ghraib and black bodies did not. However, we can’t forget that performers in ping-pong and live sex shows are not free from unhealthy and exploiting conditions of the sex industry. How can a fish and/or a bird be inserted inside a woman through a part of the body that is highly susceptible to infections and diseases and not count as an unhealthy and unsanitary work environment? In addition to diseases such as infections and HIV, other human rights violations common to the sex industry in Thailand are contractual deceiving bondages, forced working hours that can go up to 20 hours a day, horrific treatments such as beatings from clients and their bosses, psychological abuse, lack of medical assistance, scams from their employers, to name a few.

Hazel Carby brings an important question: “(...) what knowledge of Iraq and its people

⁶⁶ Melanie Richter-Montpetit, “Beyond the erotics of Orientalism: Lawfare, torture and the racial-sexual grammars of legitimate suffering,” *Security Dialogue* 45, 1 (2014): 48.

did American soldiers take with them on their invasion?”⁶⁷. Her question regarding the US invasion in Iraq that led to the violations in Abu Ghraib can also be made to this situation. As Carby affirms that “to assume such apparent innocence would be a mistake, for the invaders have created the image of the peoples they expected to find.”⁶⁸, ping-pong and live sex shows are maintained by the expectations of what Global North visitors expect to see.

As exotic and one-dimensional objects that are there to entertain, the audience is delighted to witness something so different and with no serious implications. A similar case to the dynamics here analyzed are the freak shows, most popular in the first half of the XX century. Also sources of curiosity and viewed as exotic, the bodies displayed were reduced to their physical, mental, and behavioral differences. And labeled and presented as such, the audience found pleasure in witnessing performances that were exotic and different but distant from them. It was clear that the bodies on stage were perceived as abnormal and thus the audience was normal and healthy. And this distance “established the freak show as a cultural standard by which the audience could reaffirm its normalcy by viewing those who were decidedly not normal by societal standards”⁶⁹.

Perceptions of Asian bodies also shaped the audience’s amusement and expectation in freak shows.

Freak shows appeared to combine notions of the physical other and the cultural other into a single category. (...) Cultural others were often showcased, as evidenced, not only because they were racially different but physically different as well. Exhibits that were racially different were claimed to be from a lost race such as the ‘Aztec Children’ or the

⁶⁷ Hazel Carby, “US/UK’s Special Relationship: The Culture of Torture in Abu Ghraib and Lynching Photographs,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 20 (2006): 69.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁹ Rachel Blase, “The Changing Societal View of Freaks: Popular Culture, Medical Discourse, and Physical Differences in 19th and 20th Century America,” *George Mason University*, (2017) 17.

‘Wild Men of Borneo’, any place that was considered wild and exotic.⁷⁰

At ping-pong shows, as well as in minstrelsy, the audience shows similar reactions towards the performances as freak shows. Laughing and, at the same time, showing expressions of horror, the reactions resemble watching freaks more than to sexual performances. It is the entertainment of witnessing something exotic and somewhat amazing without having to think of the staged bodies’ humanity and their personal lives. And just like these shows, “... minstrelsy made it the embodiment of unmentionable and transgressive pleasures (...) aroused pity and fear, desire and revulsion, and terror and pleasure”⁷¹. This perspective is the baseline to perceive the bodies on stage as exotic objects that are simply there to entertain the audience and no further consequences. Their subjectivity is not questioned, whereas if the question is brought up, it is immediately refuted by presumptions of “their choice, their responsibility”; as part of their local culture. Even though these cases appear sparse and seemingly involve different actors, it is the same other body based on race and gender that allows them to be displayed as freaks.

Performance and Power

It is the power of the performance to fuel the audience’s expectations and hegemonic preconceptions concerning the ‘othered’ body on stage that results in the amusement aspect. The performance and staging make it acceptable for the audience to gaze and be amused by the show. Here, the performance is the crucial staging that turns the horrific into entertainment, the concretization of conquest and domination; the “living proof” of racial and gender differences. As Hartman examines minstrelsy, melodrama or any of the chattel slavery staged performances:

⁷⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁷¹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 27.

Therefore, "performing blackness" conveys both the cross-purposes and the circulation of various modes of performance and performativity that concern the production of racial meaning and subjectivity, the nexus of race, subjection, and spectacle, the forms of racial and race(d) pleasure, enactments of white dominance and power, and the reiteration and/or rearticulation of the conditions of enslavement⁷².

The Abu Ghraib prison had, discursively, the objective of obtaining information about terrorist organizations, even though it was already proven that mechanisms of torture were not effective tools of information extraction. In addition, 85 to 90% of the detainees had no involvement with terrorist organizations and no "intelligence value". This is a clear example of how what mattered was the performance of persecution and punishment of these demonized bodies. With this high percentage of detainees not related to terrorism and no possibility of gaining any information on terrorism from the prisoners, the purpose of torture was a systematic dehumanization of the proclaimed enemies of Americans' lives. The performance itself was the purpose of the prison, a performance that was joyfully documented because that was the act of hegemony that had to be broadcasted, whether to warn their enemies or to celebrate their conquest over the other⁷³. What was really in place was the establishment of domination through performance.

Therefore, what unfolded in Abu Ghraib not only were acts that violated human rights treaties on torture but also a series of staging that would be photographed beside the smiling and satisfied perpetrators. Some of the tortures were: brutal beatings; striping the detainees of all their clothes and keeping them naked for several days; photograph and videotape them naked,

⁷² Ibid., 57.

⁷³ Carby, "US/UK's Special Relationship: The Culture of Torture in Abu Ghraib and Lynching Photographs," 60-71.

arranged in sexual positions or masturbating themselves or fellow inmates; pilling them naked in positions where their genitalia would touch each other; attaching wires to extremities and genitalia and reproduce electric torture; raping of female detainees; putting dog chains or straps on the detainees; and so on. What we can see from these examples of torture is not only physical abuse but highly gendered and charged with sexual acts. Calling men ‘gays’ and forcing them to wear female underwear are a few examples of proximation to femininity and thus torture through emasculation. These were tortures that would also aim at their psychological health and dignity.

While in countries such as the United States and the UK, public sexual acts, lewd acts and/or indecent exposure are considered crimes that, in some states, may lead to up to one year of prison and additional penalties, the staging of these acts makes it official, permissible. In the ping-pong shows, each woman carried a particular object to be inserted and in circus-like performances, each act had a spectacle charge. One of the acts was to spill out the ping-pong balls and immediately hit it with a racket, throwing the balls into the crowd, which caused reactions of disgust; and then enjoyment. The elision of the staging with the monolithic imagery of Asian women’s bodies turns live sex shows and the insertion of animals into genitals in exotic experiences memorable from a trip. The witnessing and meaning of these shows are removed from the spectator and placed in the displayed bodies as their own enjoyment, part of their nature and culture. “(...) fantasies about the other's enjoyment are ways for us to organize our own enjoyment”⁷⁴.

Enjoyment

⁷⁴ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 25.

This section addresses the outcome that the structural violence presented so far sustains: the enjoyment of “witnessing” performances, whether for their racialized and gendered bodies, for their “abnormalities” and/or for their abjectness. All the cases studied herein, from torture to ping-pong shows, are performances that define domination by means of entertainment. It is the enjoyment aspect that makes all of these performances socially acceptable, “the role of pleasure in securing the mechanisms of racial subjection”⁷⁵.

The cases of lynching and the tortures in Abu Ghraib were not solely physical and mental destruction but were somehow recorded as “souvenirs”, tokens of an amusing display. Photographs of lynching were widely exchanged or given as gifts cards to families and friends portraying a “good day out”⁷⁶. These events were not perceived as executions but as celebratory moments that were worth registering. It is important to stress that several of these stagings were photographed or somehow registered with their perpetrators posing for the picture. Today, the photographs taken from the tortures performed in Abu Ghraib are accessible to everyone.

When looking at the photographs, one cannot help but think that these young men and women look like high school kids on their first trip abroad, smiling self-consciously while announcing to the natives that they have arrived, assuring themselves of their superiority and their right to dominate while saying "hi" to Mom back home. They look like American tourists in a fantasyland where exoticized bodies become the conduit for expressing and acting upon racist desires, desires that can be fully realized only in the contact zones of the "Other."⁷⁷

Beside tortured, naked, and bleeding bodies, the soldiers posed smiling, with thumbs up, proud of their showcase. Are these celebrations so different from the entertainment provided in

⁷⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁶ Garland, “Penal Excess and Surplus Menaing: Public Torture Lynching in Twentieth-Century America,” 795.

⁷⁷ Carby, “US/UK’s Special Relationship: The Culture of Torture in Abu Ghraib and Lynching Photographs,” 70.

ping-pong shows? What must be taken into consideration is not the differences from one performance to the other as for the bodies - again assigning accountability to the displayed - but the spectators' pleasure of witnessing a performance that would not be acceptable in his/hers home country's culture, even by these same people; the pleasure of reinforcing stereotypes and dominance; the pleasure of witnessing the abnormal and exotic. The analysis of these performances is not to merely find similarities; it is to understand the structural violence, the power of staging, and the abjectness of the bodies displayed that allows performances such as these to reappear as entertainment, time and time again, in different contexts, bodies, performances.

5. The Broader Picture and Recommendations

The ping-pong shows in Thailand is an illustrative case to discuss a much broader issue, a racial/gender structure that dates from colonial domination and local inequalities. To claim that these performances are part of local culture, a culture that has been widely portrayed as sexually open and free from rules and constraints within Western countries is to ignore their implications, the lives of the members involved, its effects on local society, and the visitors/audience own racial/gender hegemony. Whereas the brutal and inhumane treatment at lynchings and the Abu Ghraib case may be more obvious to some people, cases such as sex performances in Thailand are perceived as local culture and thus entertaining. And this imagery is not perceived by a certain group of people but by all genders, economic and social groups, age, travel purposes, and countries. This means that the core reason for performances such as these has not been

addressed. In the meanwhile, each case is approached and understood within their specific particularities and placed outside the global-historical context.

Even though the ping-pong shows in Thailand are taken as an example for its still widely spread fame as the “sex capital of the world” and how this fame is enjoyed by visitors there, the sexualized and inferior colonized body is the perspective that maintains the hierarchy of states and race worldwide that has given way to forms of exploitation and continues to do so. Different contexts and countries have the same imperialist supremacy mentality background of influence and the issues pointed out concerning Thailand - Global South countries turning to service industries, systematic patterns of gendered violence, lack of resources from local governments to vulnerable groups - are the same problems as several other Global South countries are facing today. And as such, these other countries are perceived as servers to the Global North (services, materials, and bodies). Brazil, other Southeast Asian countries, The Caribbean, South Africa, to name a few. The Western hegemonies allow “Third world” countries to be subjugated, a colonial legacy that applies worldwide.

In addition to racial hierarchies, gendered structural violence must be analyzed intersecting politics and economics. This thesis’s section on gender explained how the perception of women by the local gender roles and the colonizers’ perception result in selling and exploiting them as commodities and sexual objects. Again, this is not a particularity of Thailand but a worldwide injustice; both because of local gender inequality and imperialist supremacy. Therefore, for governments to undertake a top-to-bottom approach to social and economic issues, it will never address core problems and consequently fail to resolve them.

In recent years, the South Korean government has developed several programs to provide

resources of international marriage for South Korean men such as marriage agencies and Korean language schools for foreign brides. This incentive resulted from the struggle for South Korean men in rural areas to find wives. Part of #metoo movement, Korean women saying ‘no’ to marriage has increased nationwide⁷⁸. Advocacy for gender equality and justice has been growing which leads to women choosing not to get married. In this patriarchal society, marriage means loss of independence, fixed gender roles within the family unit, among other restrictions that limit women’s individuality.

However, instead of the government approaching this decrease in marriage from a gender perspective and understanding that sexism is the core issue, the government is providing subsidies for men to buy brides overseas⁷⁹. This measure not only fails to provide effective resolutions but maintains the patriarchal system and further causes human rights violations. Foreign brides dealing with language barriers and lack of resources to rights and justice give rise to human rights violations such as domestic violence whereas they don’t find legal and social support⁸⁰.

Just as the South Korean case, to amend social problems without addressing structural gender and racial problematics maintains the current problems and further creates social

⁷⁸ Samuel Leighton-Dore, “Women in South Korea have started a #NoMarriage movement,” *SBS*, July 26, 2019,

<https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/culture/article/2019/07/26/women-south-korea-have-started-nomarriage-movement> (accessed March 2020)

⁷⁹ “South Korea’s local subsidies encourage foreign ‘bride buying’; brides from Uzbekistan ‘most expensive’,” *The Straits Times*, February 19, 2019,

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/south-koreas-local-subsidies-encourage-foreign-bride-buying-brides-from-uzbekistan> (accessed March 2020)

⁸⁰ Jason Strother and Malte Kollenberg, “South Korea Makes New Rules for International Marriages,” *VOA*, May 29, 2014,

<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/south-korea-makes-new-rules-international-marriages> (accessed March 2020)

injustice. The persistence of measures that are upheld by perceptions of sex workers as victims or responsible for their actions and situation through a moral lense is the same basis that abjects them. Humanitarian organizations and endeavors - the acclaimed neoliberal moral and altruist deed - by sharing the same perspective of sex workers as victims, have contributed to their stigmatization and vulnerability. Following the perspective of imperialist saviors, many NGOs do not distinguish trafficked sex workers and women working in the sex industry by choice. “To be repeatedly approached by missionaries and told that people are praying for them, that they can escape this life and do better is infuriating and can be damaging to one’s sense of self-worth”⁸¹. In the meantime, raids in red-light districts under Thailand's Tourism Minister Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul discourse “We want Thailand to be about quality tourism. We want the sex industry gone”⁸² have mainly persecuted the sex workers by incarceration, penalties, and other brutal violations.

Therefore, this thesis recommends addressing political, economic, and social matters intersected with gender and racial rights and issues. It is by approaching the viewer, perpetrator, and/or buyer, states are able to address core issues that underpin further human rights violations and injustices. In the case of Thailand, to question women and the staged bodies' agencies is also a hegemonic perspective that does not approach the fundamental problem and those who maintain them. Hence, it only creates further social and human injustice when concerning the sex industry as a matter of its legality.

⁸¹ Kate Emmons, “The Effects of Neoliberalism and Globalization on Thailand's Sex Industry,” Undergraduate honors thesis, University of Redlands (2019).

⁸² Patpicha Tanakasempipat “Thai Sex Industry Under Fire from Tourism Minister, Police” *Reuters*, July 16, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-vice/thai-sex-industry-under-fire-from-tourism-minister-police-idUSKCN0ZW16A> (accessed April 30, 2020)

To impose morality or try to amend its social repercussions from top-to-bottom by means of turning into illegal, it only further stigmatizes sex workers, victimizes them and, while failing to provide social support, aggravates their lack of labor and human rights. What is very common is to debate whether it was their choice to work in the sex industry and if so, they are accountable for what happens next. If not, they are helpless humans without sentience. These debates must also get over the “savior” imperialist discourse that finds comfort in believing that they are better off now. Instead, politicians and general discourse must acknowledge the importance of giving vulnerable groups voices and power to claim and decide along with policy-makers what are the best practices.

This recommendation is not only directed to policy-makers or scholars but the general public, whether in foreign lands or their home country towards other bodies. It is essential to understand everyone’s role in the continuance of practices such as the cases presented and how it is the widespread ideologies and culture that turns them into reality. It is this very same orientalism and colonial perceptions of the other that led military officers in Abu Ghraib to do what they did, and spectators of lynching, freak shows, and ping-pong shows to find amusing at each performance. To perceive them as individual cases without a commonality of the spectator is to ignore the structural violence that gives meaning to these cases, in other words, none of these cases would have happened without the spectator.

Conclusion

The analysis of ping-pong shows is to explore the structural factors that underlie the spectator/displayed dynamics. This exploration has the purpose to deconstruct discourses that

whether stigmatize sex workers as victims or fallen women. It is the structural reflection that critics of sex tourism can go beyond the judgment of its morality and finally bring the spectator and contradictory discourses to the center of analysis. By addressing the spectators, other forms of performances can be understood as outcomes of similar structural racialized and gendered violence.

To claim that ping-pong shows are a reflection of local Thai culture and it resonates with their exotic culture is a justification to ease the spectator's enjoyment. Firstly, this discourse disregards historical, political-economic, and social aspects that shape this view. On the one hand, local patriarchal systems determine women's and men's roles, shaping their obligations, morality, and part in society. It is these roles that simplify women into a sexualized gender and emphasize masculinity and its dos and don'ts. On the other hand, the foreign influence over local tourism is based on the structures presented in this thesis: the Orientalism perception of the other, particularly towards Asian women and how it is filled with stereotypes and fantasies that satisfy western masculinity desires. Secondly, it is the international neoliberal system where free competition and imperialist search for colonies have turned Global South countries into their backyard for materials and bodies.

Therefore, it is important to be aware of the intended construction of imageries such as "the sex capital of the world" and how "Thailand has no rules", where tourists are allowed to do whatever they want and would not be able to do in their home countries. The sexual openness that is associated with Thailand is a way to attract tourists and a created discourse that satisfies desires to explore a far and exotic land with bodies perceived as available for that purpose. To understand this case is to understand the global imperialist relationship between Global North

and South countries and how it applies on a global scale. It is a dynamic that involves all states and interactions with the other body, between different cultures and within each community. It is necessary to be aware of how perceptions of the other are created and go beyond imageries that simplify humans into categories.

These perspectives of others affect interactions at the individual level but also governance and policy-making processes. The ongoing political decision-making process that addresses social problems from top-to-bottom and, most times, assign responsibility to those most vulnerable, will only further increase injustice and deteriorate current problems. Whether it is the sex industry or cases of rape, the media and the justice system widely assign blame and accountability to the aggressed instead of the aggressor.

From cases where marriage with their rapist is better than the subsequent societal stigmatization to the fear of reporting sexual abuse from a relative, husband, colleague or whoever are all too familiar. Politics, economy, and international relations must have an intersectional approach with gender, sexuality, identity, and body so that core issues are addressed and stop from creating further problems. Only by analyzing structural violence and inequalities, voices from the actually affected groups can be heard, and thus there can be policies and measures that address core problems and provide concrete solutions.

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