CONTESTED IDENTITY, CONTESTED STRUGGLE

A critical discourse analysis on victim-agent narratives regarding commercial sex in Thailand

Uppsala University, Department of Government
Spring semester 2018
Bachelor’s Thesis, 15 credits. Development Studies C
Author: Emma Aler
Supervisor: Elin Bjarnegård
Word Count: 12083
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how efforts regarding the commercial sex industry in Thailand can be positioned in relation to an agent-victim framework. In the context of the expanding sex industry in Thailand, it becomes relevant to look at how efforts regarding it risks reproducing notions of ‘the prostitute’ as the victimised Other, and thus reinforcing neo-colonialism. However, the response in the form of an agent narrative has also been criticised for not taking into account intersecting forms of oppression. Here, a model coming from an emerging literature on the ‘third way feminist approach’ is used to illustrate how these instead can be combined. Using critical discourse analysis, this study draws on postcolonial feminist theory to scrutinise the ways in which non-governmental organisations imagine women as either agents or victims, or rather a combination of the two. The starting point has been that this binary definition might not be sufficient, neither for theoretically addressing the issue, nor for describing discourse. Two ideal types based on the agent-victim framework has been used to study to what extent the discursive practice of the organisations NightLight and Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers can be placed neatly into one of these ideal types, or whether a third perspective is indeed needed to account for their perception of the women they work with. The analysis has been conducted using different forms of information gathered from the official websites of the organisations, in order to understand they ways in which the organisations themselves choose to communicate their work. The results show that the discursive practices of these organisations to some extent can be accounted for using this framework, yet that in order to fully understand them, one should consider the third way which combines the strengths of both.

Keywords: Agency, Victimisation, Agent-Victim Framework, Commercial Sex, Sex Work, Postcolonialism, Feminist Theory, Thailand
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract........................................................................................................................................... 2

1. Introduction................................................................................................................................. 4
   1.1 Aim and Research Question................................................................................................. 5
   1.2 Background ......................................................................................................................... 5

2. Theoretical Background ............................................................................................................ 8
   2.1 Postcolonial Feminist Thought........................................................................................... 9
   2.2 Victimisation ....................................................................................................................... 10
   2.3 Agency .................................................................................................................................. 12
   2.4 Both Victim and Agent?....................................................................................................... 13
   2.5 Non-Governmental Organisations and Activism ............................................................... 14
   2.6 Christian mission and Orientalism...................................................................................... 15
   2.7 Summary............................................................................................................................. 15

3. Methodology and Research Design ............................................................................................ 16
   3.1 Discourse Analysis ............................................................................................................. 16
   3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis.................................................................................................. 16
   3.3 Case Selection .................................................................................................................... 18
   3.3.1 NightLight .................................................................................................................... 19
   3.3.1 Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers........................................................................... 20
   3.4 Material................................................................................................................................ 20
   3.5 Analytical Framework ......................................................................................................... 21

4. Results ......................................................................................................................................... 23
   4.1 Othering - Agency .............................................................................................................. 23
   4.2 Feminist Saviour - Empowerment ...................................................................................... 26
   4.3 Silencing - Individual Experiences ...................................................................................... 27

5. Analysis ....................................................................................................................................... 29

6. Concluding Remarks .................................................................................................................. 31

7. References .................................................................................................................................... 33
1. INTRODUCTION

With tourism becoming one of the main sources of export revenues for several emerging economies, numerous states are now prioritising tourism as a way of generating economic growth, and commercial sex in the form of sex tourism is a part of that (Singh and Hart, 2007:155). It is however crucial to recognise that commercial sex cannot be understood in a single, comprehensive way, neither can efforts regarding it be performed in a single way (Brody, 2006:185). Nevertheless, there is a tendency to spread a simplified understanding of these issues, both in academia and in media, often with a focus on women as helpless victims. The notion of ‘the Prostitute’ as a silent victim comes from a discourse on the sex industry which all too often silences sex workers’ own voices (ibid: 198). The idea of the silent victim has been criticised by many, especially liberal feminists who instead put focus on the individual as an agent with the capacity for reason and choice (Cavaliere, 2011:1428-30). However, the agent narrative has been criticised as well, for not fully taking into account the ways in which intersecting forms of oppression can limit choice. Recent theory has developed a way of combining both of these perspectives, introducing the concept of ‘constrained autonomy’.

Thailand’s sex industry is well-known both locally and internationally, despite national efforts to tone down the image of Thailand and especially Bangkok as a destination for commercial sex (Singh and Hart, 2007:159). Sex has long been promoted as a tourist attraction, as a way to develop the Thai economy (Brody, 2006: 192). Because of its economic importance, though prostitution is illegal in Thailand the issue is rather under-enforced (Hobbs et al, 2011:81). Although Thailand’s sex industry has been portrayed as ‘simply the product of a poor society’, this industry has been shown to be a product of complex international power structures (Lines, 2015:86), why it becomes relevant to study the discourse around it as part of a post-colonial discourse. Being such a globalised industry, it raises the question of whether it inevitably will serve to reinforce global structures of inequality between men and women, developed and developing, or whether it could be a space for resistance and change (Smith, 2016:370).
1.2 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The critique of the ways in which Western scholars and social workers wish to ‘save’ women in the commercial sex industry is widespread. The issue is highly gendered and interrelated with post-colonial discourse and the critique it has been subject to is part of a greater questioning of the current developmental agenda. The response has been the imagining of women as active agents with the capacity for reason and choice. However, both of these narratives have their limitations, why we should look at ways to combine the strengths from each. The victim-agent dichotomy might not be sufficient, neither for theoretically addressing the issue, nor for communicating how work is conducted in practice. Drawing on a model labelled a ‘third way feminist approach’, this thesis will examine whether this third perspective is needed for describing existing discourse, or whether the binary definition is sufficient. This will be done through a discourse analysis of two different non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with these issues, the Christian organisation NightLight and the sex worker-led Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), looking at if they perceive the women in this industry as primarily victims or agents, or rather as encompassing elements of both. In this way, the study further aims to show how the organisations in question position themselves and their role in relation to the women they work with.

The research question is as follows: How can the discourse of NGOs working with women in the commercial sex industry in Thailand be positioned in relation to notions of ‘the Prostitute’ as victim or agent?

1.3 BACKGROUND

As stated above, although it is possible to talk generally about the nature of the commercial sex industry in Thailand and elsewhere, one should have in mind that the lived realities of this industry are more complex than theory can account for (Brody, 2006:185). Yet, the sex industry cannot be understood without the context of intensifying globalization and the growing tourism industry, and how sex tourism becomes a way to account for the fantasy of the ‘Orient’. Culture and economics are in this way working together to create demand. It becomes even more complicated when considering how tourism now is one of the main sources of export revenues for several countries, among these Thailand (Singh and Hart, 2007:156-157).
Commercial transaction of sexual services began to appear in Thailand in the late 1600s (ibid:5). There has only been what can be labelled a full-scale industry for commercial sex during the last few decades. An explanation which has been given for this development is the Vietnam war, during which there emerged a market for ‘Rest and Recreation’-services for American soldiers, and subsequently the expansion of the tourism industry in general (ibid:192). In the 1950s, the issue of ‘prostitution’ started to get more international attention. The 1949 ‘Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others’ which was adopted by the UN, established that ‘women in prostitution’ were to be seen as victims (Jeffrey, 2002:19). Sex for commercial purposes was made illegal in Thailand in 1960, following international, i.e. mainly Western pressure (ibid:28). The expansion of the sex industry in Thailand was even seen as a sign of ‘systematic degradation’ of the rural parts of Thailand, in the context for a strive towards development and security, as well as a general westernization. The sex workers themselves were rarely heard in debates and never thought to possess any agency but were instead spoken for and silenced (ibid:29).

Sex then started to be promoted as a tourist attraction, which came to be a central part of developing the Thai economy. As Boonchalaksi and Guest have described it, quoted by Brody (2006:192): “The bodies of Thai women have become one of the bases of growth of the Thai industry”. Commercial sex further became central for the imagining of Thailand as different and exotic compared to the West, were the purchase of sexual services has been made equal to visiting various tourist attractions (Singh and Hart, 2007:157). Estimates of the number of sex workers in Thailand ranges from 75 000 (government estimations) to two million (Brody 2006:189 and Zoe Foundation, 2009), with a minimum of 40 000 children under the age of 18 (Zoe Foundation, 2009). The majority are women coming from the northern and north-east regions of the country, especially the Isan-region, which also are the poorest (Jeffrey, 2002:31).

The sex industry is to a great extent related to poverty (Sing and Hart, 2007:159), something which should be considered in the context of the overall trend of a feminisation of poverty in the Global South, i.e. how the burden of poverty to an increasing extent is borne by women (Bouché et al., 2018:1-2). In the case of Thailand, there are lots of people coming from the poorer, rural areas in the North to Bangkok and other urban areas in order to make a living and to be able to provide for their families (Brody, 2006:187). It is a way of quickly earning money, and often more money than other forms of employment could offer (Jeffrey, 2002:31). Entering the sex industry
can therefore be a pragmatic choice, considering for example the poor working conditions and minimal wages that factory work offers compared to the relatively high incomes in the sex industry (Brody, 2006:199-200).

Language and the use of discourse have proven to be important for the ways in which the legal system, both nationally and internationally, views different forms of sexual labour. The discourse has shifted, first so as to normalise *prostitution* as a form of sexualised oppression, naming it just that. With the emergence of sex worker activism, labelling it *sex work* became a way to shift focus, to gain respect and employment protections (Hardesty and Gunn, 2017:11-14). This thesis will however mostly use the term *commercial sex*, considering that this is a fairly neutral way to label sex as a commercial transaction. This is since it is difficult to distinguish between the different forms of commercial sex when studying the Thai case, something which also should be considered in the analysis. It should also be noted that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between other forms of commercial sex and *trafficking*, i.e. “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion…for the purpose of exploitation” (UNODC, 2018). Efforts regarding these are also interlinked. However, due to limits in time and scope, this is not the focus of this particular study.

The sex tourism industry has attracted massive amount of foreign capital in the form of investment in bars, massage parlours and hotels. In this manner, it has become both an economic as well as a political matter for Thailand. Laws and policies concerning this industry have somewhat reflected the wish for foreign investment to continue. However, recent efforts have been made to curb the continuing sex trade, which reflects a growing concern for the spread of AIDS and of revelations of the number of girls under the age of 15 in the industry. These developments certainly threaten the image of Thailand as a tourist paradise, and since the government greatly depends of the economic revenues from this industry, it can explain that they now have decided to act (Brody, 2006:194).

The literature on various forms of commercial sex is highly gendered and heteronormative in that the focus is on adult female sex workers or prostitutes, mostly with male clients. The research done on the male equivalent as well as non-binary sex workers is not as developed (Bouché et al, 2018:4). There has also been less focus on the trafficking of children and teenagers, because this
part of the industry has been more heavily condemned and as a result moved underground, and also because of considerations regarding conducting research in this area in a respectful way, which does not risk the wellbeing of individuals (Brody, 2006:185-186). The heavy focus on women involved in commercial sex is problematic in that it in some ways feeds the victimisation of women while at the same time not fully recognising the issues others face who are involved in commercial sex (Bouché et al, 2018:3). With this in mind, this study will still have its focus on women in the sex industry, because of the above-mentioned reasons and also since the majority of people in this industry are women. However, potential future research could thus look at other parts of the industry.

Women tend to bear the costs of the international division of labour and socioeconomic impoverishment, processes which have their roots in global inequality and the imperial project. These processes are highly gendered, not least when looking at tourism and especially sex tourism as a way of marking difference between the Self and the Other, establishing global authority (Jeffrey, 2002:4). However, it becomes clear that there is no single, easy way to account for the complexities of the sex industry in Thailand or how it is interrelated with processes of global inequality and development, neither when considering the motivations for entry nor the demand for there to be such a market.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section I will present the theoretical concepts found in earlier research, which will be used to build an analytical framework. Firstly, postcolonial feminist thought will be discussed, and the ways in which Western feminist discourse have been critiqued for reproducing the idea of ‘third world women’ as victims, in order to highlight the centrality of the victim-agent framework. Secondly, the concepts of victimisation and agency will be scrutinised and defined. Thirdly, a third way for approaching the issue of commercial sex will be introduced. Lastly, the history of NGOs and sex worker activism will be elaborated on, as well as the history of Christian missions in Thailand, to put the two organisations chosen for analysis in context.
2.1 POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST THOUGHT

The notion that women in the so-called developing world or Global South are victims is a view that is widespread and constantly reproduced, both in the academic world and elsewhere. It has nevertheless also been scrutinised and criticised by many, and in many different ways (see Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988; Fluri, 2009; Burton, 1990). Western feminism has long been criticised for portraying women in the Global South in ways that reproduce the colonial legacy of a hierarchy between the West and ‘the Rest’, disseminating a simplistic view on women as a homogenous group in need of rescuing. A form of othering takes place when a ‘we-them’ dichotomy is constructed: Women in the Global South are believed to be poor, uneducated, sexually constrained and victimised, and they are constructed in relation to the opposed idea of women in the Global North being well informed, modern, sexually free, and in possession of agency. It is in this way that colonial discourses are utilised to exercise power over the ways in which development is defined (1988:61-63).

Western attempts at ‘rescuing’ women in other parts of the world has further been questioned by Burton (1990), among others. Burton describes how Western feminism is part of an imperial legacy, derived from Victorian times. She argues that Victorian feminism was intertwined with the colonial mind-set which made them perceive Other women, in this case Indian women, as “unfortunates in need of saving by their British feminist sisters” (1990:295). This signifies an objectification of the ‘Oriental woman’ performed by the Western feminist, where the latter sets out to ‘discover’ this object. Western feminists are thus able to define and silence them (1990:303). This idea resonates with the writings of Said in his ‘Orientalism’, describing the orientalist mindset which served to legitimise the colonial project by imagining the colonised Other as inferior to the superior Self (1978).

Conducting research in the field of development and feminist theory, it is crucial to be aware of the ways in which one’s own use of language reproduces discourse. I will in this thesis be referring to binary definitions such as the Global South and the Global North, which should be problematised. Although binary understandings of the world carry with them a history of colonial hierarchy, it is necessary to refer to such concepts when utilising postcolonial theory since much of this research tradition is based on that such dichotomies exists – although as socially constructed ideas. Using terms such as ‘developing’ and ’developed’, it is important to note that
such concepts are contested and difficult to define, and that it is impossible to draw any hard lines between them, either in theory or in reality.

Although Thailand never was a colony per se, one did experience an imperial or semi-colonial era, which was initiated by the signing of a treaty between Britain and Siam, granting immunity from Siamese law for the British. Similar treaties were signed with the US and other European powers. These treaties did not establish colonial rule, but clearly showed that Americans and Europeans had a higher status than the Siamese. The imperial era was legitimized through gender and sexuality, and in many ways “(...) gender underwrote the establishment of Empire”. The Siamese people were considered to be uncivilised, lacking in moral character and sexual control, and this was used to legitimize the colonial project (Jeffrey, 2002:6-7). These ‘essential differences’ were used to prove the uncivilized nature of Thai culture, in contrast to the civilized West (ibid:144). This is why we should consider postcolonial hierarchies of power when looking at efforts regarding commercial sex in Thailand.

2.2 VICTIMISATION

Research and policy regarding the international sex industry really illuminate diverging positions within feminist theory. The victim-agent divide shows an important difference between those who considers sex work to be just like any other kind of work, and those who perceive it as inherently abusive (Westmarland and Gangoli, 2006:2). The notion of sex workers as victims comes from the idea of commercial sex as a form of sexualised domination that sustains gender inequality (Cavalieri, 2011:1421-23). A victim is subsequently constructed or understood as rather the opposite of someone who possesses agency, an individual who is seen as being victim to external factors which in different ways undermines their ability to choose. In this context, victimisation is often imagined as the discursive process in which an individual is deprived of their agency. This is the understanding of victimisation which will be used for this analysis.

Some feminists take on the view that it is impossible to engage in commercial sex voluntarily for two reasons; because it involves self-harm, and because there really is no other possible labour option (Cavalieri, 2011:1421-23). The objectification and commodification of women’s bodies by men is seen as the foundation for commercial sex, which results in that it always will include the
victimisation of women (Cook, 2015:821). Based on this analysis of selling sex as exploitative, the abolition of all forms of sexual labour follows as the only possible response (Cavalieri, 2011:1415).

However, this model discards the importance of understanding the individual experiences of commercial sex. Instead, the focus lies on women as a group, but as a constituted one rather than one which inhabits pluralism and difference. This view has been criticised for not taking into account other structures of dominance which interacts with gender. Another criticism is that it rejects a distinction between trafficking and other forms of commercial sex, which excludes the possibility of any form of agency in women’s decision to enter into the industry. Moreover, the imagining of women as victims have been accused of silencing the very women it tries to ‘save’, by rejecting the possibility for there to be an active choice involved in the process (Cavalieri, 2011:1425-26).

To conclude, Jeffrey examines how ‘the Prostitute’ is assumed as being powerless and without agency, not by definition but by certain interpretations of ‘prostitution’. The notions of women and certain cultures as being inferior to men and Western culture respectively, are utilised to construct the notion of the Prostitute. These assumptions serve the interest of those who are in possession of certain power and legitimises the act of ‘saving’ women. It is however by understanding these assumptions and the language that conveys them that we can move towards a discourse which takes into account the complexities of reality: “By turning the usual assumption about prostitute women inside out, we expose the complex workings of discursive power and challenge its operation” (Jeffrey, 2002:144).
2.3 AGENCY

The notion of sex workers as active agents derives from the liberal feminist idea of the individual as the agent of her own life, with a capacity for reason and choice. From that perspective, choosing sexual labour is equivalent to choosing any kind of employment (Cavalieri, 2011:1428-30). Kabeer’s definition of agency will be used for this analysis, who describes it as the ‘ability to define one’s goals and act upon them’ (2002:20). Consequently, possessing agency in this context is thought of as the ability of an individual in the sex industry to define their goals and having the possibility to try to achieve those goals.

Kabeer relates the concept of agency to the idea of empowerment, were the latter is defined as “the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context were this ability was previously denied to them” (2002:19). Resources, agency and achievement together produce an individual’s ability to make a choice (ibid.). Agency has often been operationalised as ‘individual decision-making’, however, Kabeer claims that it goes beyond that, since it is not merely about the actions which can be measured and observed, but entails the ‘meaning, motivation and purpose’ behind those actions (2002:21). This leads us to the difficult question of whether or not it matters what kind of choice one makes. If a woman chooses to do something which in fact undermines her wellbeing, which some would argue that entering the sex industry does, is that to be considered an act of agency? Or is it rather an expression of an internalisation of a lower social status? If so, one could argue that power can be exercised through consent as well as coercion (Kabeer, 2012:23-24).

“…in assessing whether or not an achievement embodies meaningful choice, we have to ask ourselves whether other choices were not only materially possible but whether they were conceived to be within the realms of possibility” (Kabeer, 2012:25).

The meaning of coercion is however not a completely clear concept, for example due to the fact that an individual’s agency can be altered or change over time. You might migrate of your own free will, but then find yourself in a position where you are coerced or otherwise forced to enter into sexual labour. Further, you might engage in sex labour voluntarily, but without fully comprehending or having access to information about the work you are supposed to perform. However, focusing on coercion might result in that acts of abuse against women who have
consented to the work are being overlooked, or that the working conditions might be unacceptable. There is a danger in that it might lead people to assert that women who have exercised agency and taken a decision in fact be “treated as if they “deserved” the abuses they experience” (Cavalieri, 2011:1433-36).

Thus, it can be problematic to always assume agency. Critics would say that considering that it is a particularly dangerous form of employment, even with improved labour conditions, it cannot be considered any form of labour. Moreover, most women who are stating that it is in fact empowering are from ‘developed contexts’. Although the motivations might have been economic ones, the context is rarely as complex as in developing countries, or as in cases of trafficking (Cavalieri, 2011:1440).

2.4 BOTH VICTIM AND AGENT?

As previously shown, there is a tendency to imagine women in the sex industry as either victims or agents. Both of these narratives have limitations, but also advantages. The victim-framework puts focus on the sex-based domination which in many ways characterizes the sex industry, as well as recognizing how poverty often underlies the choice to engage in sexual labour. These are important considerations, especially in ‘developing’ contexts. On the other end, the liberal feminist approach accounts for a wide range of individual women’s experiences, with all its complexities and ambiguities (ibid:1444). By recognizing women as individuals with agency and highlighting empowerment as the way forward, we can steer away from the silencing of women involved in commercial sex and how it serves to reproduce colonial legacies of power.

Considering this, it might be possible to perceive individuals as encompassing both the role of the victim and that of the empowered agent, since a binary perception does not really incorporate the complexities of the issue. Cavalieri, among others, has developed a third way of imagining women in the sex industry as both victims and agents. This third way depicts individual women as actors with agency, but with constrained personal autonomy, combining what she argues are the stronger parts of each theory. In this way it becomes possible to formulate policy which can help alleviate poverty and account for how it is related to sex work (ibid:1410).

The third-way model is built on four central tenets. The first one is an awareness of how structures of privilege determine opportunity. The second is trying to explain and counteract how
intersecting forms of oppression impact the lives of individuals. The third one is how individual’s experiences differ within the context of varying forms of oppression, which means rejecting any one-size-fits-all solution and enabling women to define their own experience. The last one is opening up the possibility for individuals to be active agents, even whilst under oppression (ibid. 1447-48).

Cavalieri states that her model in many ways resonates with the capabilities approach, as formulated by Amartya Sen. This approach imagines development as the freedom of each individual to choose to live the life they have reason to value, and the aim of development should thus be the expansion of individual’s freedom and capacity to choose (1999). This is resonated in the third-way model: “When trafficking represents a choice under circumstances of constrained autonomy where limited alternatives are available, the capabilities approach insists that the proper intervention is to increase individual capabilities” (Cavalieri, 2011:1457). This can be related to Kabeer’s definition of empowerment as the ability of individuals to make strategic life choices, and thus to agency as well. In this way, the answer to the question of whether it can be considered agency to choose an occupation which might undermine your well-being, is that the important part is the choice itself.

2.5 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND ACTIVISM

As shown in this theoretical background, discourses around the issue of commercial sex have concerned dichotomies: victim or agent, force or consent and so on. The central question is whether the global sexual market is to be seen as only serving to reproduce international inequalities, or whether it can entail forms of agency (Smith, 2016:370). This question is relevant both for theory and practice, and the dual identities of sex workers can be seen in both. Sex worker activism has been difficult to perform in Thailand, because of the heavy stigma on sex work and an unwilling, even anti-labour government. As previously shown, the great economic revenues coming from this industry have provided great incentives for the government to keep it relatively unregulated. Groups of sex workers have historically held protests and strikes as well as formed organisations demanding better working conditions, but therefore initially with little success. However, NGOs run by non-sex workers became more successful in raising the issue. Their focus was on exploitation, which came to reinforce the perception of women as vulnerable victims, rather than as political actors. They operated from a distance, insisting that sex work was
inherently wrong. One might argue that the focus on sex worker victimisation was necessary to adopt in order to combat exploitation. Nevertheless, the response that came from many sex worker activists was that it risks reinforcing control over women and female sexuality (Jeffrey, 2002:74-87). Today, there are a variety of NGOs operating in Thailand, with quite diverging ideas of the nature of sex work. The two organisations chosen for this analysis, NightLight and APNSW, represent two quite different positions, which will be developed on further in the case selection.

2.6 CHRISTIAN MISSION AND ORIENTALISM

In order to fully comprehend the position of NightLight as a Christian organisation, one should consider that there is a history of Christian missions in Thailand. One should especially consider that there is a history of missions with the aim of ‘saving’ women from the sex industry. The dualistic nature of missionary thought; Us and Them, civilised and uncivilised, Christian and non-Christian has been described as deeply Orientalist. The foundation of the missionary project lies in the belief that the inferior East should be made the likeness of the superior West (Swanson, 2004:109). Although modern-day mission is different, the Orientalist legacy is still to be found in their perception of Asia. This legacy should be questioned, in order to avoid reinforcing imperialistic tendencies, and therefore also considered when looking at modern Christian NGOs operating in Thailand (Shumm, 2008).

2.7 SUMMARY

To conclude, both of the two theoretical approaches to the issue of commercial sex have been criticised in different ways. Although the agency approach can be argued to be further away from reinforcing colonial legacies of power and inequality, it has nevertheless been criticised for not fully taking into account the lived realities for sex workers by always assuming agency. This dichotomy does highlight important issues which need to be taken into consideration, but the third-way feminist approach shows that this way of thinking might be insufficient, and actually overlook tendencies to be found in empirics.
3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

For this thesis I will be using the method of discourse analysis, more precisely Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis (CDA). Discourse analysis consists of a series of approaches that can be used to understand different social domains. The definition of discourse that this thesis will be utilising is that of Jorgensen and Phillips, who defines it as ‘a particular way of talking about or understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)’ (2008:9). Discourse analysis is commonly used in various fields within social science, including the field of development, and postcolonial and feminist studies.

The basic assumption of discourse analysis derives from the constructivist idea that discourse never is neutral, but rather that it is an important part of creating and changing social relations, identities and perceptions of the world. ‘Knowledge is created through social interaction in which we construct common truths and compete about what is true and false.’ (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2008:12) This entails that knowledge should not be perceived as objective truth, nor should we consider knowledge and representations of the world as reflecting the reality ‘out there’. Knowledges and understandings of the world are not static, nor are they separated from social interaction and social processes. Importantly, knowledge and discourse have social consequences. That is, depending on how we perceive the world, we will act in certain ways. Discourse analysis seeks to explain in what ways reality is being represented in discourse and in social interactions, but also how discourse is part of constructing that reality.

3.2 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

As aforementioned, this analysis will draw on the method developed by Fairclough, as described by Jorgensen and Phillips. CDA, in particular, focuses on how discourse constructs the social world. Fairclough uses the concept of intertextuality to explain how the language of a text always builds on earlier discursive practices and structures, and in that way building on already established meanings (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2008:13-15).
The aim of CDA is to explore how discourse is part of processes of change in social and cultural phenomena. The starting point of this method is therefore that discourse is a crucial part of constructing social identities and social relations (ibid:55). Importantly, discursive practice both contributes to the shaping of the societal world as well as reflects it. It further aims to contribute to social change, why it is not politically neutral but instead critical of unequal power relations between different social groups. This is based on the assumption that discourse shapes and reproduces relations of unequal power. In this way, the researcher is also part of shaping the social reality. Part of the analysis is therefore to ‘uncover the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of unequal power relations’ (ibid:58).

Two focal points are highlighted in performing the analysis: the communicative event and the order of discourse. The order of discourse describes the different types of discourses within a specific field. The communicative event has three dimensions: text (which includes speech, writing, visual image or a combination of these), discursive practice (including the production and consumption of texts) and social practice. The analysis is conducted on all three levels; analysis of the discourses which are articulated in the production and consumption of the text, analysis of linguistic structures, and analysis of how the discursive practice relates to the existing discourse and broader social practice - whether it reproduces or restructures it (ibid:62).

The aim of CDA should be ‘explanatory critique’. Therefore, the analysis should have its starting point in an issue that research could help solve, and the research design should be altered to match the specific material used. Some aspects of the text which can be scrutinised for the analysis are: interactional control (i.e. the relationship between speakers), ethos, metaphors, wording and grammar (ibid:73). Fairclough uses the two concepts of transitivity and modality. Transitivity is used to describe how events and processes are connected to subjects and objects, and the consequences this might have for perception of agency, if for example an effect is emphasised rather than the actor. On the other hand, modality describes how ‘speakers commit themselves to their statements to varying degrees’. For example, whether a statement is expressed as the truth, or rather something which can be subject to discussion. The textual analysis is then to be scrutinised drawing on other social and cultural theories, in order to fully comprehend how the discursive practices which have been analysed can be related to social relations and practices - and whether these are part of reproducing or reconstructing the order of discourse (ibid:73-76).
There are some issues worth considering when using discourse analysis. Firstly, there is a risk of taking a too idealistic position when looking at a certain discourse and thereby reducing reality to concepts and ideas. However, it is to avoid doing this that Fairclough states that analysis of discourse should be accompanied by analysis of discursive practice, including social practice. Secondly, there is the issue of relativism and consequently reliability. How can an interpretation be considered truth? Yet, it can be argued that it is possible to distinguish what is true within a certain discourse, and that this is in fact what is important in doing such an analysis (Bergström and Boréus, 2000:256-259).

3.3 CASE SELECTION

The case of Thailand has been central to research on the sex industry because of it being both a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking in the Mekong Sub-region (Zoe Foundation, 2009). Therefore, Thailand can be considered to be a ‘most important case’, because of the country being a key part of the industry. Drawing on research of the Thai case we aim at understanding the empirical phenomenon in question, although this cannot be considered an entirely new area of research (Ljungkvist, 2014:15; Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009:718). Two organisations working in different ways with women in the sex industry have been chosen for analysis. The organisations have been picked considering that these are ‘most likely cases’ for what the analysis aims at shedding light upon - namely the victim- and agent narratives respectively. In the analysis, I will try to illuminate whether or not the two organisations can be considered to entail aspects of the third-way approach, or if the victim-agent framework can adequately describe their approaches respectively. This case selection can be both a strength and a weakness for the analysis, considering that the cases and the material are strategically chosen, which could be considered a form of ‘cherry-picking’. However, this has been done to be able to scrutinise whether these most-likely cases for the agent-victim narratives respectively still entail elements of a third approach. If this seems to be the case, one could expect this to be true for other organisations as well.

The starting point for APNSW is rather different than that of NightLight, considering that this is an organisation founded by people who have been directly involved in the commercial sex industry themselves in one way or another. Drawing on the history of sex worker activism, APNSW should be considered a most likely case for the agent discourse. NightLight, on the
other hand, should be considered a most likely case for the victim discourse. NightLight is based in the USA, and its founders are neither Thai nor do they have a background in the sex industry, which means that there is an inevitable distance between the actors. Since international (Christian) organisations have a history of perceiving women in commercial sex primarily as victims and consider it their mission to help them out of ‘prostitution’, NightLight should be considered a most likely case for this discourse.

3.3.1 NIGHTLIGHT

The American Annie Dieselberg first founded NightLight in 2005, with the aim of providing alternative employment for women in the commercial sex industry in Thailand. NightLight operates today in two sections; NightLight Design is a registered business designing and producing jewellery, in which women seeking work outside the commercial sex industry has the opportunity to be employed. The NightLight Foundation is a Christian, non-profit organisation, working with holistic intervention and restoration of women that have been negatively affected by their work in the sex industry. Both of these two branches are based in Bangkok, although the administrative headquarters for the international organisation is placed in the US (NightLight, n.d.b). NightLight has outreach centres in Bangkok, with the purpose of building relations with women working in the so-called ‘red light district’ of Nana Sukhumvit, in order to offer them help and possibly alternative employment. Apart from offering work opportunities, NightLight provides education in for example accounting, management and marketing (NightLight, n.d.d).
3.3.2 APNSW

The APNSW was initially founded at the International Aids Conference of 1994, as a regional network working to promote the human rights of sex workers and to combat violence, discrimination and HIV vulnerability. The organisation conducts its work through both ‘pro-active’ and ‘re-active’ policy advocacy, supporting a rights-based approach to human rights and HIV prevention for sex workers of all genders. The network consists of sex workers and supporters, in the form of organisations, groups and individual members. APNSW believe that the discrimination, criminalisation and stigma of sex workers create a vulnerability to violence, HIV and social exclusion. They strive for a decriminalisation of sex work and homosexuality, policy reform for a safe work environment, inclusion of sex workers in decision-making forums, as well as equal access to health services (NSWP, 2014:45-46).

3.4 MATERIAL

The aim of this study is to examine how the organisations present themselves, and their perception of sex workers primarily as either victims or agents, or as encompassing elements of both of these. The material has therefore been chosen from the official websites of NightLight and APNSW, ensuring that the analysis is based on how the organisations in question represent themselves, and in that way getting as close to their discourse as possible for this thesis. Both of these have information about the work that they do under categories named for example ‘About Us’ or ‘Strategy and Plans’, which have been used for analysis. Additionally, this thesis has been based on two longer documents from NightLight; a document with frequently asked questions and an annual report from 2017, and a regional report from 2014 written by APNSW and its umbrella organisation Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) which describes in length the work that APNSW conducts. For the latter, only the part concerning the work of APNSW has been looked at, although it is a report which covers other organisations in the region as well.

Although it can be questioned to what extent the ways in which an organisation presents itself represents the reality, and there might be a distance between vision and execution, how an organisation chooses to describe their work is important and should be reflected to some extent in their actual accomplishments. The analysis should nonetheless be conducted with this in mind; that this material has been produced for marketing purposes and thus can be expected to show a somewhat biased picture of the organisations in question. The results should be considered with
the limitations of the material in mind, both the quantity of material which was available for analysis, and the nature of said material.

### 3.5 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This section will connect the analysis to the theoretical framework presented above by demonstrating how the material will be placed in relation to the victim-agent narrative. In Fairclough’s CDA, the analysis should be executed with a research design that has been constructed with the particular material in mind, so as to make the analysis accurate for the specific case and therefore also assure validity (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2008:73). This approach further makes space for aspects of the material to be brought forward, which perhaps was not expected (Esaiasson et al, 2012:217).

With this in mind, two ideal types have been constructed, which represent the agent - and victim discourse respectively. The material will be scrutinised, and different aspects of the discourse presented will be placed in one of the categories of each ideal type. Alternatively, it will be elaborated on in what way some discursive elements can be argued to encompass aspects of both ideal types and thereby resonate with the third-way model. As with all theory, these are not expected to fully encompass the complexities of reality. Although the ideal types are constructed as opposites, one should consider that the divide is in fact not as clear-cut (Bjarnegård, 2009:121). Rather, these are meant to function as an interpretive framework, making it possible to categorise discursive elements for analysis. The different elements of the ideal types should draw on the concepts described in the theoretical framework (Bergström and Boréus, 2000:158-160).

An issue with both ideal types and discourse analysis is reliability, that is the risk that the result of the analysis would differ depending on the researcher, for example if the definitions are not entirely clear. It is therefore important that the categories are clearly rooted in theory and thoroughly explained (Esaiasson et al, 2012:63). The analysis will be presented according to the order of the analytical framework, each theme corresponding to an aspect of the two ideal types. The concepts presented below have been drawn from the theoretical framework, and examples will be given on how these rather abstract ideas might look like in the material. One should however note that there are no hard lines to be drawn between them in reality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VICTIM</th>
<th>AGENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Othering</td>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist saviour</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silencing</td>
<td>Individual experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Othering* is operationalised as a Self-Other dichotomy, where the homogenised and subordinated Other is a function of the colonial mindset. An example is the use of the words *we* and *them* in a way which depicts a distance between the two and suggests that the author expects the Self to have superior knowledge or a superior position of some kind. The same goes for using terms such as *discovery*. *Agency* is defined as the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them, in this context the ability of an individual in the sex industry to define and try to achieve their goals. Use of words such as *self-determination* and *community* suggest perception of agency. This could imply that the author recognises agency in choosing to do sex work.

The concept of *feminist saviour* refers to how Western feminism has a history of wishing to save ‘the Other woman’. Words which might be used in such a discourse can be *save, restore, rescue* and so on. For the specific case of NightLight, being a Christian organisation, a discourse drawing on the missionary notion of ‘saving’ the Other also implies a saviour-narrative. On the other hand, an *empowerment* discourse is characterised by a determination to better the situation for sex workers, rather than take them out of the industry, coming from the notion that it is indeed possible for sex work to be like any kind of work. Using the term *sex work* is a clear indication of this narrative. Since the analysis is focused on how the organisations choose to represent themselves, using the words *empower* or *empowering* is naturally also a sign of this discourse.

*Silencing* is characterised by speaking for an individual or a group, that is not letting them define their experiences themselves. Discursive practice can be silencing if individuals are treated grammatically as objects rather than subjects, if it displays a belief that the author possesses superior knowledge, or a simplification of individual experiences. On the other hand, a narrative can show recognition of *individual experiences*, for example by presenting individuals as subjects.
rather than objects or recognising the importance of not reducing individuals to part of a constituted group.

4. RESULTS

4.1 OTHERING - AGENCY

This theme refers to the process of othering and how it can be present or absent in discursive practice, as well as agency as the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them. The analysis shows that in general, NightLight’s discursive practice tends to entail processes of othering, whilst that of APNSW recognises agency to a much greater extent. However, NightLight’s discourse entails element of an agent narrative as well.

4.1.1 NIGHTLIGHT

By repeatedly using the phrase ‘to reach out to’, it is established that there is a distinguished we, the employees and volunteers at NightLight, and them, the women they seek to ‘save’ (see e.g. NightLight, 2017 and NightLight, n.d.b). The distance between the employees at NightLight and the women they work with becomes clear in the presentation of the ‘mission’ they work with: “NightLight is an international organization compelled by love to reach out to, rescue, and restore all those who are negatively impacted by sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation” (NightLight, 2017:3).

The way in which the organisation positions itself as ‘pioneers’ mirrors quite clearly the discourse described by for example Burton, where Western feminists imagined women in the Global South as a homogenous group in need of rescuing - for instance in the annual report of 2017: “In 2005, we set out as pioneers on an adventure of discovery and encountered needs that we could not have imagined.” (NightLight, 2017:1). Words such as ‘discovery’, ‘encountered’ and ‘adventure’ highlights the othering process throughout the texts, indicating a construction of a Self-Other dichotomy between the Western feminist and the ‘Oriental’ or ‘Thai woman’. The Self is constructed as well informed and modern, whilst the Other is imagined as distant and exotic, and most importantly incapable of deciding for themselves. Although the intentions are to help and
assist women who have been sexually exploited, this discourse risks causing more damage by reproducing notions about ‘the Prostitute’ as the Other. Importantly, this allows for Western actors to set the developmental agenda.

The material presented by NightLight generally implies a perceived lack of agency in the women they work with. An example of this can be seen in the following quote: “Our vision: To offer intervention to sexually exploited women and children, to enable them to discover their dignity, and to provide a program of holistic transformation, empowering them to live and work in their community” (NightLight, n.d.a.). It is understood that NightLight offers them possibilities and alternatives, rather than individuals seeking assistance from the organisation. The word rescue is frequently used, which again implies lack of choice and agency. The way in which NightLight explain reasons for entering the industry reproduces this notion as well: “A number of factors may push a woman in Thailand to enter the sex industry” (NightLight, n.d.e.:1). By stating that certain factors push women into the sex industry, NightLight reproduces a discourse which takes away women’s agency in choosing occupation. Nonetheless, some of the reasons which NightLight puts forward as reasons for entering sex work can suggest a perception of agency, despite describing them as ‘pushing’ them into the industry. For example, how it is explained that migrating to Bangkok from the rural regions and taking work in the sex industry might be a choice for young girls, which enables them to provide for their family (NightLight, n.d.a.:1). However, it is evident that the starting point for NightLight is that sex work is inherently exploitative.

4.1.2 APNSW

By repeatedly stating that they wish to represent, mobilise and empower sex workers APNSW avoids an Othering discourse, placing themselves as part of that very group. The ‘mission’ of APNSW is significantly different from that of NightLight: “To represent, mobilise and empower communities of female, male and transgender sex workers in Asia and the Pacific region” (APNSW, n. d.a). Further, APNSW includes ‘female, male and transgender’ as part of said community (see e.g. NSWP, 2014:46). Although this thesis has its focus on women in commercial sex, this indicates an absence of Othering because it implies an understanding of heterogeneity within the group ‘sex workers’. This challenges the notion of ‘the Prostitute’ as a
constituted category. Another way in which the use of language indicates an absence of othering is the common use of words such as ‘solidarity’ (see e.g. APNSW, n.d.a., NSWP, 2014).

By always using the term sex worker and explicitly stating that ‘sex work is work’, one draws on the idea of women as active agents with capacity for reason and choice (see e.g. APNSW, n.d.a., NSWP, 2014). Self-determination further entails a belief in that it is the individual who should decide what they value as employment, highlighted by statements such as: “All APNSW members share the same core beliefs that sex work is work and that sex workers should lead their organisations and projects” (NSWP, 2014:46). Using wording like leadership, partnership, grassroots and community-lead consistently, concepts which all entail different levels of agency and empowerment, it becomes clear that this is something which APNSW places at the centre of their approach (see NSWP, 2014).

Looking at the level of production and consumption of text, agency is present in that APNSW is founded by people with experience from and strong connections to the sex worker-community, which they also seek to represent (NSWP, 2014::45). Sex worker agency is a great part of the identity of APNSW, something that they highlight throughout the material. It is also shown clearly in the social practice:

“The advocacy of APNSW along with its members and partners has within the last five years brought the voices of sex workers to the heart of international, regional and national law and policy discussions.” (NSWP, 2014:47).

“While advocating for sex workers to participate in crucial meetings that determine legal and policy approaches to HIV and sex work, APNSW ensures that the capacity of its members is also built to ensure a proper and meaningful engagement.” (NSWP, 2014:48)

It is in this way that the abstract idea of agency and empowerment come to actually restructure the ways in which the sex industry is perceived and managed.
4.2 FEMINIST SAVIOUR - EMPOWERMENT

This theme concerns the question of whether an organisation consider it their mission to rescue women from the sex industry, coming from a tradition of the ‘western feminist saviour’, or whether they aim at working with women to empower them, whatever the context. The results suggest that NightLight perceive themselves primarily as feminist saviours, whilst the focus of APNSW is empowerment to a greater extent.

4.2.1 NIGHTLIGHT

The role of NightLight as the saviour of ‘trapped’ women is highlighted repeatedly. Their mission to ‘save’ women is legitimised based on the truth-claim of commercial sex as inevitably exploitative. By for example stating that they should continue “fighting for the ones who are still trapped and undiscovered in the darkest places” (NightLigth, 2017:2), they establish the relationship between the enlightened Self and the victimised Other. NightLight further describes how they ‘saved’ African women from exploitation (ibid.). Nonetheless, it is stated several times that NightLight works towards the empowerment of women, for example in that they state that they wish to “provide a program of holistic transformation, empowering them to live and work in their community” (NightLight, n.d.a). However, it is more often highlighted that they work to ‘reach out to, rescue, and restore’ women (see e.g. NightLight, 2017, NightLight, n.d.e.). Not a lot of focus is put on that NightLigth is a Christian organisation, nonetheless it is stated a few times that their work is performed with Christianity and religious belief as its starting point, for example in the following statements: “We believe that excellence honors God and dignifies those with whom we work” (NightLight, 2017:4), and “Out of the darkness, the Light shines” (NightLight, 2017:2). This should be considered in the context of earlier Christian missions in Thailand and how it has been criticised for reinforcing Self-Other images and the notion of the ‘Western saviour’.

4.2.2 APNSW

APNSW draws on a discourse of empowerment, stating for example that they wish to “create solidarity and promote leadership among sex workers of all genders in Asia and the Pacific”, which is also reflected in their social practice of capacity building and requests for policy reform. APNSW utilises the term sex worker throughout the texts, rather than the earlier more common
prostitute, which reflects their wish to put sex worker’s empowerment in focus. As their mission is for sex work to be seen as ‘real’ work, this is a form of empowerment. APNSW further highlights the importance of capacity building, for example stating that they aim to “build regional mechanisms for the exchange of information and experiences” (NSWP, 2014:46). Capacity building is a crucial part of empowerment, according to the definition this thesis has used, as it expands the ability of individuals to make strategic life choices.

4.3 SILENCING - INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES

As elaborated on in the theoretical framework, the process of victimisation often ends up silencing women. The opposite process would therefore be to take into account the many diverse experiences women might have, which might involve pragmatic considerations and active choices. The analysis shows that NightLight tends to silence individuals to some extent, but that there are some aspects of their discourse which suggest an understanding of individual experiences. APNSW places focus throughout on individual experiences and difference.

4.3.1 NIGHTLIGHT

There are several instances where the language-use of NightLight reinforces victimisation through silencing. Silencing enables Western feminists to define the ‘Oriental’ or ‘Thai woman’, which in turn reproduces neo-colonial power relations. Looking at transitivity, there are a few examples of how NightLight silences women by grammatically placing them as objects instead of subjects: “What types of establishments are women in prostitution hired to work in?” (NightLight, n.d.e.), and “A number of factors may push a woman in Thailand to enter the sex industry” (ibid.). This places focus on the event and the actor as a passive receiver, rather than as an active agent. It is furthermore highlighted that the aim for NightLight is to save women who are ‘trapped’ (see e.g. NightLight, n.d.b. and NightLight, 2017:2), something which implies a modality of truth in that it is based on the interpretation of sex work as inherently bad.

There are however elements of NightLight’s discursive practice which would suggest that they take individual experiences into account, for instance the following sentences: “We seek to serve with humility, knowing no one person has all the answers. We affirm the beauty and role of each individual, community, and nation as a stakeholder and influencer.” (NightLight, 2017:4).
“Holistic restoration: We believe that the issues are complex and that true transformation comes with concern and attention to the whole person, their family, and their community.” (NightLight, 2017:4). This suggests an understanding of difference and complexity in individuals, which in a way challenges the idea of ‘prostitutes’ as a group with identical experiences and needs.

NightLight’s presentation of reasons for women to enter into the industry suggests the same, giving several possible reasons: culture, economy, education and spiritual beliefs (NightLight, n.d.e.). Nevertheless, these are described as ‘pushing’ women into the industry, which implies lack of agency, so the message here is somewhat two-sided. Nor is the recognition of individual experiences as evident on the level of social practice. It goes without saying that many women indeed are exploited in this industry, and for many, NightLight might offer what they need. Nonetheless, there is no mention of possibility for empowerment whilst staying in the industry, which would suggest a more nuanced understanding of their situation.

4.3.2 APNSW

APNSW takes on a rights-based approach to sex work, in a discourse which places focus on how to improve the situation for sex workers rather than ‘rescuing’ them. As they several times throughout the texts highlight the importance of addressing “lack of labour rights and social protection”, APNSW shows a nuanced understanding of the issues relating to the commercial sex industry. APNSW was founded to be a forum for sex worker activism and empowerment, and in that way puts emphasis on individual experiences, something which is reflected in both discursive and social practice. They often address the issue of diversity and recognition of difference, for example in the following statement: “We must fight for a new paradigm of a society in which sex workers are recognised as different, and respected for the income we generate and distribute” (NSWP, 2014:53). In this way, one could argue that they are taking individual experiences into consideration to a great extent.

Furthermore, it is for example stated that: “Stigma is the main driver of sex workers’ vulnerability and the main obstacle to effective HIV programming for sex workers.” (NSWP, 2014:50). Vulnerability suggests a recognition of the many serious issues sex workers face, highlighting the difference in experience whilst still not taking away their agency in choosing employment. These findings can be evidence of a discourse which encompasses both elements of a victim - and agent
narrative, or rather a discourse which imagines sex workers as actors with agency, but with constrained personal autonomy.

5. ANALYSIS

It becomes clear that although NightLight and APNSW to some extent fit in the agent - and victim end of the spectrum respectively, there are some aspects of their discourse which rather can be accounted for using the third way feminist approach to commercial sex. It could therefore be argued that both of these approaches to sex labour have their limitations in accurately describing the lived reality of the industry and efforts regarding it. It should however be kept in mind that this analysis is based on a limited amount of material, and that further examination is necessary to draw further conclusions. The material is furthermore produced for websites, which can affect the results, as elaborated on earlier. Additionally, this thesis has not really shown if or to what extent the discursive practice mirrors the ‘actual’ practice. We cannot be certain that the evidence found for a third-way analysis actually are ideologically driven, or that this discourse can be traced back to a conscious choice of wording, grammar and so on.

The discourse of NightLight is to a large extent characterised by a victimisation narrative, imagining women in the commercial sex industry as victims without the capacity to really decide for themselves what a ‘good’ life entails. Looking at the different categories of the victim ideal type, NightLight can be positioned at the victimisation end of the spectrum. However, there are some discursive elements which suggest perception of agency. Firstly, NightLight does acknowledge some agency, although this cannot be seen in the same way in the social practice. Further, some difference in experiences and needs is recognised. Lastly, NightLight states that their aim is to empower women, through capacity building and ‘restoration’, although it is a form of empowerment which is thought of as taking place only after the woman in question have been ‘saved’. Although the foundation of the discursive practice is victimisation, placing the organisation itself in the position of the ‘saviour’, the victim narrative might not be sufficient to fully account for how NightLight perceive women in the sex industry. This raises the question of to what extent the discourse of NightLight can be considered to entail the perception of sex workers as ‘actors with agency, but with constrained personal autonomy’. We can attempt at answering that question by looking at the four central tenets of the third-way model.
The first one, awareness of how structures of privilege determine opportunity, NightLight can be said to have to some limited extent. By reflecting on the different ways in which women are ‘pushed’ into the industry, such as by economic needs or lack of other employment options, they can be argued to recognise in part how privilege determine opportunity. The second tenet; trying to explain and counteract how intersecting forms of oppression impact the lives of individuals, NightLight does to some extent as well. However, the evidence which has been found in this study shows more a will for holistic understanding and ‘restoration’, rather than practical measures for addressing different forms of oppression. The third tenet, acknowledging individual experiences and letting them define these themselves, is more difficult to find. Again, NightLight states that they do not have all the answers, yet they make the truth claim that all sex work is inherently exploitative. The last tenet; opening up for individuals to be active agents, even whilst under oppression, is not very evident either. NightLight quite clearly position themselves as the agents, and the workers as the victims in need of saving. Looking at how the capabilities approach relates to the third way, the work of NightLight can be said to encompass this perspective to some degree, in their focus on capacity building through education. This can be argued to expand the capacity for choice. However, NightLight nevertheless works towards saving women from the industry, which does not really correspond with this idea. Thus, although the space for a third way here is quite limited, some degree of it is to be found. However, the tendency to reinforce structures of inequality along the lines of neo-colonialism remains.

APNSW have their starting point in agency, something which is evident in the way they present themselves and their work. As this thesis has showed, APNSW can quite clearly be positioned at the agent end of the agent-victim spectrum. The focus is solidarity, capacity building and community, and the discourse cannot really be argued to entail victimisation at all. However, APNSW can be said to encompass the third way to quite some extent. Their approach to sex work does entail an understanding of structures of oppression and privilege and how it determines opportunity. They address human rights, labour rights and stigma and how these can determine well-being. Further, their intersectional analysis takes into account different forms of oppression and how individual experience differs greatly, for example by including sex workers of all genders. The discursive practice can also be related to the capabilities approach to freedom, in that there is a focus on the ability to define one’s own experiences and goals, building capacity to choose for oneself.
Perhaps most importantly, APNSW places great focus on sex workers as the agents of their own lives, whilst still recognising the great issues they face in the form of discrimination, stigma, violence and human rights abuses. In this way, APNSW can be seen as moving towards an approach which imagines sex workers as active agents with constrained autonomy. The challenge for the agency discourse is perhaps how to combine the idea of sex work as empowering, while still recognising the difficulties sex workers face, such as discrimination and violence. As elaborated on in the theoretical background, to assume agency in a developing context risks overlooking serious issues that sex workers might face, whether they are coerced or not.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The aim of this study has been to illuminate the ways in which NGOs perceive women in the sex industry, as primarily victims or agents or rather a combination of them both, and how they position themselves in relation to the women. This has been done in the context of the critique which has been aimed at efforts regarding commercial sex and sex tourism reproducing and reinforcing hierarchies of power between ‘the West’ and ‘the Rest’. This thesis has shown that maybe the difference between the agent - and victim discourse is not as clear-cut as one might be tempted to imagine, and that a third way in between these might be needed in order to fully encompass the ways in which NGOs perceive sex workers.

Nevertheless, considering the limited scope of the thesis, one should not be too quick to draw conclusions; why further research on the subject is definitely needed. This study has examined two most-likely cases, in order to see whether or not they encompass elements of a third-way approach. Further studies should however be made on other cases, since one should be careful to draw general conclusions from a single study. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that the results of this study are to a large extent dependent on the interpretation of the researcher, which can be argued to be a challenge for all discourse analysis.

Neither the issues related to the Thai commercial sex industry, nor the solutions to these are easily defined. It is, however, clear that we cannot continue to define sex workers as either victims or agents if we want to accurately account for diversity and individuality, or the complex workings of intersecting forms of oppression. This binary view limits our understanding if we aim to work towards a fairer working environment for sex workers and expand the capacity for
real choice. Perhaps theory needs to account for diverging perceptions to a greater extent, and as Cavalieri has shown, perhaps we should reconsider the victim-agent dichotomy and give way for an approach which encompasses both of these.
7. REFERENCES

7.1 SCHOLARLY ARTICLES AND BOOKS


### 7.2 OTHER SOURCES


### 7.3 PRIMARY SOURCES

APNSW (n.d.a.). *Our Vision, Goals and Values*. Available at: https://apnsw.info/about-apnsw/our-vision-goals-and-values/ [Accessed 7 April 2018]


NightLight (n.d.a.). *About Us*. Available at: https://www.nightlightinternational.com/about/ [Accessed 5 April 2018]

NightLight (n.d.b.). *Our Story*. Available at: https://www.nightlightinternational.com/our-story/ [Accessed 5 April 2018]

NightLight (n.d.c.). *Bangkok*. Available at: https://www.nightlightinternational.com/bangkok/ [Accessed 23 April 2018]
