

Sisters, Boyfriends, and the Big City: Trans Entertainers and Sex Workers in Globalized Thailand

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จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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ขณะที่ประเด็นต่าง ๆ เกี่ยวกับคนข้ามเพศกลายเป็นประเด็นกระแสหลักในเวทีสิทธิมนุษยชน ความเข้าใจและงานวิจัยส่วนมากต่อกลุ่มคนชายขอบนี้มีศูนย์กลางอยู่ที่มุมมองต่อการป้องกันและการสร้างความตระหนักรู้เกี่ยวกับเรื่องเอชไอวีเอดส์เพื่อสร้างข้อเสนอเพิ่มเติมต่อวาทกรรมว่าด้วยผู้หญิงข้ามเพศในโลกการทำงานซึ่งเป็นวาทกรรมที่กำลังขยายตัวขึ้น งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มีจุดสนใจอยู่ที่ชีวิตของผู้หญิงข้ามเพศซึ่งทำงานบริการทางเพศ และงานบันเทิง ในเมืองใหญ่ที่สำคัญของประเทศไทย ได้แก่ กรุงเทพมหานครและเมืองพัทยา งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ใช้แนวทางการศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพ ประกอบด้วยการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา นโยบายของรัฐบาลไทยที่มีความเกี่ยวข้องสำคัญกับเรื่องนี้ และการสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างโดยพูดคุยกับผู้หญิงข้ามเพศจำนวน 8 ราย ตัวแทนหน่วยงานที่ไม่ใช่รัฐซึ่งทำงานเกี่ยวกับผู้หญิงข้ามเพศในที่อื่น และ ทีมบริหารของโรงแสดงคาบaretผู้หญิงข้ามเพศที่มีชื่อเสียง

จากการวิเคราะห์ผ่านกรอบแนวคิดเรื่องความเป็นปทัสถานของคนรักเพศเดียวกัน (homonormativity) และแนวคิดชาตินิยมของคนรักเพศเดียวกัน (homonationalism) งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้สำรวจให้เห็นถึงนโยบายของรัฐบาลไทยที่ขัดแย้งกันเอง ซึ่งส่งผลกระทบต่อผู้หญิงข้ามเพศ โดยเฉพาะเจาะจงแล้ว งานศึกษาชิ้นนี้มีจุดการวิเคราะห์อยู่ที่การสนับสนุนและส่งเสริมนักแสดงคาบaretข้ามเพศ ของการท่องเที่ยวแห่งประเทศไทย ซึ่งเป็นสิ่งที่ตรงกันข้ามกับตราใบที่บาดลึก และความสองมาตรฐานที่ผู้หญิงข้ามเพศคนอื่น ๆ โดยเฉพาะกลุ่มที่ทำงานบริการทางเพศ ต้องเผชิญ ทั้งที่นักแสดงคาบaretข้ามเพศได้รับผลประโยชน์จากการสนับสนุนของรัฐ ชุมชนคนข้ามเพศในประเทศไทยนอกเหนือจากกลุ่มดังกล่าวกลับไม่ได้รับความเท่าเทียมแม้แต่น้อย ในส่วนการสรุปวิทยานิพนธ์งานศึกษาชิ้นนี้พบว่าผู้หญิงข้ามเพศบางกลุ่มอาจคิดอยู่ใน โครงสร้างทางการเมือง เศรษฐกิจ และสังคมวัฒนธรรมต่าง ๆ ซึ่งผลักดันให้คนเหล่านี้แปลงสภาพตัวเองเป็นสินค้า แลกกับสิทธิต่าง ๆ ที่จะได้รับ แต่ถึงแม้ว่าอัตลักษณ์และวัฒนธรรมของคนข้ามเพศจะโดนแปลงสภาพเป็นสินค้า ผู้หญิงข้ามเพศ ได้แสดงให้เห็นถึงความสามารถในฐานะผู้กระทำการ (agency) โดยการต่อต้านและท้าทายความสองมาตรฐานในสังคมด้วยวิธีการของพวกเขาเองเช่นกัน



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As transgender issues penetrate mainstream human rights dialogue, most of the current understanding and research on this marginalized group revolve around the perspective of HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness. To add to the growing academic discourse on transgender women in the world of work, this research looks into the lives of transgender women sex workers and entertainers in the major cities of Bangkok and Pattaya in Thailand. The research uses a qualitative approach consisting of content analysis of relevant Thai policies and semi-structured interviews with 8 transgender women, a transgender-focused local NGO, and the management team of a prominent transgender cabaret theatre.

Drawing its analysis from the concepts of homonormativity and homonationalism, the research explores the Thai state's contradicting policies that affect transgender women. In particular, the study looks at the Tourism Authority of Thailand's promotion and support of transgender cabaret performers, which is in contrast to the deep stigma and discrimination experienced by other transgender women, specifically transgender sex workers. In spite of what transgender cabaret performers may benefit from state support, this does not translate to equality for the broader transgender community in Thailand. Concluding this thesis, the study finds that some transgender women may be implicated in multiple political, economic, and socio-cultural structures and pushed to become commodified in order to gain rights. But despite the commodification of trans identity and culture, transgender women show their agency by resisting and challenging societal discrimination in their own ways.



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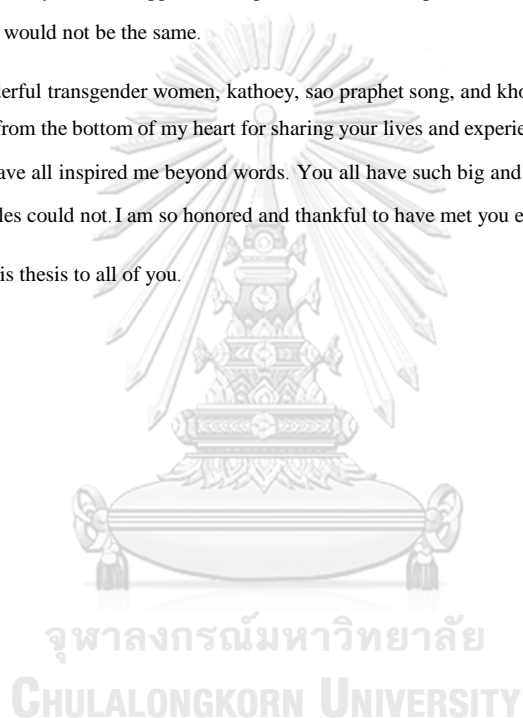
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Currently, there is a rising trend of interest in broader LGBTIQ issues as seen in the increase of establishments catering to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ) people and allies around the world; as well as an increasingly visible LGBTIQ representation in pop culture and media. As if to reflect global public interest, the world of development work has also begun to take interest in addressing LGBTIQ issues, particularly the inequalities they experience. In a widely lauded move by the International Commission of Jurists and the International Service for Human Rights, the Yogyakarta Principles were developed in 2006 as a set of international legal standards on the application of international law to human rights violations based on gender and sexuality. The United Nations later followed with a landmark resolution in 2011 affirming the right to non-discrimination of LGBTIQ persons, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity five years after the Yogyakarta Principles.¹ More recently in 2016, the UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution that establishes the Independent Expert on the protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Given this high level interest in LGBTIQ issues, UN agencies like the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the UN Development Programme began to develop and implement programmes and projects that addressed some of the pressing issues that affect LGBTIQ communities around the world.

¹ OHCHR: Human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity, A/HRC/RES/17/19.

On a national level, Thailand has long been known as a haven for LGBTIQ people based on the widely held perception of Thailand's cultural tolerance. As a result, LGBTIQ people from all over the globe have historically been migrating in and out of Thailand to experience their share of this perceived tolerance and escape from the restrictive, traditional gender norms in their home countries. As Thailand continues toward a path of development, the instance of LGBTIQ migration is inevitably becoming increasingly apparent. More and more LGBTIQ people, particularly Western gay men and transgender women, already find Thailand to be an attractive destination for recreational and medical tourism. Behind this enticing façade of gender and sexual freedom however, is a reality that continues to discriminate against LGBTIQ people.

Transgender people in Southeast Asia and the world are arguably the most marginalized gender minority of all. In terms of HIV prevalence, transgender people have long been regarded as one of the populations at most risk. In Thailand, transgender women in particular, have received extensive attention from the academia with numerous studies documenting the lives of Thai transgender women (historically called *kathoey*), as well as the nuance their gender identity provides in the discussion of Western conceptions of gender. In spite of the many and extensive research on the health (mainly HIV-related), gender and sexuality of transgender people in Southeast Asia's relatively little has been done on the migration and work experiences of transgender people. In terms of the marginalization of transgender women into the sex work and entertainment sectors and the cross-border movement they do as part of their work, less is known. It is in this perspective that this study has been conceptualized and developed in the hopes of adding to and complicating the existing body of knowledge on transgender women.

1.2. Objectives and Research Questions

During the initial phases of the research, the primary objective of the study was to explore the structural contexts that permit, facilitate, and drive transgender women to migrate into Thailand and in particular, Bangkok. However, during the data gathering process the researcher encountered several challenges including unanticipated political changes which made it more difficult to access the necessary migrant transgender communities. As a result, the research objectives were modified to accommodate the experiences of Thai transgender women who migrate out of Thailand. The new primary research objective is therefore to explore some of the structural contexts which facilitate and drive the cross-border movement of transgender women into and out of Thailand for work. Subsequent research objectives include exploring some examples of the interaction between the Thai state and transgender women.

With these objectives, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are some of the political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts that shape the labour migration of transgender women into, out of, and within Thailand?
2. How do transgender women interact and cope with Thailand's tourism policy through work and migration?

1.3. Conceptual Framework

In discussing the interaction between transgender women and the various political, economic, social, and cultural conditions in Thailand, it is necessary to look to the works of queer scholars who theorize how foreign and national policies affect queer communities. In this background, the study draws from Cynthia Weber's discussion of the 'gay rights holder' and the 'gay patriot' within the specific figurations of the 'normal homosexual', and conversely the 'perverse homosexual', in international relations theory (2016). Weber uses the terms 'gay' and 'homosexual' for her own

analytical purposes because “the ‘homosexual’ was ‘birthed’ and therefore ‘known’ in Western hegemonic discourses as male... [and] It is this male (if not always masculine) figure of the ‘homosexual’ who... appears in discourses of statecraft as mancraft, as a figure who is or is opposed to sovereign man (Weber 2016).” Despite her usage of these terms—which may appear to exclude other genders, sexes, and sexualities such as transgender people—I do not think that this will hinder the analysis of this study because her “aim is not to reify ‘homosexuality’ or the ‘homosexual’ as male and/or masculine but to trace how practices of ‘statecraft as mancraft’ are destabilized because of their insistence upon a knowable figure of the ‘homosexual’ as or against ‘sovereign man’” (Weber 2016).

Using this framework, I will analyze some examples of how transgender women in Thailand interact with the Thai state, focusing largely on the Thai tourism policy and how it has historically shaped and continues to shape the labour and migration of transgender women. In particular, this framework will aid in pondering how the Thai state takes advantage of ‘LGBT tourism’, (or ‘pink tourism’) in Thailand, and uses it to boost the Thai tourism industry while preserving its figuration of the ‘perverse homosexual’ (in this case, transgender woman) by promoting particular occupations in which the transgender woman can transform into the ‘normal homosexual’ by being productive for the nation.

Weber draws largely upon the works of queer studies scholars like Lisa Duggan (2003) and defines the ‘gay rights holder’ as a “variation of the entrepreneurial neoliberal subject who is (re)productive in/for capitalism on behalf of the nation” (Duggan 2003, Weber 2016). Using this definition, the ‘gay rights holder’ is firmly situated within neoliberal economics as well as national discourses of patriotism (Weber 2016). As the ‘gay patriot’, the ‘gay rights holder’ is “mobilized explicitly on behalf of the ‘nation’ and against threatening anarchical, pathological, national and international ‘others’ (Weber

2016). In this case, the ‘perverse homosexual’ is a figure “whose unruliness and irrationality can be cast as threatening national patriotisms and national and international (neo)liberalisms” (Weber 2016). Because of this, the ‘perverse homosexual’ is “feared, excluded, and sometimes killed by Western states, while the gay rights holder and the gay patriot are celebrated by these states even though these normal homosexuals are only selectively included and protected” (Weber 2016).

In the context of human rights and development discourses, which has historically conferred rights onto whom a political community recognizes as human, the ‘homosexual’ emerges as an up-and-coming human rights holder following a tradition of political struggles borne by minorities—women, children, religious minorities, and ethnic and racial minorities—in order to be included into the category of ‘human’ as human rights holders. Since the ‘perverse homosexual’ is cast as a threat to national patriotisms and national and international (neo)liberalisms, including the ‘homosexual’ into liberal political communities as ‘normal human’ necessitates a move to distinguish the ‘normal homosexual’ from the ‘perverse homosexual’ (Weber 2016). For this, Weber employs what Lisa Duggan calls ‘homonormativity’, which Duggan describes as “a new neoliberal sexual politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2003, Weber 2016). Where ‘heteronormativity’ is defined as the “institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged” (Berlant and Warner 1998, Weber 2016), Duggan argues that homonormativity expands what is considered the ‘normal human’ to include the ‘homosexual’ and its various figurations (e.g. transgender women)—previously understood by heteronormativity as perverse—as long as they are properly attached to neoliberalism; meaning to embrace neoliberal modalities of domesticity and

consumption (Weber 2016). From here I will deviate slightly from Weber and Duggan's mobilization of homonormativity since this study is not concerned with proper domesticity and what the model of a 'normal reproductive family' means for 'homosexuals'. Instead, I will build on the aspect of neoliberal consumption and argue that to be properly attached to neoliberalism means to engage uncritically in the market and participate in the formal economy as opposed to the shadow economy of neoliberal globalization (Penttinen 2007). To participate in the formal economy means to be employed in 'normal' occupations for 'homosexuals' and its various figurations (more specifically the transgender woman) rather than in sexually perverse occupations, namely sex work. By using the term 'shadow economy', I also evoke Weber's analysis of Hilary Clinton's 2011 speech, 'Gay rights are human rights', where Weber spells out how Clinton invokes the 'LGBT in the shadows' as a symbol of the costs of not recognizing gay rights as human rights (Weber 2016). Weber writes:

"Here, Clinton inscribes the 'LGBT in the shadows' as that 'homosexual' who is not just the victim of homophobia... Clinton's 'LGBT in the shadows' is also inscribed as forever linked to HIV and AIDS as a carrier of disease and death, as he is so often still known in global public health discourses... Clinton's evocation of the 'LGBT in the shadows' as the carrier of HIV and AIDS takes us to a similarly layered and violent past that is about more than just the criminalization of male homosexuality; it is also about the political, physical, sexual, affective, and discursive violence done to this figure—by those opposing this presumed carrier of disease and death—in the name of protecting society and the state from this figure" (Weber 2016).

With the 'LGBT in the shadows' inscribed as a carrier of disease and therefore a threat to the nation, Weber posits that Clinton installs this definition to set up her

argument as to why the 'LGBT in the shadows' must be regulated through inclusion into a liberal political community.

“Clinton deploys the 'LGBT in the shadows' as a similarly haunting social figure to argue for a particular form of social life within the state. This social life is one that is safe from the unregulated and undomesticated 'perverse homosexuality' that the 'LGBT in the shadows' represents. For as that 'homosexual' who is forever understood as a carrier of disease and death, the 'LGBT in the shadows' is a figure that—if left unregulated by the nation and undomesticated in the family, we are lead to believe—threatens 'public health' because he presumably practices unsafe sex” (Weber 2016).

It is within this particular figuration of the 'perverse homosexual' as the 'LGBT in the shadows' that I pinpoint the transgender woman in the 'shadow economy' who by participating in the sexually perverse practices of transgenderism and sex work is understood as a threat to the nation. It is also through this very specific figure that I identify the 'normal transgender woman' who participates in the formal economy and who is (re)productive in/for capitalism on behalf of the nation. By shifting attention to the participation of the 'normal human' in the formal economy rather than domesticity, the transgender woman in the formal economy and the transgender woman in the shadow economy found in this study are then specific articulations of the 'normal homosexual' and the 'perverse homosexual', respectively, in Weber's reading.

Through homonormativity, this distinction between the 'normal homosexual' and the 'perverse homosexual' becomes possible and situates the 'normal homosexual' and the 'perverse homosexual' within neoliberal discourses. As it stands, “The 'new normal' sexualized subject in the 'new homormativity', then is the 'homosexual' whose desires for... consumption [and participation in the formal economy] are the same as

those of the ‘straight’ neoliberal subject” (Weber 2016) and “What is perverse is a desire for a different political, economic, and social life that is incompatible with neoliberalism” (Weber 2016). This means that to develop into the ‘normal transgender woman’ requires the ‘transgender woman’s depoliticization and reproduction of the ‘straight’ neoliberal subject’s desires for consumption and production. With particular respect to the Thai transgender woman, these desires—as will be discussed later—include their acceptance and endorsement of Thai standards of feminine beauty. In full, this works to help the ‘transgender woman’ to be properly incorporated into the category of ‘normal human’. Homonormativity thus serves to expand the category of the ‘normal subject’ to include the ‘normal homosexual’. Using Hannah Arendt’s terms, Weber then argues that this refiguration of the normal subject makes it possible for the ‘normal homosexual’ to have the right to have rights (Arendt 1994, Weber 2016). “By inscribing this particular figuration of the ‘homosexual’ as worthy of rights, homonormative discourses simultaneously figure which ‘homosexuals’ are *unworthy* of rights—racialized and disabled sexual, social, psychological, economic, and political ‘degenerates’ and ‘deviants’ who cannot or will not developmentally mature into this ‘new normal sexual subject’” (Weber 2016). This means that a new developmental trajectory for the ‘normal homosexual’ is set which measures an individual’s development against that individual’s desire to embrace neoliberal modalities of consumption and participation in the formal economy which, once embraced, bestows the right to have rights (Weber 2016).

By bestowing the right to have rights, states are now obligated to recognize and protect this new normal sexualized subject. Jasbir Puar calls this “constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism and sexuality” that produces the ‘human rights industrial complex’ as ‘homonationalism’ (Puar 2013, Weber 2016). Weber describes homonationalism as a “combination of homonormativity and nationalism that figures ‘good homosexuals’ who are worthy of

the state's protection while preserving 'bad homosexuals' as threats to the state" (Puar 2007, Weber 2016). Essentially, Puar uses homonationalism as a "deep critique of lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses and how those rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to citizenship—cultural and legal—at the expense of the delimitation and expulsion of other populations" (Puar 2013, Weber 2016). That said, it is based on this neoliberal geopolitical and historical context that Puar invokes the term 'pinkwashing' to describe the cynical promotion of gay rights as human rights as representative of a state's modernity and development (Weber 2016).

Within this conceptual framework, the 'transgender woman'—as a specific figuration of the 'homosexual'—becomes the 'normal transgender woman', who is worthy of rights and is promoted globally by the Thai state, while the 'perverse transgender woman' is subject to political, physical, sexual, affective, and discursive violence in the name of protecting Thai society and the state. As discussed earlier, the 'transgender woman's' development into the 'normal transgender woman' works in three ways: by being depoliticized, by endorsing Thai feminine beauty standards, and most importantly by participating in the formal modes of neoliberal capitalism on behalf of the Thai nation.

However, before I move forward on this thesis, it is important to heed Weber's first caution in mobilizing this analytic. Homonormativity and homonationalism are both geopolitically and historically specific and malleable (Weber 2016). This means that it is crucial to be careful against universalist interpretations of neoliberal institutions, understandings, and practical orientations (Weber 2016). That is why in my reading, I limit myself on the specific geopolitical and economic history of the Thai state with respect to its intertwining tourism and sex industry and the participation of transgender women in both of these industries. Moreover, Weber suggests that "while

homormativity and [homonationalism] can be and are useful guides for analysing human rights and patriotism and its relation to homosexuality and the homosexual, they can too quickly smooth over interesting and powerful contradictions and indeed overdetermine all engagements with some reified (neo)liberalism and/or some set of reified nationalist practices” (Weber 2016). In this respect, it is important to pay attention to how these concepts assist and limit analysis (Weber 2016). As Weber notes, “These limitations might include a neglect to fully appreciate, for example, how market politics *and/or* moral politics in a wide array of combinations figure the ‘homosexual in international relations (e.g., Amar 2013, 16) and how the redirection and improvement of regulation in addition to subversion itself can be embraced as a form of resistance (e.g., (Odysseos 2016)” (Weber 2016).

1.4. Research Methodology

In order to shed light into the work and migration experiences of transgender women in the sex and entertainment sectors in Thailand, the researcher conducted a qualitative study focusing on the experiences of transgender women in Bangkok and Pattaya. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 transgender women and a local NGO focusing on the rights of transgender people, as well as conducted desk reviews of existing literature including international principles on LGBTIQ rights, state policies, legal frameworks, and NGO-backed reports on gender equality and sex work.

1.4.1. Site Selection, Data Gathering, and Sampling

The initial research site of the study was limited to the confines of the city of Bangkok (Krung Thep). However, this has had to be expanded to include Pattaya in Chon Buri Province, due to several challenges including unforeseen political changes and organizational delays which compounded an increasingly limited access to

transgender communities. Although other sites like Chiang Mai and Phuket could have added nuances to the study as sites with considerable migrant, transgender, and sex worker populations, site selection was limited to the major cities of Bangkok and Pattaya due to time constraints and budgeting limitations.

Data gathering was initially planned to be conducted throughout May 2017, however it became necessary to build rapport with some potential interviewees and organizations for them to participate in the study. Further complicated by the aforementioned challenges, some potential interviewees and organizations ended up not taking part in the study at all which have resulted in the need to extend data-gathering twice; the first extension was until July, and the second was until September 2017.

Sampling was primarily done using the snowball method. During field work in Pattaya, the researcher coordinated and consulted with the Sisters Foundation, a centre for transgender people providing various health and legal support services tailored for transgender people; as well as the Alcazar Cabaret Show, one of two renowned transgender cabaret theatres in Thailand. Both organizations functioned as gatekeepers leading to some of the transgender women interviewed in the study.

1.4.2. Research Instruments and Data Treatment

Data collection was done through the use of semi-structured interviews recorded on handwritten notes and voice recordings onsite. The data was later transcribed electronically onto Microsoft Word which was then organized based on important themes and topics that came up during the interviews. Once categorized based on topic, this information was tabulated through Microsoft Excel to make cross-analysis among the several interviews easier. Through this method, similarities and dissimilarities along with unique experiences were extrapolated for analysis.

1.4.3. Limitations

As previously mentioned, several challenges were met throughout the course of gathering data for the study that have created and compounded limitations. Foremost of these limitations are time and budgeting constraints. The time allotted for conducting this study has been repeatedly adjusted to accommodate changes and unexpected circumstances. Regardless, limited time has always been considered since the beginning of the study in order to accomplish this thesis given the deadline for completing it as a requirement for graduation. On the other hand, budgeting is another limitation as it prevented the researcher from travelling to other possible sites for interviewing transgender women such as Chiang Mai and Phuket. As mentioned earlier, the study was supposedly intended to only interview transgender women in Bangkok; this was also due to budgeting and time constraints. In spite of this and due to challenges encountered during the study, the research scope had to be expanded along with the budget plan and timeline.

Considering the sensitivity of discussing transgender and sex worker issues, another significant limitation is accessing the transgender communities. Initially, the study was designed to focus on the experiences of Filipino transgender women who migrated to Bangkok for work in the entertainment and sex work sectors primarily because this eliminates the limitation of a language barrier and need for an interpreter. Although the researcher did establish connections within the Filipino transgender community in Bangkok, only a few were readily accessible and willing to participate in the study. In this respect, the researcher also reached out to various regional and local grassroots NGOs in Thailand and the Philippines to give insight and perhaps develop some leads. Local Thai NGOs however, report that they only ever worked with Lao, Cambodian, and Burmese transgender women for non-Thai transgender people. NGOs in the Philippines have also commented that although there would be a Filipino transgender community in Thailand, most Filipino transgender women actually go to

either Hong Kong or Singapore, particularly to do sex work. With this information, the research design was then modified to include Thai, Lao, Cambodian, and Burmese transgender women who work in Bangkok. Accessing this migrant transgender community was anticipated to be difficult especially after learning that most migrant transgender women, especially those from Lao PDR and Cambodia, are located in border towns rather than in major cities like Bangkok and are often irregular migrants. In spite of this major challenge, the researcher pursued these migrant transgender communities in the cities by seeking local NGOs in Bangkok that provide services to these transgender women. Due to severe organizational delays and conflicts in schedule, the NGO in Bangkok that could have provided access to the transgender sex worker community within the city ended up not partaking in the study in spite of months of correspondence. Local NGOs in Pattaya, specifically the Sisters Foundation, were contacted to mitigate this delay. Interviews held in cooperation with Sisters Foundation in Pattaya were successful in accessing Thai transgender sex workers, but since the availability of transgender women for interview was determined by happenstance—only if they are in the clinic to get services—no non-Thai transgender women were interviewed. After interviewing these transgender women, it was deemed necessary to conduct further interviews. Thus the researcher went on a second field visit to Pattaya in September to interview transgender cabaret performers with the help of the Alcazar Cabaret Show. Throughout the search for interviewees, the need to have reliable and trustworthy gatekeepers was considered with prime importance in order to help foster building rapport between the researcher and the transgender informants. As such, the researcher took the time to establish confidence with these gatekeepers as well rather than approaching transgender women directly. But perhaps the most impactful challenges that came up during data gathering which made it near impossible to interview migrant transgender women and transgender sex workers were two political changes. One was when the government issued an executive decree on 23 June 2017 that imposed heavy fines on employers who hire irregular migrant workers which resulted in hundreds and thousands of migrant workers to return to their countries of

origin.² Though the exact effect of this change in Thailand's migration policy to migrant transgender women is unknown, based on the anecdotal evidence of Sisters Foundation that migrant transgender women from Lao PDR and Cambodia were irregular migrants, it is safe to assume that they are affected by this policy change. The second policy change is the increased effort of the Thai government to crackdown on sex workers in an effort to shift common perceptions on Thai tourism which is often linked to its visible sex tourism industry. Due to the prevalence of sex work among transgender women in Thailand, as well as public perception on transgender women which generalizes them as sex workers and criminals, transgender women are at an increased risk of experiencing police abuse and violence.³ Some of the transgender women interviewed in this study have even some negative experiences with the police. As a result, it became increasingly difficult to approach and talk to migrant transgender women, transgender sex workers and entertainers about their work and migration activities due to the heightened security risk. Given the inability of the researcher to control or avoid these risks, it was then inevitable and necessary to accept these risks and proceed with the available data.

6 of the 8 transgender women interviewed for this study are Thai and their interviews were primarily conducted in Thai language with some of the interviewees responding in English occasionally. Interviews with the Thai informants were done on two separate research trips to Pattaya, the first one was in cooperation of the Sisters Foundation and the second was with the Alcazar Cabaret Show. The first set of interviews were interpreted by an English-speaking staff of the NGO. In any translation work, misinterpretation is always a potential issue, regardless, the interpreter's

² Some articles covering this change in migration policy are as follows:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/thailand-60000-workers-flee-labour-laws-170703065936362.html>

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/learning/advanced/1280203/foreign-labour-law-flight-to-border-economic-disruption>

³ For an article detailing the abuses transgender women face, please see the following:

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/archive/law-cops-out-on-transgender-rights-in-pattaya/1309607>

familiarity with the interviewees and the existing rapport between them, as well as the interpreter's knowledge on transgender issues on a grassroots level proved relevant during the interviews and minimized misinterpretation and misunderstanding. In cases when the interpreter herself felt unsure of how to translate words into English, the researcher asked probing questions in order to determine meanings and contexts as accurately as possible. During the second research trip, the researcher was accompanied by a fellow student from Chulalongkorn University who provided interpretation during interviews with the cabaret performers and Alcazar's management. The interpreter's fluency in English is up to a high standard and in times when he himself needed further clarification with the interviewees, the interpreter asked further questions in order to help himself understand and was transparent to the researcher whenever these issues came up. On both occasions however, the researcher noticed that both interviewees sometimes added their own opinions when interpreting the interviewee's answers, hence extra care to distinguish between the interpreter's opinions and the interviewee's answers were made.

When conducting any study, it is imperative to be careful of haphazardly generalizing research findings. Given this study's research design, the limited data gathered, and the various limitations presented, it is important to remember that this thesis does not and cannot aim to extrapolate information to generalize the experiences of transgender women. Instead, this research only provides a small glimpse of what transgender women experience in the context of labour and migration within Thailand's tourism development policy. There is a wide gamut of experiences that transgender women might share and it is impossible for this small thesis to cover all of them. Even as the researcher was gathering data, it became apparent that there are more questions that pop up for every interview that need to be answered. Significant as they may be, these questions will need to be explored further and hopefully answered in future research.

1.4.4. Ethical Considerations

Bearing in mind all of the interviewees' safety and well-being and considering the sensitivities of this research, all interviewees were fully informed of the goals and purposes of this research prior to conducting any interviews or voice recording. The researcher also informed the interviewees that they will be assured anonymity in the study, no real names were used in referring to the transgender interviewees and any personal information or history reflected in this study are included with the consent of the informant. The researcher obtained verbal consent from all the informants. Additionally, the informants were also given the option to refrain from answering any of the questions asked if they feel that it is a sensitive topic and might not want their opinions reflected in the research. As previously mentioned, the security of the participants was greatly considered hence all interviews were conducted in places where the informants felt comfortable and safe. However, in some interviews, external factors beyond the researcher's control, such as the presence of other people in the room and their occasional interruptions and unsolicited opinions, need to be factored in as an influence to the responses of the interviewees.

The gender identities and preferred gender pronouns of all the participants are respected throughout the study.

1.4.5. Significance of the Study

The different forms of structural inequality that marginalize transgender women have been studied by various researchers dating as far back as the 1980s. However, given the rapid social, economic, political, and technological change that have occurred within the past two decades, the context in which transgender women live in have drastically changed. Economic restructuring after the Cold War has led to the creation and expansion of transnational migratory routes constituting an expanding global infrastructure that have connected countries, cities, and people to a degree unlike any

in history. Down to the individual level, globalization has transformed the lives of people by opening opportunities once unavailable, even inconceivable, to almost anyone. In terms of the experiences of transgender women, this has meant opportunities to earn an income through tourism migration and experience life removed from the traditional gender norms and expectations they grew up with.

With respect to increasing global connectivity spurred by technological innovations and global economic restructuring, tourism has become and will continue to be an important facet in contemporary society. In this context, how the enactment of tourism development by states, like Thailand, uplifts and limits transgender people and the broader LGBTIQ community as a deeply marginalized socio-political group must be studied in order to establish an understanding of this largely unexplored phenomenon with the intention to address the specific challenges that transgender people face including the various manifestations of structural inequality and systematic discrimination. The purpose of this research is then to contribute and add nuance to the body of knowledge on transgender people while also exploring the complex political, economic, and socio-cultural relations that create and maintain the conditions in which transgender people are implicated in.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE

REVIEW

This chapter begins by looking into the effects of neoliberal globalization on gender roles and how global economic restructuring in the past decades has led to men, women, and LGBTIQ people's involvement with a growing, interconnected transnational sex industry. Following this, I move to discuss globalization's particular effect on the LGBTIQ community and culture; beginning from theoretical analyses within global queer studies before narrowing down to specific examples in Thailand. The discussion will then look specifically into the history of Thailand's economic development with respect to its tourism and sex industry, and how this has historically shaped and currently affects transgender women's lives. In the next sections, I will then analyze the particular rights issues of LGBTIQ people and sex workers in Thailand, but not before providing an international context for LGBTIQ rights recognition. Lastly, I will trace how global trends influence national policies which in turn affect national populations in the community and individual level through a review Thailand's national tourism development plan.

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2.1. The Shadows of Neoliberal Globalization

When looking at the relationship between economic development and sex work, it is often the case to do so in terms of women sex workers; particularly regarding the economic and cultural shifts in the 80s and 90s that have impacted gender roles. It has been argued that economic development has had significant impacts on the gender roles of women in society (Sassen 1998). Women, for instance, have limited options for survival in a capitalist society and thus migrate to sell their cheap labour elsewhere in order to earn relatively higher income. Consequently, greater access to higher income

allowed women to emerge as active participants in public discussions thus asserting their positions in the public sphere (Sassen 2002). Economic development has thus affected gender relations in more than one way.

Bernstein points to how developments in the economic, political, and cultural spheres have not only changed the practice of sex work in spatial and social terms but also redefined the meaning of sex work in emotional terms (2007). Bernstein demonstrates this by analysing economic, social, and spatial shifts at the local, national, and global levels; and by doing so, highlights the importance of looking at sex work within economic and cultural currents (2007). This emphasis on structural shifts is important in recognizing sex work, and the broader sex trade, as dynamic and occurs in different contexts. These contexts may change over time and space which individuals may interpret, experience, and act upon in different ways. By looking at the sex industry and the underpinning patriarchal system as static, there is little recognition that they can comprise of multiple social dimensions and impact sex workers differently (Truong 1990); therefore little distinction is made between the different conditions in which a transaction for sexual services might take place (O'Connell Davidson 1998).

Following this emphasis on studying sex work within their given structural contexts, I identify some scholars—among a large body of academics—who focus on the correlation between globalization and the sex industry. These scholars look particularly into the activities by the sex industry that remain in the shadows with respect to the gendering of economic development. What this means is that as cities “[privilege] the masculine worlds of finance, banking, insurance and law, seeing these as more ‘skilled occupations’ and more important in driving the global economy” (Hubbard 2011), women’s migration and participation in the sex industry remain hidden, as if independent from the expansion of cities (Agathangelou 2004). The fact that activities by the sex industry remain within the realm of the shadow economy is not without pressure from governments and has been reinforced by the anti-prostitution movement,

including abolitionist feminists. Since scholars, activists, and policy-makers have paid attention to the sex industry, no other document has ever been as impactful as the Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) by the US Department of State. The TIP report has arguably shaped the political and academic landscape on sex work and the sex industry since its release by identifying all women in sex work as trafficking victims.⁴ The scholars I look to however, argue against this generalization and provide nuances to how sex work, the sex industry, and trafficking is generally understood.

Moreover, as I discuss literature on sex work, it is worth noting that “despite the considerable conceptual, empirical and normative contestation surrounding the intersections between sexual economies and global capitalism... the bulk of scholarship on the political economy of sexual commerce remains preoccupied with the experiences and status of female sex workers” (Smith 2011). And since it is not in my intentions to conflate the experiences of women sex workers and transgender sex workers, I will explore existing literature on the experiences of male and transgender sex workers that offer an alternative gender perspective on sex work. For, as Smith (2011) notes, “there are dangers with rendering male and transgender sex workers invisible... [t]o do so not only denies their subjectivities and potential for political agency but also runs the risk of reinforcing the very gender dualisms that many feminists would wish to challenge, i.e. by reproducing pre-existing heteronormative assumptions that there is a ‘natural’ gender order in which it is women who are the sexual objects and men who are the sexual subjects” (Smith 2011).

⁴ For further discussion on the TIP Report and its impact on sex work, see Chuang, J. (2014). “Exploitation Creep and the Unmaking of Human Trafficking Law.” The American Journal of International Law **108**(4): 609-649..

Looking at the impact of globalization on women's bodies, Elina Penttinen argues that aside from using women for cheap labour, global capitalism also has the effect of commoditizing women's bodies through the sex trade (2007). Where the sex trade occurs, Penttinen borrows from Appadurai's concept of five dimensions (Appadurai 1996) and points to what she calls "shadow globalization" or "activities made possible by global flows of information, technology, finance, and people that are taking place in informal and illegal ways, but in the shadows in terms of otherness" (Penttinen 2007). Christine Chin looks into shadow globalization and the sex trade in the context of Malaysia where she provides a glimpse into the shadow economy of a transnational sex industry. In her book, *Cosmopolitan Sex Workers: Women and Migration in a Global City* (2013), Chin identifies and examines the ways in which cities create opportunities and modes of migration used for migration for sex work; the creative strategies employed by states, migrant sex workers, and groups facilitating migration for sex work to mitigate risks and maximize opportunities; as well as the cosmopolitan subjectivities that emerge from the experiences of migrant sex workers and syndicate members with the Other (Chin 2013). Using this framework of analysis, Chin concludes that "women's transnational migration for sex work occurs in and is fuelled by structural constraints and opportunities born from the marriage of patriarchal power and free-market economies" (Chin 2013).

Structural constraints is also emphasized by Parreñas as a key component in her framework of indentured mobility; which proposes a more nuanced perspective in the distinction between sex workers and victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation (Parreñas 2011). Parreñas interviews Filipino women and transgender migrant entertainers in Japan, whom, under the definition of the US Department of State's Trafficking in Person's Report (TIP), are identified as sexually trafficked persons. In her book, *Illicit Flirtations: Labor, Migration, and Sex Trafficking in Tokyo* (2011), Parreñas argues against this definition and posits that "migrant entertainers are not trafficked persons, or individuals coerced to do hostess work, but instead labor migrants

who face severe structural constraints” (Parreñas 2011). Parreñas comes to this conclusion by outlining the migration process of migrant entertainers: demonstrating how labour migration policies from both the Japanese and Filipino Governments, with much influence from the TIP Report, push migrant entertainers to rely on a network of middlemen brokers and thus increase their risk of exploitation (Parreñas 2011). This relationship, Parreñas moves to describe as “legally sanctioned relations of servitude that these brokers maintain with entertainers” (Parreñas 2011).

It is worth noting that, in doing her research, Parreñas also takes into account the experiences of migrant transgender entertainers along with women entertainers. In looking at these two subject groups, Parreñas is careful not to homogenize the experience of both women and transgender entertainers, noting that migrant transgender entertainers are often work twice as hard as women entertainers and are expected to do more than their cisgender counterparts, i.e. more elaborate performances, costumes, etc. (Parreñas 2011).

While Parreñas puts emphasis on the structural constraints that put migrant entertainers at risk of exploitation, Padilla (2007) on the other hand, looks more into large-scale structural shifts in the Dominican political economy that influence internal migration for sex work. In his book, *Caribbean Pleasure Industry: Tourism, Sexuality and AIDS in the Dominican Republic* (2007), Padilla situates this rural-urban migration in the context of structural shifts toward globalization such as the increase of air travel, as well as the inflow of foreign investment and growth of the tourism industry in developing countries (2007). Padilla peers into the world of male sex work and its connections to gay tourism, arguing that the growth of the tourism sector along with declining opportunities in the formal wage economy has led many Dominican men to move from rural areas to urban areas and tourism zones in search of employment (Padilla 2007). Part of this population of Dominican men are drawn to the ‘pleasure industry’ in which sex work is undertaken both alongside, and instead of, other jobs in

the service sector (Padilla 2007). Concurrently, technological advancements such as the internet and electronic commerce—which have led to virtual sex tourism networks—have also facilitated tourism services explicitly targeting gay tourists (Padilla 2007).

As Padilla presents the link between these structural shifts and men's participation in sex work, he also notes the reproduction of socio-economic inequalities between the Western gay tourist and the local men which service them. Padilla names this the 'international economy of stigma' in which the negative social consequences of participating in non-normative sexuality are transferred from North to South (2007). Moreover, Padilla also finds that while transgressing heteronormative norms, male sex workers also reproduce patriarchal gender norms to serve their benefit (2007). Further discussion on the effect of globalization to the broader lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) community will be presented in later sections, however it should be noted that aside from underlining the interlinkages of economic development, globalization, tourism, migration, and sex work, perhaps it is also important to keep in mind the "colonial constructions of tourism as a travel adventure" (Puar 2002) as well as the gendered and sexual power relations that are challenged and reproduced in sex work. As Aizura (2011) puts it "Deciphering the complexities of how neoliberal capitalism intersects with gender-variant practices and identities cannot proceed effectively without analysis of the geocultural trajectories of those practices" (Aizura 2011).

2.2. Globalization, Queer Identity, and Culture

Similar to the dual effect of neoliberal globalization to women, i.e. limiting their options for survival in a male-dominated, capitalist society, while at the same time leading to the emergence of women as public actors which challenge unequal gender relations (Sassen 1998, 2002), neoliberal globalization has affected the LGBTIQ

community, particularly the transgender community, in a similar way. Looking into the relationship between capitalism and queer culture, D'Emilio notes that it was capitalism's replacement of the self-sufficient household and communities with wage labour that gave individuals relative autonomy (1993). He argues that as individuals gained access to income and use that income freely, people began to identify as LGBT; they began to see themselves as part of a larger LGBT community and organized themselves politically based on that identity (D'Emilio 1993). A debate then arises from this relationship between global capitalism as a system of exploitation and subordination vis-à-vis queer identity and autonomy. Jackson, in *Queer Bangkok: 21st Century Markets, Media, and Rights* (2011), provides a nuanced discussion between the idea that the "subjection to globalizing market processes involves a loss of [queer] autonomy" and that the market "provides a basis for movements to enhance queer autonomy in an overwhelmingly heteronormative world" (Jackson 2011). In *Queer Globalizations*, Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan argue that queerness is now a global phenomenon in which queer sexuality and culture can be seen in various forms of media, as well as in political discourses on human rights, throughout the world (2002). They further that queer sexuality and culture, which used to be solely considered private, is now commodified and marketed. Queerness is now an "object of consumption, an object in which nonqueers invest their passions and purchasing power, and an object in which queers constitute their identities in [a] contemporary consumer-oriented globalized world" (Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002). Looking at the recent developments of the LGBTIQ rights movement around the world, the commodification of queer culture and identity can be seen as a positive force from which queer people can stake their claim toward societal recognition. Nonqueer people, as Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan put it, become more and more exposed to queerness which, ideally, would make them more accepting of LGBTIQ people (2002). This should be taken with a grain of salt, however, since despite global capitalism providing avenues of opportunities for LGBTIQ identities to be recognized and accepted by mainstream society, it should be noted that it also excludes other LGBTIQ people from experiencing and benefitting

from queer autonomy. Due to the commodification of LGBTIQ identity and the middle-class consumer to which it is directed, LGBTIQ people with lower incomes are often excluded from participating in the increasingly market-based practices of queer culture. As Jackson succinctly puts it: “In brief, one needs money to afford the gay lifestyle, and poverty is a barrier to full participation in this market-based identity and culture, which are to a significant extent based on consumption” (Jackson 2011).

For the transgender woman in Thailand, the subjection vs. autonomy debate revolves mostly around the concept of beauty and “passing”; blending in or appearing as a “real woman”. Around the world, but in Thailand especially, the widespread commodification of feminine beauty becomes a platform in which transgender women can contest negative stereotypes while assert recognition of their rights and claim cultural and social acceptance (Renneson 2011). At the same time, the globally burgeoning cosmetic surgery industry of Thailand, has cemented the Thai state as “one of the premier sites worldwide to obtain vaginoplasty and other cosmetic surgeries” and that “many surgeons advertise Bangkok as a “Mecca” of transsexual body modification” (Aizura 2011). Aizura points out however, that as a prime destination for gender reassignment surgery (GRS) and sex reassignment surgery (SRS)⁵, its orientation toward a Western market has led to the price inflation of physiological feminization technologies which make it difficult for Southeast Asian transgender women to afford feminizing medical interventions which allow them to “pass” and become successful in their performance of feminine beauty. Regardless, this portrayal of Bangkok as a go-to destination for GRS can be seen as a pull factor to the migration of transgender women.

⁵ Aizura uses the term “gender reassignment surgery” to refer to both genital and non-genital procedures although it is also sometimes referred to as sexual reassignment surgery (2011). I will differentiate between the two by using SRS solely to refer to the complete genital procedure and using GRS as the broader term. In relation, I use the term transgender women to refer to male-to-female transgender people, regardless of whether they have undergone a complete SRS or not.

How neoliberal globalization affects queer autonomy and culture can also be seen with respect to the physical and social spaces in which transgender women in Southeast Asia can freely move. In bolstering its tourism industry, Thailand has dedicated tourist zones, like Phuket and Pattaya, especially designed to pander to foreign tastes (Jackson 2011). As these zones cater to foreign cultural expectations, it can be seen as a space where “un-Thainess”, or practices that run counter to Thai cultural norms, are permitted (Jackson 2011). In this respect, non-heteronormative identities, such as with transgender women, as well as practices that bear strong cultural stigma, such as sex work, have relatively more space in these designated tourist zones. Timo Ojanen points out that Pattaya, for example, is considered to be a “territory of freedom” for transgender women due to the large population of transwomen in the city, whom also provide mutual support for each other (Ojanen 2009). These geophysical spaces, as containment zones for international tourism, then provide relative freedom from the restrictive cultural norms and expectations revolving around gender and work.

Out of these tourist zones, transgender women may also benefit from the increased access to wage labour derived from neoliberal globalization. Other than giving them financial independence, transgender women’s access to higher income—mostly as sex workers/entertainers—provide them an opportunity to negotiate acceptance and autonomy in the family and community level. In researching Thai transgender sex workers, Witchayanee Ocha examines how transwomen may “buy” social acceptance and independence within their families by providing financial support (2008). Since filial responsibility and family acceptance run strong in Southeast Asian cultures, working as entertainers/sex workers and earning higher income as a result, allow transgender women the opportunity to fulfil their filial responsibility and gain acceptance in the family while at the same time claim sexual and gender autonomy and live the “gay lifestyle”.

Nevertheless, this opportunity provided by the entertainment/sex industry may not be a choice which transgender women in Southeast Asia willingly make. Winter

(2011) provides a comprehensive discussion of the marginalization of transgender women into sex work, using the concept of “transprejudice” proposed by Mark King et al (2009); whereas “[t]ransprejudice engenders discrimination because it delegitimizes, undercutting transpeople’s claims to a quality of life corresponding to that of other people in their societies. In turn, discriminatory behaviour leads to the exclusion of transpeople from economic and social activity, driving them to the margins of society... When a government neglects to protect a discriminated group, or actively perpetrates discrimination, then discrimination can be viewed as systematic and one can speak only of oppression” (Winter 2011). Winter supports his argument by pointing out the common human rights violations which transgender women in Thailand experience; namely the right to privacy, the right to work, and the right to marry and found a family. This is despite Thailand ratified various international human rights conventions such as the International Covenant on the Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The inability to change personal documentation signifying one’s gender at birth gives transgender women a significant burden as it “outs” them as trans and instantly subjects them to the mental pathologization of transgender identity and making it difficult to find a job. Despite many transgender women being university graduates, employment discrimination of transgender women results in a “ghetto” employment, or employment in a narrow range of jobs where formal job interviews may not be involved and which transgender women are pushed into (Winter 2006). The status of transgender women as people who do not fit in society, coupled with the mental pathologization of their sexual and gender identity seals their marginality and becomes a factor pushing them to work in the sex industry (Ocha 2012). Due to the limited range of jobs accessible to transgender women, many turn to sex work as a means to earn income and fulfil filial responsibilities.

It would be a mistake however, to assume that all transgender women in the entertainment/sex industry are forced into it due to the lack of rights-protective policies, legislation, and mechanisms on gender-based employment discrimination. Winter

recognizes this as well, pointing out that aside from the financial rewards of a Western-oriented sex market (Brummelhuis 1999) and the family and community acceptance that go along with it, “work[ing] in specialized “ladyboy” bars provide [transwomen in Thailand] a sense of community, especially those who have migrated to the city” (Winter 2011). This supports a 1998 survey which highlights the importance of social networks in providing information about working conditions in the sex industry (Lim 1998). In addition, entertainment and sex work also provide the opportunity to reaffirm a transwoman’s female identity as well as to meet a foreigner (Brummelhuis 1999). The former is especially important for transgender women going back to their interests in “passing” as real women. Some studies also suggest that meeting a married man and eventually “stealing him” from his wife galvanizes the transgender woman’s feminine identity as “better than a real woman” (Brummelhuis 1999). Moreover, given that sex work may serve to buttress the masculinity of male clients (Parreñas 2011), it can also be argued that sex work also makes transgender women feel more feminine the more masculine their client is (Brummelhuis 1999). Meeting a foreign client through sex work who may eventually offer a long-term relationship and financial support, which also increases the possibility of getting married and moving out of Southeast Asia to live in a foreign country, is a very common push factor to sex work for transwomen.

2.3. Economic Development and Sex Work in Thailand

Since the 1980s, scholars have looked into the correlation of tourism-focused economic development and the emergence of a visible sex industry in Southeast Asia (Phongpaichit 1982, Truong 1983, 1990, Lee 1991, Leheny 1995, Lim 1998). Truong in particular, maps out the linkages of airlines, hotels, and tour packages made possible by the tourism industry, which matched a growing demand for sexual services offered at tourist destinations (1983).

In Thailand, Lim takes this discussion deeper, arguing that the pattern of economic development has interacted with existing gender relations in Thai society in such a way as to set the conditions for a burgeoning sex industry (1998). The limited income-earning opportunities for women with low levels of education, coupled with the social pressure of providing financial support to families, and a relatively tolerant attitude towards sex work help ensure that there will always be a supply of labor directed towards the sex industry in Thailand (Lim 1998). Similarly, there is a demand for sexual services due to the social acceptance of men buying these services, the increased disposable income of middle- to upper-class Thais, and the development of Thai tourism, which arguably tends to promote the sex industry (Lim 1998). Thus, according to Lim, the growth of the sex industry in Thailand can be linked to three major factors: gender roles, economic development, and tourism (1998).

Though economic development has indeed enhanced women's economic roles and reinforced their autonomy, the ideology in which feminine beauty is considered an important asset for a woman, along with the valuation of a woman based on her economic role to the family has often pushed women to enter sex work. The cultural expectation that Thai children must support their families, in conjunction with the economic structure which offers better rewards for sexual services provides a strong motivation for women to become sex workers (Lim 1998). Since the deeply rooted cultural expectation of filial responsibility and the economic conditions which provide higher rewards for work in the sex industry is not exclusive to women, this pattern can be interpreted to be similar to the experience of transgender women as well. Moreover, filial responsibility and limited economic opportunities can also be seen throughout Southeast Asia, not just Thailand, and can be a driving force for transgender women to migrate and enter sex work.

Given that there is a steady supply of sex workers due to Thai gender roles and other social and cultural factors, it is imperative to acknowledge that sex workers operate within an economic structure which affects the supply and demand for

commercial sexual services which have been shaped by political, economic, and cultural shifts in Thailand. Since the 1950s and 1960s, economic development in Thailand has had an essentially Western orientation, in particular are the US investments in Thailand. These investments resulted in large transfers of money, but also of American personnel into Thailand; most of whom were military personnel who served in US military bases in Thailand or on rest and recreation leave from the Viet Nam War (Lim 1998). During the Viet Nam War, Pattaya was selected as a center for R&R for American soldiers. It was during this time that Pattaya first developed a visible sex industry as restaurants, shops, hotels, bars, and nightclubs sprung throughout the city in order to cater to American soldiers (1998). After the war, commercial sexual services in Pattaya survived and expanded by catering to tourists (1998). Lim points out, however, that the domestic economic policies that have attempted to transform Thailand's agricultural economy into an export-oriented industrial economy has had more impact concerning the emergence of the Thai sex industry (1998). Lim states that "the shift in emphasis from agricultural to industrial exports, and from import-substitution to export-led growth, resulted in a shift in the spatial concentration of development efforts and in the demand for labor. The strategy of economic restructuring was pursued in conjunction with extracting surplus from the agricultural sector for industrial investment, subsidizing urban dwellers in order to keep urban wages low, encouraging foreign investment and promoting tourism." (Lim 1998).

The growth and expansion of the Thai tourism industry in recent decades can be seen as a direct result of Thailand's economic restructuring process. In 2016, 32.6 million foreign tourists visited Thailand, bringing in USD45.9 billion (THB1.64 trillion) worth of revenue.⁶ This is 9% higher from the previous number of tourist arrivals into Thailand in 2015, which was pegged at 30 million. In 2010, the number of tourist arrivals into Thailand were around 16 million. Since then, this number has steadily

⁶ For more information, see: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-tourism-idUSKBN14POQF>. Accessed in 3 May 2017.

increased to around 19.23 million in 2011, to 22.35 million in 2012, and to 26.5 million in 2013. This number has dropped to 24.81 million in 2014 due to the political tumult in the beginning of the year, but has quickly picked up to 30 million in 2015.⁷ This indicates that the Thai tourism industry is quickly growing at a relatively steady pace. Thailand has often promoted international tourism, with its sex industry as a major attraction for some tourists (Lim 1998). This has led to a counterflow of Thai sex workers into the countries of origin of the tourists, as well as an influx of foreign sex workers in Thailand; mostly from neighbouring countries such as Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and the Yunnan Province of China (Ibid.). The concentration of sex worker activities in designated tourist areas around Thailand show the central role of foreign tourists in patronizing the sex industry (Ibid.). Within Bangkok, these areas are namely Silom, specifically Patpong, and Soi Cowboy and Nana Plaza in Sukhumvit area. Other well-known areas outside the capital are Pattaya and Phuket. The visibility of sexual services in these tourist zones has been documented by other researchers whom have linked the existence of the sex industry with tourism (Truong 1983).

In previous years, the government has been lax toward the existence of sex workers because of the relative social acceptance of sex work, but also possibly because of the high revenue that the sex industry supposedly yields. In some instances, the government has given outward support for the expansion of the sex industry in order to encourage inflows of foreign exchange (Lim 1998). Nevertheless, recent developments show that the Thai government's ambivalent stand on the sex industry may be changing. Raids of entertainment establishments, entrapment operations, and random arrests of sex workers—transgender women in particular—have been reported by Thai news media in recent months.⁸ Operations like these targeting transgender sex workers put them at

⁷ For more information, see: <http://www.thaiwebsites.com/tourism.asp>. Accessed in 3 May 2017.

⁸ Local and international news agencies have covered the recent efforts by Thai police to “clean up” Pattaya of its visible sex industry. For more information, see the ff: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-pattaya-image-idUSKBN16X090>

great risk of violence and abuse from police as well as further deepen the stigma on transgender women and sex workers.

2.4. International Recognition of LGBTI Rights

Since the 1990s, there have been many developments in the international community which have led to the acknowledgement of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)⁹ as something that is covered by international human rights laws. One of the most prominent of these is the conception of the Yogyakarta Principles in 2006. Although the Yogyakarta Principles are not legally binding, they establish international benchmarks for SOGI standards which makes for an important advance toward the international recognition of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) persons. Some of the relevant human rights outlined in the Yogyakarta Principles include: the right to protection from all forms of exploitation, sale, and trafficking of human beings (Principle 11); the right to work (Principle 12); the right to social security and other social protection measures (Principle 13); the right to freedom of movement (Principle 22); and the right to seek asylum (Principle 23). Further examples of LGBTIQ rights recognition in the international arena include the ILO Recommendation No. 200, which calls on members states to promote “the involvement and empowerment of all workers regardless of their sexual orientation and whether or not they belong to a vulnerable group”.¹⁰ Other examples pertaining to the right of

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/learning/advanced/1222153/pattaya-las-vegas-of-sex-seeks-family-friendliness>

<http://www.holiday-pattaya.com/2017/02/more-raids-as-push-continues-to-clean.html>

<http://pattayatoday.net/news/latest-edition/pattaya-cleanup-or-control-by-military/>

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/special-reports/1309607/law-cops-out-on-transgender-rights-in-pattaya>

⁹ ‘Sexual orientation’ and ‘gender identity’ (SOGI), can also refer to LGBT IQpeople but are considered the more formal and legally accepted terms (Suriyasarn 2014).

¹⁰ For more information, see http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/99thSession/texts/WCMS_142613/lang-en/index.htm

LGBTIQ persons to work are the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), and the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).

However, it was in June 2011 that LGBTI rights was officially recognized by the UN Human Rights Council in a landmark resolution affirming the right to non-discrimination of LGBT persons, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity.¹¹ Following this milestone resolution, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report which outlines the five obligations that States have towards LGBTI people; namely, 1) to protect individuals from homophobic and transphobic violence; 2) to prevent the torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of LGBT persons; 3) to decriminalize homosexuality; 4) to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; and 5) to respect the freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly for LGBT and intersex people.¹² Apart from these, the rights of LGBTI persons are also covered in several international conventions such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is also an important international human rights convention on gender equality which can be used as a lens for looking into gender-based discrimination and inequalities. Moreover, the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families (MWC) also covers LGBTI migrant workers as Article 1 of the convention states, “The present Convention is applicable, except as otherwise provided hereafter, to all migrant workers and members of their families without distinction of any kind such as sex, race, colour, language, religion or conviction, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, nationality, age, economic position, property, marital status, birth or other status.”¹³

¹¹ OHCHR: Human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity, A/HRC/RES/17/19.

¹² OHCHR. Born Free and Equal: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/BornFreeAndEqual.aspx>

¹³ OHCHR: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CMW.aspx>

2.5. LGBTIQ Rights in Thailand

Although there are no Thai laws explicitly discriminating against LGBTIQ persons residing in Thailand, for a long time, there were also no laws prohibiting discrimination against LGBTIQ persons. This has changed since the historic passing of the Gender Equality Act, 2015 (2558) into law¹⁴, which prohibits discrimination based on “the fact that the person is male or female or of a different appearance from his/her own sex by birth”. The draft constitution of Thailand, which was backed by a constitutional referendum in 2016 and is still up for approval by the King, has barely made any changes from the 2007 constitution regarding the protection of the rights of Thai citizens, stating “Unjust discrimination against a person on the grounds of the difference in origin, race, language, sex, age, disability, physical or health condition, personal status, economic or social standing, religious belief, education or political view that does not violate the provisions of this constitution, or any other ground shall be prohibited.”¹⁵ This means that the Thai Constitution along with the various human rights resolutions and conventions that were ratified and supported by Thailand provide a basis to treat LGBTIQ citizens with the same rights as other citizens. Regardless, legislative policies still fail to protect the rights of LGBTIQ people in Thailand which prevent LGBTIQ citizens from enjoying and exercising their rights and freedoms; in particular, this includes the absence of state recognition of LGBTIQ unions, as well as the inability to change one’s gender in identification documents.

¹⁴ Recently, Thailand has put into force a new legislation called the Gender Equality Act 2015, which stipulates that employers shall not discriminate based on gender identity. This law, however, is relatively new and may still be in the initial phases of implementation at the time of writing. Thus, data on whether this law actually prevents gender discrimination in the workplace is currently unavailable.

¹⁵ From an unofficial English translation of the draft 2016 constitution. Accessed in 27 April 2017 at http://www.constitutionnet.org/files/thailand-draft-constitution_englishtranslation_june_2016.pdf

For the purposes of this research, it is important to look at the laws and policies in Thailand which have a marked effect on transgender women. For instance, prior to the passing of the Gender Equality Act, transgender women were often vulnerable to employment discrimination due to the mental pathologization of transgender identity by the Thai military. In Thailand, people who were born male must undergo reserve-officer training or military service. Transgender women who have undergone gender reassignment surgery (GRS), such as having breast implants and having full sex reassignment surgery (SRS), may be exempted from this obligation by obtaining discharge papers or Sor. Dor. 43 which indicates that the cause of their exemption is due to “a disease causing permanent psychological damage”. This document must then be presented to a potential employer throughout a transwoman’s working life. Thai lobbyists however, have successfully pressured military authorities to stop the usage of the pathologizing phrase until recently. In spite of this, the mental pathologization of transgender identity has often led to transgender women’s inability to enter certain sectors of employment, channeling them into a limited range of professions often related stereotypes of transgender people. “For example, transgender persons are able to find work in the entertainment industry as cabaret performers or beauty pageant contestants, in the beauty industry as make-up artists, in cosmetics, and in a few service jobs such as public relations.” (Suriyasarn 2014) This discrimination that transgender women have faced often demoralize them and diminish their self-esteem, compromising their mental health; others are pushed into sex work as well (Winter 2006). Moreover, the Thai Civil Service Act stipulates the prohibition of people who are “morally defective to the extent of being socially objectionable”¹⁶ which could be used by people with prejudice against LGBTI persons to reject LGBTI applicants (Suriyasarn 2014).

¹⁶ (Sec. 36, B(4)), the Civil Service Act B.E. 2551 (2008).

The fact that transgender persons, mostly male-to-female (MTF) transgenders but female-to-male (FTM) are also affected, cannot legally change the sex indicated in their identification documents, especially their passports, also creates problems. Transgender persons often face obstacles during international travel because the sex in their passports does not correspond with their physical appearance. This becomes a problem especially during personal and business travel when they do not have an official invitation letter to present during immigration checks at borders. “[T]ransgender persons are commonly detained by immigration and face questioning under suspicion of using a fake passport that can last an hour or longer, sometimes causing travel delay. This incurs costs to businesses and decreases employment opportunities for transgender persons.”(Suriyasarn 2014).

Aside from laws and regulations, indirect discrimination against transgender persons is permitted by institutional policies and rules that impose codes of conduct that are favor traditional heteronormative¹⁷ male and female roles (Suriyasarn 2014). For example, many public sector institutions and private companies, as well as schools, require students and employees to dress only according to their sex at birth (UNDP and USAID 2014).¹⁸ There are also cases where LGBT persons have not been promoted or allowed to travel for business because doing so would allegedly make matters more tedious and complicated as opposed to a heterosexual worker. Prejudice against LGBT workers have also led to LGBT workers receiving lower salaries than their heterosexual counterparts (Suriyasarn 2014). Moreover, violence and harassment in the workplace are also something the LGBTI persons in Thailand experience. The result of both direct and indirect discrimination in the workplace have led to many LGBT people to pretend

¹⁷ Here, ‘heteronormative’ is defined as heterosexual behaviour and social norms that society considers as ‘normal’. It can refer not only to sexual behaviour but also to the social roles expected of heterosexuals (UNDP and USAID, 2014).

¹⁸ For a more detailed discussion on LGBT Rights in Thailand, read Being LGBT in Asia: Thailand Country Report in <http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/operations/projects/overview/being-lgbt-in-asia.html>

to fit into mainstream society's definition of gender. As such they hide their sexualities in order to be hired, maintain credibility, and eligibility for job advancement (Suriyasarn 2014).

Despite Thailand's, global reputation for being one of the most LGBT-friendly tourist destinations in the world, Thai social and cultural attitudes are far from accepting non-heteronormative behavior and identities (Jackson 1999). Attitudes towards LGBTIQ people are only tolerant as long as they blend within society and refrain from overt expression of their sexual orientation and gender identity; hostility towards LGBTIQ individuals remain behind the masks of people who do not openly express their disapproval. Generally, there seems to be a lack of understanding of human rights principles, particularly regarding LGBTIQ people, by Thai society (UNDP and USAID 2014) and although society may give tolerance or acquiescence, Thai society lack an understanding of the particular struggles and needs of LGBT people (Ojanen 2009).

2.6. Thai Legislation on Sex Work

Since this paper will also touch on sex work in Thailand, this section will focus on some of the relevant legislations which affect sex workers in Thailand. Thailand has several laws that criminalize sex work and which aims to penalize violators in the sex trade: the Penal Code, the Prostitution Act, and the Entertainment Places Act. Thailand's Penal Code does not explicitly prohibit prostitution, however it is illegal for any person to earn income from being a prostitute.¹⁹ Title IX, Section 286 of the Penal Code states that any person over 16 years of age who subsists on the earning of a prostitute shall be imprisoned for 7 to 20 years and fined 14,000 to 40,000 baht, or imprisoned for life. It also penalizes those persons who are habitually associated with a prostitute, benefit

¹⁹ For more information, see: <http://www.impowr.org/content/current-legal-framework-prostitution-thailand>. Accessed in 4 May 2017.

from a prostitute, and who assist any prostitute in a quarrel with a customer. It does not however state specific penalties for these offenses.

The current Prostitution Act is the main legal framework prohibiting prostitution. The Prostitution Act, or the Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act of 1996, replaced the previous law on prostitution; the Prostitution Suppression Act of 1960. It defines prostitution as the act of promiscuously rendering sexual services for remuneration regardless of the sex of both persons involved in the act.²⁰ Prostitutes and all persons who were involved in arranging or profiting from the act are also liable for punishment. It is clear that the Prostitution Act criminalizes sex work, however, Sections 11 to 16 of the Act provides that convicted prostitutes should receive medical treatment and vocational training, and be admitted into an “assistance center” for a period not exceeding one year (Lim 1998). These sections seemingly provide a light at the end of the tunnel, seeking to “rehabilitate” and “reintegrate” sex workers back into “normal” society.

The rehabilitation of sex workers is also reinforced by the Entertainment Places Act of 1966. This Act initially regulates the operations of nightclubs, bars, spas and massage parlors by requiring them to obtain operating licenses from local police and prohibiting them from using the premises for prostitution (Lim 1998). This makes those who control the operations of these entertainment establishments criminally liable if prostitution occurs in their premises. The Act also provides for the Social Welfare Department to send prostitutes to rehabilitation centers where they will receive occupational training. However, the Act is rarely used to prosecute owners of establishments or other persons involved, rather, it is mostly used to send sex workers to rehabilitation centers.

²⁰ Ibid.

The Penal Code and the two Acts criminalize sex work without regard for the social and economic structures which push women and transgender women into sex work. It also conflates voluntary sex workers with forced or trafficked prostitutes which subsequently misidentifies sex work with sex trafficking. This misidentification of sex work with sex trafficking further complicates law enforcement against transnational sex trafficking, as well as disregards the right of these women to work. Moreover, the conflation of these two concepts, in conjunction with the provision to send sex workers to rehabilitation centers serves to further the stigmatization of sex work as something that is socially deviant, and could even hurt transgender sex workers by reinforcing the mental pathologization of transgender identity.

2.7. The National Tourism Development Plan

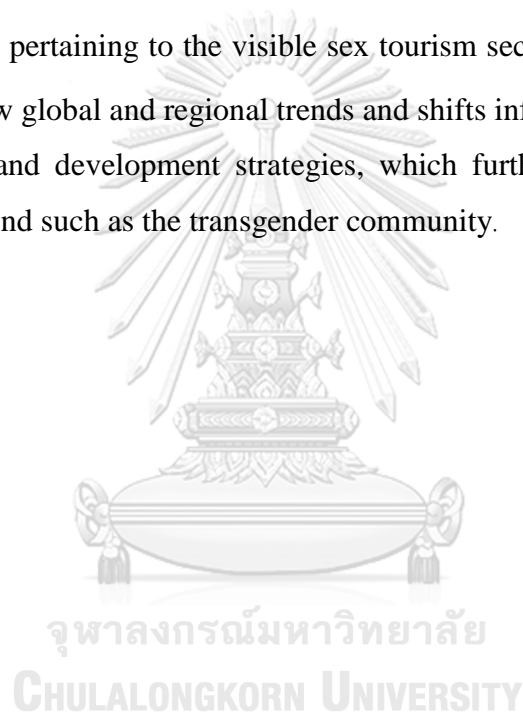
Previously, I discussed the links between economic development and sex work, and briefly illustrated the role of tourism within this context and how it has led to the creation of spaces where transgender women, sex workers, and foreign tourists intersect. In this section, I turn to how global shifts and trends trickle down to affect local communities within the context of tourism development based on Pornphatu Rupjumlong's article on *Thailand's Tourism Policy and Regulatory Framework for Competitiveness in the AEC* (2012).

To start, there are three laws relevant to the development of Thai tourism. First is the Act of Tourism of Thailand, BE. 2522, which led to the establishment of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). The TAT exists until today and is most prominent in promoting and marketing the tourism industry of Thailand to the world and within the country. The second law is the Act of Tourism Council of Thailand, B.E. 2544, which established the Tourism Council of Thailand to coordinate between tourism business operators and government agencies. After the December 2007 general elections, the Thai tourism industry was deemed to lack coordination which resulted in

"aimless and discontinuous administration and development" (Rupjumlong 2012), thus the Act of National Tourism Policy, B.E. 2551, was later enforced in order to develop a mechanism to integrate Thailand's tourism policy and administration at all levels of the government, and as a result, the National Tourism Development Plan, B.E. 2555-2559 (2012-2016) was developed. Strongly influenced by the World Economic Forum's Global Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2008-2009, the Plan had 5 key strategies that focused on 1) tourism infrastructure; 2) the development and restoration of tourism resources; 3) tourism products and services; 4) confidence-building and the promotion of tourism; and 5) participation between the government, civil society, and the private sector.

In spite of this, due to the background of the National Tourism Policy Act which is hinged on the integration and coordination of tourism government agencies, the plan overlooks improvements on Thailand's tourism regulatory framework (Rupjumlong 2012 (Rupjumlong 2012). In 2011, the World Economic Forum published the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2011 which ranks the travel and tourism competitiveness of countries around the world taking into account their existing regulatory framework, business environment, infrastructure, along with human, cultural, and natural resources. In this report, Thailand was ranked 77 in Regulatory Framework; 43 in Business Environment and Infrastructure; and 21 in Human, Cultural, and Natural Resources. Based on this ranking, Rupjumlong highlights the need to improve Thailand's tourism competitiveness particularly against its neighbouring ASEAN countries. In order to surpass its competitors, Rupjumlong strongly suggests that it is imperative to focus on improving Thailand's tourism regulatory framework first and foremost and in doing this, emphasizes "creating [an] attractive atmosphere for tourism promotion by eradicating [the] hindrance[s] of tourism development and creating proper rules and regulations to facilitate foreign direct investment (FDI) (Rupjumlong 2012).

In critiquing the National Tourism Development Plan based on the World Economic Forum's Reports, Rupjumlong underlines the need for Thailand to align its national policies with global and regional standards in order to remain competitive in the face of global and regional structural shifts. What Rupjumlong meant with “eradicating the hindrances of tourism development and creating proper rules and regulations” may be interpreted subjectively, however, it does reflect the current strategies of the Thai government and police regarding the “cleansing” of the negative image of Thailand pertaining to the visible sex tourism sector. From this, the line can be drawn from how global and regional trends and shifts influence the development of national policies and development strategies, which further trickle down to affect people on the ground such as the transgender community.



CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

3.1. Introduction

In order to understand the lives of the transgender women interviewed in this study, one specific aspect of their day-to-day living I will look into is their experiences at work.²¹ In spite of the diversity of actors that transgender women communicate with, the first section will focus on the two groups of people that the transgender women themselves have deemed to have a big impact on them in terms of surviving their daily lives; namely the Khun Mae/Mama and the police. This section will introduce the Khun Mae and Mama as important positive figures in the lives of transgender women in Thailand, as well as how the respondents configure the police as an arm of the state. After introducing these figures, I will then show how a variety of actors—families, employers, mamas and brokers, friends and clients, as well as the state—play an important role in shaping the work of the transgender women. In this section, these actors will be situated within the broader discussion on the transgender women's occupations and experiences at work located in particular political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts. It is worth noting that there is a dearth of comprehensive research regarding the working conditions in the sex work and entertainment industries in Thailand. There is also a lack of legislation and policies outlining labour standards in these industries aside from the existing laws criminalizing sex work such as the Prostitution Act and the Entertainment Places Act. At first glance, the lack of minimum standards in the entertainment sector has led to diverse working conditions; different establishments implement different workplace policies and thus different recruitment

²¹ For more in-depth descriptions of the individual transgender women who took part in this research, please see Appendix A.

processes, work benefits, and so on. For the sex work sector, the criminalization thereof has also led to a variety of working conditions and practices. Without detracting from the diversity of experiences of transgender women in the sex work and entertainment industries, this section provides a glimpse of the working conditions and experiences in these industries as told by the interviewees. This being said, this section does not attempt to provide a comprehensive outline of the working conditions of transgender women. The transgender women interviewed in this study had distinct experiences which varied based on their occupations: bar performers, cabaret performers, and sex workers. These experiences were influenced by different factors including workplace policies, family and community acceptance, socioeconomic status, and migrant status.

3.2. The Khun Mae, Mama, and the Police

3.2.1. Khun Mae and Mama

Based on the interviews, transgender women rely on their personal connections to gain information. Their personal connections, primarily consisting of fellow transgender friends and co-workers, play a major role in providing job opportunities, financial assistance and emotional support, as well as important information on migration and access to migration channels. They are also key in disseminating valuable information on how to survive and thrive as an entertainer or sex worker, such as on how to apply makeup, talk to foreigners, book clients, and stay safe on and off work. According to one NGO informant, transgender women rely heavily on these network of friends mainly because it is much easier and much more comfortable opening up to a fellow transgender woman about issues and problems such as sexual health. Transgender women are generally more at ease talking to another transgender woman since they are better positioned to have a greater understanding of their circumstances and can empathize due to having encountered similar experiences and situations in life. Due to these commonalities, transgender women tend to surround themselves with

other transgender women. This is not to say that transgender women do not make friends with cis-gender women and other lesbian, gay, and queer people, or even heterosexual men. However, it is in this perspective that groups of transgender women more or less act as a family and treat each other as sisters.

A key member of the transgender “family” in Thailand is the ‘khun mae’ (คุณแม่). ‘Mae’ (แม่) means “mother” in Thai. However, according to an NGO informant, a ‘khun mae’ for transgender women is a highly respected, older transgender woman whom younger transgender women look to as sources of information and support. In this aspect, a ‘khun mae’ can be found in one’s circle of friends and at work. A ‘khun mae’ is different from a ‘mama’ (mama-san). In the context of transgender sex workers, Sally, who herself is a mama, explains that a mama’s role is multi-purpose.²² A mama can be a creditor, a landlady, a pimp/employer, a travel guide, and a broker; she can fulfil one or two of these roles, or all of the above. A mama can be someone a transgender woman calls for help when dealing with the police or immigration officials.

Whereas a ‘mama’ may act as a pimp and/or a broker for sex workers, a ‘khun mae’ serves more as a house mother. Moreover, due to the association of the term ‘mama’ to a sex worker pimp, the term “mama” can carry negative connotations. However, a transgender woman can both act as a ‘mama’ and a ‘khun mae’ at the same time. The difference between a ‘khun mae’ and a ‘mama’ can be quite blurred; for example, transgender women in need of financial assistance may turn to either ‘mama’ or ‘khun mae’ for support. The difficulty distinguishing between the two may also arise when the term ‘mama’ is used to mean “mother”, pertaining to the family relationship among transgender social networks, instead of ‘mama’ as in the pimp. Regardless, according to

²² There is no reason to believe that a mama does not fulfil similar roles for cis-women sex workers, but since Sally and I were talking in just about transgender sex workers, I wanted to point the importance of context.

the NGO informant a 'khun mae' commands a great deal of respect among transgender women. One of the respondents went as far as saying, "*I believe 100% whatever my khun mae says.*"

3.2.2. The Police

With her long-time experience as a sex worker, Gina states that, although she herself never had a problem with the police, police interaction with transgender women, and in particular sex workers, in the past has been very little. There was little to no need to worry being stopped by a policeman for questioning. Now, policemen are getting more involved with transgender women and sex workers in general. Gina, Sally, and NGO informants all agree that this is because of the government's changing attitudes on Thailand's image. As the government tries to address human/sex trafficking, drugs, and crime, transgender sex workers are at an increased risk of experiencing extortion, abuse, and violence from various groups including mafias.

The increase of tourism in Thailand was identified by Gina, Sally, and NGO informants as the reason why Pattaya, specifically, has become a more dangerous city than in the past couple of decades. They say that as more and more money could be made in tourism, powerful mafias became involved and competed against each other. Corruption in the government and police force also worsened the situation. It became increasingly common that transgender sex workers paid bribes to police and mafias in order to remain safe. Mamas naturally provided money to transgender women in these situations as well as gave money "under the table" to some officials in order to protect themselves and the sex workers they managed. As one informant puts it: "*If you will stay here (Pattaya), you should choose to save yourself... we choose to pay (bribes) for [safety].*"

Though transgender sex workers are the most vulnerable group, other transgender women are also subjected to discrimination and abuse by the police. Ruby, one of the cabaret workers, mentioned how she was asked to pull over by the police for a random drug test. She was asked to provide a urine sample on the side of the road without any partition or cover, violating her privacy. Although she said that the police never asked her if she were transgender, she says that when women were asked to do the drug test, the police always provided them with a partition.

However, there are some examples of positive police interaction. Star for example recalled an experience that when her motorbike was stolen, she ran to the police for help and was treated nicely and professionally. Not all police discriminate or ask for bribes and some are said to be even open to have a serious relationship with a transgender woman. Regardless, Ruby believes that transgender women do want to cooperate with the police, but it is they who make things difficult for transgender women by violating their rights and treating them badly. Ruby points out that the bad treatment of the police was due to the generalized belief that transgender women are criminals, with the police and media treatment of transgender women playing a huge part to perpetuate this belief. This generalization of transgender women's public image was also echoed by transgender sex workers who feel that the fact that there are many transgender women doing sex work creates a bad image for all transgender women in Thailand, but although they would like to work in other jobs, the discrimination they experience push them to the margins of society and give them very limited options aside from sex work.

As expressed by Gina, social, economic, and political changes throughout Thailand's history in the past 30 or 40 years have shaped the current structural conditions for transgender women. There are many structural changes in Thailand that have trickled down to affect transgender women, but the development of Thailand's tourism is probably the most influential and noticeable of these changes. In fact, most

of the Thai interviewees have pointed to the development of tourism in key cities as a major factor to their decision to migrate from their rural communities. Gina and Sally, some of the first Thai transgender women who migrated into Pattaya, saw the opportunities that tourism provided them as transgender women. Along with these opportunities however, were also challenges including an increasing propaganda against transgender women that put them in a negative light in the eyes of the government, the police, and the general public. Due to their association with various illegal activities, transgender women became targets of negative media representation, public odium, and police abuse and violence.

3.3. Experiences at Work

The relationships of transgender women in Bangkok and Pattaya with the Khun Mae/Mama and the police underscore the political, economic, and social contexts in which transgender women are implicated in. At this point however, how deep these relationships reflect these structural conditions are situational at best. In this regard, the work experiences of transgender women provide a larger window from which to look at their experiences as a whole. Given the 'ghetto employment' that transgender women are boxed into (Winter 2006), the work of transgender women can provide some salient points as to how they are able to cope with or transcend institutionalized stigma and other negative associations while also being constrained by these structural conditions. In particular, the work of transgender women has some interesting overlaps with their cross-border movement/migration. This opens up another discussion on the migration experiences of transgender people; which, in itself is a largely underresearched subject. With the work and cross-border experiences of transgender women in mind, this section presents the accounts of the interviewed transgender women regarding the occupations within the sex and entertainment industries; namely as cabaret performers, bar performers and sex workers.

3.3.1. Cabaret Performers

Employed in one of the most established cabaret theatres in Thailand, the three cabaret performers: Jewel, Star, and Ruby; have better working conditions, and in particular, earn a higher income compared to the rest of the interviewees. Although they are called cabaret performers, Thai cabaret, according to the theatre's owner, is distinct from the definition of 'cabaret' popularized by cabaret theatres like the Moulin Rouge and the Crazy Horse in Paris, France despite taking inspiration from them. The performers do not perform nude nor do sexually suggestive performances. Rather, their shows are reminiscent of Las Vegas showgirls with their elaborate sets, props, and intricate costumes that incorporate feathers, sequins, and so on.

The cabaret theatre had strict workplace policies such as a rigorous hiring process and work schedule. All three performers had to undergo an interview and a competitive audition process to be hired into the show. Physical appearance, sociability, and the ability to dance and sing are key criteria in getting hired. Star and Ruby say that white skin is a must and that all the girls in the cabaret undergo surgery to enhance their appearance. It is important for cabaret performers to portray a particular image of beauty to cater to the different tastes of their audience. Star, whom both Ruby and Jewel say is a classic Thai beauty—with her white complexion, large eyes, thin nose, soft jawline and an overall soft, amicable facial features—is said to pander to Thai and Western preferences. Ruby claims she appeals more to East Asian audiences. This is though there is not much difference in their facial characteristics; Ruby's nostrils, cheekbones, and jawline are only a little bit more pronounced than Star's. Jewel on the other hand relies more on her comedic appeal than her beauty; she has darker skin and is larger than the other two performers. Though Jewel does not fit the typical concept of cabaret beauty, she says that she was hired by the theatre because of her experience in performing arts

in high school. In fact, her number during the cabaret show served as a comic relief compared to the more grandiose and showgirl appeal of the other performances.

The cabaret performers' daily work schedule can be quite demanding. Star, Jewel, and Ruby worked a total of 8 hours a day but from 3:00 pm to 11:00 pm. All performers were expected to arrive at work at 3:00 to 4:00 pm and had at least an hour to prepare their costume and makeup before their first show; they do 3 to 4 shows every night which ended at 11:00 pm. If they have a new routine to perform, the performers stay to rehearse from 11:00 pm to 2:00 am—routines were updated once every month. Though the interviewees did not discuss how much they earned due to people from the management being present during the interview. Nonetheless, they are entitled to one day off a week but for girls who play a major role in the show, like Star and Ruby, they cannot take a day off on the same day another star is on leave. Although they never mentioned any insurance benefits, the cabaret performers said that they do get discounts and sometimes sponsorships to have cosmetics surgery. Though there is no formal partnership between the cabaret theatre and the clinics to provide transgender women with any kind of cosmetics surgery, it appears that providing surgery to transgender women is mutually beneficial for both businesses. As the transgender performers get surgery in a clinic, they serve a double purpose of promoting the clinic's services and the cabaret theatre. Compared to the workplaces of the other interviewees in this study, the cabaret theatre has clearly defined workplace policies. Unlike the bar performers, the cabaret performers have a stable income and do not need to solicit for tips. Although health insurance and other work benefits aside from their weekly day-off were not disclosed, the cabaret performers are in much less risk of labour exploitation.

In spite of these workplace policies, the show's emphasis on physical beauty does take a toll on the psychology of the cabaret performers. Ruby, for example, does not view herself as beautiful despite having undergone extensive surgery and despite

being one of the stars of the cabaret show. Additionally, Ruby said that they get surgery primarily for their job as performers, feeling good about themselves (how they look) comes second. The three interviewees said that it was typical among the performers in the cabaret to influence each other on getting surgery even though they might not need to get any more done. Within this context, the cabaret show's strong emphasis on physical appearance reinforces the reproduction of feminine beauty among transgender women. Looking or "passing" as a "real woman" goes beyond personal affects or safety, but extends to the realm of work which capitalizes on the exoticization of transgender women. In one way or another, the performance of feminine beauty by transgender women in cabaret theatres contributes to the exotic, otherworldly perception of transgender women but also perpetuates the exotic, oriental brand of Thai tourism.

Indeed, it is the cabaret performers' performance of exotic Thai beauty that gives them opportunities to work in Thailand and overseas. Twice or thrice every year, some of the cabaret performers—like Star and Ruby—get the opportunity to travel overseas to promote Thai tourism and the cabaret theatre. These promotional tours are sponsored by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). According to them, the TAT has already brought them to several countries in the past including Australia, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, and Viet Nam to name a few. Star and Ruby say that they are invited to perform in events organized by the Royal Thai Embassy in their respective countries. These events can be held anywhere from malls and convention centres to more formal business gatherings. Accordingly, the cabaret performers perform for an audience of just about anyone, from the general public to more elite members of society. The TAT arranges all necessary travel documents for them including air ticket, visa, and accommodations; and because these trips are sponsored by the state, going through immigration was never an issue for these transgender women, in spite of their passports identifying them as male due to the lack of legal gender recognition in Thailand. Moreover, Star and Ruby also say that the TAT takes care of everything once they arrive to the destination airport and gives them a VIP

service; this includes driving them to and from the airport, bringing them to their hotel, and transporting them to the performance venue.

Whether these cabaret performers perform sex work on the side remains unknown. In other entertainment venues, receiving requests for sexual services from clients may be accepted, expected, and done up front or under the table. However, the likelihood of these sorts of requests or expectations being felt or experienced by the three cabaret performers were never discussed due to the presence of other people during the interview. Nevertheless, during a separate interview with the show's production manager and costume designer, the two interviewees implied disapproval of sex work and went so far as to say that transgender women who go to work overseas are viewed negatively; implying that these people typically do "inappropriate work"—referring to transgender women in sex work.

3.3.2. Sex Workers

Roxy and Gina's experiences as sex workers come more from their time doing sex work overseas than doing sex work in Thailand. In this case, the terms and conditions in which transgender women do sex work can vary from country to country and from the agreement of the mama, pimp, and sex worker. Presented here are the three interviewees' own experiences and therefore should not be taken generally. Roxy's experience, for example, is essentially different from that of Gina's because she relies more on her personal connections and ability to meet boyfriends online. In this context, Roxy can be considered as a freelance sex worker since she is not affiliated with any employer or establishment and finds clients on her own. Gina, alternatively, worked with a mama to find clients and travel overseas.

In Thailand, Gina and Roxy say that a sex worker usually earns 1,000 to 2,000 Thai baht for every client. They usually provide sexual services in the client's hotel

room or in a hotel they agreed to meet in. Drawing from her long-time experience as a sex worker, Gina says that if you're lucky to find a rich customer, you can convince him to pay 20,000 baht for one night. She says that if you can tell that they're rich, you can substantially raise your asking prices and they will still be willing to pay for sexual services. Though this might seem to be an incredible amount, the NGO informant I asked to verify this claim did not seem so surprised and implied that asking prices can always vary depending on physical appearance, sociability, and skill.

Doing sex work overseas is a different story. First, when talking about the cross-border movement of transgender sex workers in Southeast Asia, one characteristic that came up during the interviews was that they do not stay in one city for an entire year. Second, is that their movement is supported or facilitated by personal connections (e.g. family and friends) and more organized transnational groups.

Instead of staying in one city or regional hub in Southeast Asia, transgender sex workers appear to frequently move around the region depending on whether it is the low season (May-October) or high season (November-April) for tourism in Thailand. While some sex workers go back to their home provinces in Thailand during low season, others choose to do sex work in other countries. Roxy for example, usually goes back to her home province to stay with her family during the low season. However, in some cases, Roxy says that she travels to countries like Singapore or Hong Kong for sex work. After meeting a boyfriend/client through online mobile apps such as Facebook or Line, Roxy says that she convinces them to fly her into the country so they can meet in person. She says that she does not have any difficulty passing through immigration borders since she enters as a tourist and never overstays her visa. Unlike Gina and Sally, Roxy directly communicates and negotiates with her clients without using an intermediary such as a mama. Unique among the other transgender women, Roxy uses her own creative strategy to be able to travel overseas and find work through social media. She is the only one in this study to have used social media to her benefit and

accomplish her goals. Roxy says that she learned how to do this after hearing from her peers and since then have taught herself how to talk to get boyfriends that would help her travel abroad.

On the other hand, Gina and Sally's accounts of doing sex work overseas is remarkably different. Unlike the cabaret performers who gain sponsorship from the Thai government, some transgender sex workers rely on a transnational circuit that organizes and facilitates the cross-border movement of these people. In order to access this circuit, a mama's role as a broker is of key significance. As Sally describes her role with regard to brokering, she explains that she is sub-contracted by another broker in the country of destination to recruit and send transgender sex workers to the country of destination. A typical business transaction in Southeast Asia starts when a client overseas wants to bring in a transgender sex worker into the country. Sally gives the example of a wealthy Chinese businessman in Singapore who will host a big business event. Considering the businessman wants to be a 'good host', he plans ahead of his event and hires a broker to send sex workers to Singapore. According to Sally, the broker will tell her the kind of sex workers their client is looking for, i.e. characteristics such as age, height, skin colour, body type, personality, and level of experience in sex work. It is then up to Sally to identify and classify the sex workers she recruits and send them abroad. To send these workers overseas, Sally contacts sex workers where they have an agreement or contract on payment terms including if she has to lend a sex worker money for travelling, and her share of the worker's earnings. After an agreement has been made between Sally and the transgender woman, she then helps prepare the necessary travel arrangements to send them to Singapore.

Gina, who had much more experience travelling overseas, provides a similar story. She says that sex workers have to come to an agreement with a mama or broker first before being able to go to any country. This agreement appears much like a job contract that outlines the terms and conditions of the work expected from the sex

worker, including how much a sex worker is expected to earn and how much she gives back to her mama or broker. In principle, the amount of money a sex worker is supposed to earn, how much she gives to her mama, and how much she keeps, varies between agreements and is based on the duration of overseas stay and the expectation of the mama and relevant third party actors. Gina said that she had to rely on her mama to help her throughout the migration process; from arranging travel documents, going through airport immigration, finding lodging, finding and negotiating prices with clients, and return. Gina gives an example of going to Europe for one year. Since the visa application process to European countries was a bit more tedious and the flight tickets and accommodation more expensive compared to Southeast Asian countries, Gina stayed and worked abroad for far longer—usually at least 1 year and up to 2 years—than she would have if she went to countries near Thailand. Since the duration of stay is long and they can expect to earn more per client, a sex worker could be expected to earn one million baht for one year. How she will earn this much depends on her and her mama. According to Gina, the client pays her directly and that she will have to give the mama's share of her total earnings once they are back in Thailand.

A mama not only helps her get around a foreign country, but also serves as a guarantee to make sure she comes back to Thailand. Since a mama serves as the primary benefactor and person responsible for the sex worker, a sex worker needs to follow her mama's rules. Gina travelled and stayed with her mama in European countries as a safety and security measure. According to Gina, when she was in Germany she only stayed inside her room and did not leave without her mama because aside from not being allowed to roam around the city, she could not speak German or English and did not know anything about the city they were in. Throughout the duration of a transgender woman's stay in the country, the mama is in charge of seeking clients, negotiating prices, and arranging meeting time and place. Thus making the sex worker become heavily dependent on her mama. Gina does not seem to have control over who she has sex with or how many times a day since it is the role of the mama to negotiate with

clients and facilitate meet ups. There is also a pressure to do sex work as much as possible due to the quota of earnings she has to meet as stated in the contract.

Based on her limited description of her experience doing sex work overseas, it is not difficult to determine that the risk of her being exploited by her mama and even abused by her customer is high. Nevertheless, it is important to note that she knew or at least had a decent understanding of the terms and conditions of work prior to going overseas. Moreover, Gina has spent time overseas more than once—aside from Germany, she has been to Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong; which means that she has elected to work in similar conditions repeatedly. It appears that in spite of the possibility of her rights being severely limited, Gina perceives that the gains she receives from doing sex work overseas outweigh these limitations. Moreover, Gina points out that the anti-trafficking efforts of governments worldwide has made this practice become more difficult now than it used to be. Thus, Gina says that for Thai transgender women to do sex work in European countries is very rare. When asked about any difficulty she faced when she was active in migrating to other countries to do sex work, Gina states that the only difficult part of travelling was when she has to transit through Muslim countries such as the UAE and Qatar where transgender women are often questioned about their gender. Yet, Gina says that as long as she is with her mama, these situations presented no real threat or danger because the mama will take care of it.

3.3.3. Bar Performers

The experiences and working conditions of Lucky and Rika as bar performers differ greatly from that of the rest of the transgender women interviewed in the study, primarily because they are migrant workers. Throughout the time spent gathering data, Lucky and Rika were the only transgender migrant workers available for interview. Despite efforts to gather data from other migrant transgender women, changes in the

socio-political environment of Thailand regarding migrant labour and transgender women made it increasingly difficult to ask migrant transgender women of other nationalities and other occupations to participate in the study due to security reasons. In this context, it is important to acknowledge that the situations in which both Lucky and Rika are in are relatively better and safer than the migrant transgender women who were not able to participate in this study.

Before discussing Lucky and Rika's working experiences in a Bangkok bar, I feel that it is important to first provide some context into their arrival and work in Thailand in order to better understand their accounts on labour migration. Before becoming a performer in Bangkok, Rika had planned to teach English instead. In order to get hold of information that would impact her decision to migrate, Rika contacted her friend who was an English teacher in Thailand to learn about working and living conditions in the country. With the support and encouragement of her family, Rika decided to leave the Philippines to find a teaching job in Thailand. Rika entered on a tourist visa and did the ritual of doing visa runs to renew her tourist visa for a few months. Since it proved difficult for her to find a job, her friend introduced her to one of the bars in Bangkok and encouraged her to try performing since she already had prior experience back in the Philippines. This was how Rika came to performing in Bangkok. After a couple of months, Rika was introduced to a client who offered her a stint in Singapore. This client paid for her ticket to fly to Singapore. After this short stint, Rika maximized her one-month tourist visa in Singapore to look for jobs while staying with the friends she knew in the city. Eventually, Rika was able to secure a 6-month contract with another bar which allowed her to stay longer in the country. After her 6 months in Singapore were over, Rika went back to Bangkok to continue performing. She says that she is happy with what she does and is no longer looking for English teaching jobs. Rika's experience of labour migration is similar to that of Roxy's in that they both rely on the personal connections they make. Rika however, relies more on her friends and friends of friends in order to find jobs and migrate. Whether it's a boyfriend or a friend,

both Rika and Roxy are able to make use of their personal connections to gain information on migration and the resources to accomplish this. Rika's strategic use of her connections in Bangkok and Singapore has helped make migrating, finding work, and living in either city easier for her in the absence of recruitment agencies.

Lucky, on the other hand, is a special case. According to her, she was “sent” to Thailand by her family out of disapproval and shame of her gender. Lucky came to Thailand more than 10 years ago with her mother and sisters. Before completing her high school education in the Philippines, Lucky says that her parents told her they will take a one-week vacation in Thailand. Her family arranged all her travel documents for her; passport, airplane ticket, and visa. It was only after coming to Bangkok that she realized that her family intended to keep her in Thailand “for good.” Her family had a small business in Bangkok at the time and they were able to put Lucky and her sisters in an international school to finish their education. It was out of shame that her family brought her to Thailand to stay. Lucky says that her sexuality brought shame to her family and to avoid further social ridicule from their community, her family decided to “send her away to Thailand.” Lucky never went back to the Philippines ever since.

After finishing her final year of high school in Thailand, Lucky decided to run away from home. When she was 16, Lucky was discovered by a fashion designer in the Philippines who gave her the opportunity to do modelling stints while in high school. With this modelling background, she decided to model as a freelancer despite initially wanting to become a chef. After running away, Lucky became a homeless person for a short while, sleeping on benches in the waiting areas for motorcycle taxis for three days. After this, her friend from school helped her and let her stay in their home for a few months. Despite being treated well by a newfound family, Lucky knew she couldn't rely on her friend's support and sought work. She mentions that once she was able to book modelling jobs, she checked in at cheap hotels around Bangkok for a place to stay in

and bathe at night. During the day, she deposited her belongings in baggage counters in department stores while she went off to go to castings and auditions.

Despite running away, Lucky was able to extend her student visa (from studying in Bangkok) for six months. When her visa expired, she stayed with a tourist visa for 3 years, after which she was able to find a job as a production assistant for a television show, securing a work permit for 3 and a half years. She also modelled during this time and with the help of her modelling agency, she was able to travel to cities like New York, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Macau, and Hong Kong. Despite presenting female, Lucky says she did not have much problems when going abroad even though her passport indicates she is male. The only memory she recalled of a negative experience was when she was questioned by Singaporean immigration officers for suspicion of prostitution. She was never taken to an interrogation room however, as she says she quickly rebutted the immigration officer after he questioned her. She says she instinctively learned how to respond to immigration officers in those types of situations as it is important to show them that you are confident and you know what you are doing; *“you need to be quick when being interrogated by immigration officers, if you show hesitation they will think you’re lying.”*

With her modelling agency, she never had difficulty finding jobs or travelling abroad. She does note however, that her tan skin was a turnoff in the Thai modelling industry, so she mostly booked jobs overseas. She says that her gender never became a huge issue when modelling. But after modelling for a decade, Lucky decided to have a career change because although modelling pays well, the industry is very strict and there are a lot of rules. Being a frequent customer of a local bar in Bangkok and making friends with those who worked at the bar, Lucky began working as a regular featured entertainer.

Lucky's story is special because she initially migrated into Thailand with her family, but under the false pretence of a tourist vacation. Her family had planned all along that they will stay in Thailand, where Lucky and her sisters will finish their education. Lucky ran away from her family and became homeless, but with the help of her friends and driven by her strong sense of determination, she was able to find a job and cope with whatever challenges she faced. Lucky's later experience working overseas was facilitated by her modelling agency which booked her jobs in different countries and arranged all necessary travel documents. It was only until she decided to stop modelling that Lucky stayed in Thailand and through the connections she has made, she was able to begin work as an entertainer. Based on Lucky's story, it is clear that her friends had been crucial to helping her survive an incredibly difficult time in her life. From there, Lucky was able to move forward and benefit from her job as a model in order to travel and work in different countries. During this time, her modelling agency has been integral in facilitating her cross-border movement. Overall, Lucky's migration into Thailand is a direct result of the strict gender norms and social context in the Philippines. Once in Thailand, and after running away from her family, Lucky had to face further challenges on her situation of homelessness and joblessness which she coped with by devising creative strategies and through sheer will and determination.

Lucky and Rika did not undergo a strict recruitment process to be hired as bar performers. Lucky, who used to be a model with a penchant for dancing, and Rika, who has years of experience as a performer in Manila, were both hired after making friends with the bar owner and other performers. Both transgender women were given the opportunity to perform in the bar and later on became regular acts. They both work 3 to 4 nights a week and do 1 or 2 numbers each night from 9:00 pm to 12:00 midnight. In spite of being regular performers, Lucky and Rika say that they do not have a contract with the bar. Instead, they work with a fellow performer who helps them book jobs in other bars and clubs. In this arrangement, Lucky and Rika work in more than one bar every week. Sometimes they work in 2 to 3 bars on the same night, travelling to and

from venues in the middle of performances. For each venue, Lucky and Rika say that they earn between 1,000 to 2,000 Thai baht. This means that on nights they perform in 3 venues, they can earn up to 6,000 baht per night. However, working in 3 venues in one night is very tiring and do not happen very often; thus, at 1,000 to 2,000 baht per night and working 3 to 4 nights a week, their weekly income would be around 3,000 to 8,000 baht. Because of this, Lucky and Rika say that they have to rely on tips to supplement their income.

Their performances typically involve dancing and comedic interactions with audiences. They also incorporate playful touching and sexually suggestive gestures in their acts to enhance audience impact. However, these never amount to sexual acts with their audience. For Lucky and Rika, employing comical or sexually suggestive movements and gestures provides a shock value to their performance and is used only to serve the purpose of entertaining their audience. Both performers say that they have no interest in providing sexual services to their customers in and out of their workplaces for moral reasons. Nevertheless, Lucky says she has experienced receiving money from a sexual partner a few times as a “gift of love”. Lucky says she never solicited money from these partners before or after sex and that these partners just gave the money to her.

Given these working conditions, a number of factors might put Lucky and Rika at risk of exploitation and abuse. As migrant workers, Lucky and Rika should ideally have a permit and a visa to work in Thailand. Since they do not have a formal contract with an employer however, both transgender women cannot secure a work permit or a working visa and are technically working as freelance performers. Moreover, because of the lack of a permit and visa, Lucky and Rika regularly renew their tourist visa at their own cost. Although both performers say that the lack of legal documents to work in Thailand was not a big issue for them, this puts them at risk of being arrested by police for working in Thailand without proper documents. Regularly renewing their

tourist visas also puts a great burden on them. Additionally, the terms in which both performers earn their income is very unpredictable. Their heavy reliance on getting tips show that their flow of income is highly unstable and is barely enough to sustain a living in Bangkok. Work benefits as little as a paid leave is also unavailable to them along with other benefits such as health insurance.

In response to this, and interestingly enough, Rika was the only one of the interviewees who brought up these issues regarding wages and work benefits for entertainers, as well as the possibility of entertainers unionizing. She points out that entertainers in general had varying degrees of wages and different entertainers were paid based on different scales. There was no minimum wage in the industry and each entertainer's pay had to be negotiated with their employer. Rika considers her work as an entertainer as a profession and that workers in the industry should get paid well, however, because of how the industry currently works, things such as healthcare is the sole responsibility of the individual. Rika believes that if entertainers want to get better wages, workers need to unionize and labour standards for performers had to be developed.

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented some examples of the experiences of transgender women in terms of their work and cross-border movement which, along with some influential actors, reflect their complex and interrelated political, economic, and social environment. Of note, the Thai state's push for tourism development as part of their broader economic development plan has considerably shaped the political and economic milieu of transgender women. Indeed, the development of Thai tourism has led to more opportunities for both Thai and migrant transgender women to work and earn income. Tourism has also brought opportunities for transgender women to travel and work overseas as entertainers and sex workers through the efforts of the TAT as a

political institution and the transnational sex industry, respectively. This economic set up points to tourism development creating ‘territories of freedom’ (Ojanen 2009) and providing opportunities for transgender women to live the ‘gay lifestyle’ (Jackson 2011), as well as, by extension, opportunities to develop ‘cosmopolitan subjectivities’ through interacting with foreigners (Chin 2013). Despite these positive developments, tourism has also led to negative outcomes for transgender women such as their association with criminality. These negative outcomes are produced (and reproduced) through the synergy of national policies and social institutions that reinforce the already existing negative stereotypes against ‘perverse’ sexual identities and sexual behavior, particularly transgender women and sex work. Additionally, the experience of transgender women are also shaped by the social institution of feminine beauty in Thailand; since through their adherence to and performance of Thai feminine beauty, they are able to gain access to more economic opportunities and social privilege.

In conclusion, the labour and migration of transgender women into, out of, and within Thailand is significantly shaped by development of the tourism industry. In a political context, tourism development has led to national policies that further stigmatize transgender women as the state urges the tourism industry, particularly in Pattaya, to rebrand itself. Economically, however, tourism has also led to more opportunities for transgender women to work and travel, enabling them to support themselves and their families. This access to jobs—however limited—appears to also lead to social change as transgender women become more accepted by their families and their communities.

In the next chapter, I will expand on this analysis of the implications of the actors, structures, and institutions to transgender women in Thailand. I will do this by further contextualizing the Khun Mae/Mama, along with the TAT and police (as representatives of the state) with respect to the work of transgender women and underline the political, economic, and social conditions presented in this chapter. With

this in mind, I will also consider the coping mechanisms and possible forms of resistance that transgender women employ in order to survive or thrive, and assert and claim their cultural and legal citizenship in the Thai state, within the said structural contexts.



CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

With the previous chapter's findings illustrating the political, economic, and social aspects of tourism development in Thailand, I will now move to analyze the actors and structures that the transgender women interact with. I start with the 'trans family' as a coping mechanism in the face of societal stigma and discrimination. Key to this trans family is the Khun Mae and Mama whose roles I discuss as both matriarchs of a "family" of transgender women, as well as gatekeepers of information and resources. I then look at how the work that transgender women do reflect their subversion into homonormativity but at the same time exhibit legitimate forms of resistance. Lastly, I will point out the Thai state's dissonant treatment of transgender women and the broader effects of Thailand's tourism policy to transgender women and queer culture as a whole.

4.2. Matriarchs of Trans Family and Gatekeepers of Information

One interesting finding that involves the Khun Mae/Mama is that transgender women often develop social networks amongst themselves. They do this because they feel that it is easier to open up to fellow transgender women about their experiences. Since transgender women's families and communities often reject them, these social groupings that transgender women form fills the gap that family and community rejection leave; providing transgender women the love and support they need in place of their families/blood relatives. In other words, this social group is an answer to the social isolation that transgender women experience due to stigma and discrimination.

Apart from love and support, the social group also provides them information and resources that help them cope with the political, economic, and social conditions present in their environment. Though not unique to transgender people, these alternative 'families', could be considered as a support system integral to the lives of transgender women. In this sense, the formation of these social groups is a coping mechanism within the context of an unequal and discriminatory social, economic, and political atmosphere.

These groups take the form of a hierarchical family structure rather than a horizontal social network. At the top of this hierarchy is the Khun Mae. The reason why this group is figured as a family is because of the transgender women's use of 'Khun Mae', which means 'mother' in Thai, to refer to the most respected transgender woman in their group. Transgender women figure themselves as a family of sisters. However, this does not mean that groups like these are not without its economic purpose. I turn to the Mama—figured as an employer, broker, creditor, etc.—and her group of transgender sex workers for a specific example. While this kind of group can also look like a family (providing love and support), it can also have a purpose of providing work and income for both the Mama and transgender sex workers. As previously noted, the mama is a key member of transgender women's groups as someone who connects transgender sex workers to the larger network of actors that assist and facilitate migration. A mama's access to and influence within this network is important as it determines her influence over transgender sex workers. In other words, the mama is the first person that transgender sex workers must turn to in order to access the information, financial resources, and personal connections necessary to give them the opportunity to travel and survive overseas to do sex work and earn a higher income. More than a broker, the mama is a transgender sex worker's gatekeeper of opportunities.

It is in this background that transgender sex workers heavily rely on their Khun Mae/Mama. In order to work abroad, transgender sex workers still choose to depend on

the Khun Mae/Mama in spite of the limitations involved; i.e. limited mobility overseas. The fact that transgender women themselves choose—given the limited options they have—to become dependent on the Mama as a means to achieve greater economic ends is reminiscent of the concept of indentured mobility proposed by Rhacel Parreñas (2011). This means that for transgender sex workers, dependence on their mamas can be regarded as a result of the existing structures in place, i.e. poor economic conditions in the country of origin; the criminalization of sex work; labour policies that do not protect the rights of transgender people; the lack of legal gender recognition of transgender people that create restrictions on the migration of transgender women; and restrictive gender norms and stereotypes that lead to the systematic discrimination of transgender women. Driven by social and economic needs to earn an income and support their families, compounded by discriminatory policies and social stigma that prevent them from entering various other job sectors, transgender women are left with limited options but to work as sex workers and rely on the network, information, and resources that the mama can provide.

4.3. Subversion and Forms of Resistance

Having touched on the fact that structural conditions push transgender women to sex work, points us to the Thai state's unequal treatment of transgender women. But on this note, it is important to remember that transgender women are limited to a few occupations; not just sex work. With gender norms and stereotypes culminating in the form of job discrimination, transgender women in Thailand are left with only very limited space to enter the job market aside from the entertainment, beauty, retail, and sex industries; and even within these industries, transgender women are still discriminated against. Among the jobs in these industries, being a cabaret performer appears to be the one most favored by the Thai state. Thai cabaret has been so renowned that it has become a permanent feature of Thai tourism. This is exemplified by the fact that the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) sponsors transgender cabaret performers

to promote Thai tourism overseas. In this case, the cross-border movements of transgender cabaret performers to various countries throughout Asia serves primarily this purpose of promoting tourism. Transgender cabaret performers have become famous in Thailand since the 80s and 90s and have played an important role in bringing in tourism revenue to support Thailand's national economic development. It is for this reason that the TAT supports these particular transgender women in the first place.

Based on these personal experiences of Star and Ruby, the cabaret shows and their transgender performers are employed by the TAT as part of their marketing strategy to promote tourism in Thailand. Given that this is part of the state's policy to promote tourism in order to push forward Thailand's national development, two conflicting sides in the state's treatment of transgender women appear: one where state actors continue to stigmatize transgender women and deny them of their rights; and another where the state utilizes transgender women as beauty models and performers, ambassadors of Thai tourism in a way, in order to achieve the state's goals of national development. As mentioned in previous chapters, Thailand is a well-known destination for LGBT tourism and, in particular, a global hub for cosmetic surgery catering to transgender people. Transgender cabaret performers contribute to this image of Thailand. Weber, and so many other queer scholars, call this phenomenon 'pinkwashing', or the cynical promotion of gay rights as human rights as representative of a state's modernity and development (Weber 2016). In supporting these cabaret performers, the Thai state also effectively alienates other transgender women. This means that the benefits gained from the support of the state is only limited to a particular group of transgender people. In other words, while the Thai state benefits from transgender cabaret performers, the transgender community as a whole still suffers from widespread stigma and discrimination; most notably at the hands of the police.

Another impact of providing support only to transgender cabaret performers is the preservation of the 'ghetto employment' in which transgender women are pushed

into (Winter 2006). Considering cabaret as an accepted occupation for transgender women only cements entertainment work as a sector in which transgender women can enter; it does not lead to less employment discrimination in other job industries, and perpetuates the lack of space for transgender people to become professionals in other sectors.

By supporting and promoting transgender cabaret performers, the Thai state has accepted cabaret as an occupation for transgender women that is productive for the nation. In order to perform her job effectively, the transgender cabaret performer must be depoliticized. Additionally, through her acceptance and endorsement of Thai standards of feminine beauty, the transgender cabaret performer reproduces the desires of the 'straight neoliberal subject' for consumption in terms of the capitalist beauty and cosmetic surgery industries. By endorsing Thai standards of feminine beauty, being depoliticized, and being (re)productive in/for capitalism on behalf of the nation (Duggan 2003, Weber 2016), it is now possible to figure the transgender cabaret performer as a 'normal transgender woman' and a 'gay rights holder'.

Does this mean that transgender cabaret performers have allowed trans identity and culture to be commodified in exchange for the right to have rights? And if so, has their development from 'perverse transgender woman' to 'normal transgender woman' who has the right to have rights been recognized by the state? On the commodification of trans identity and culture, I think it is relevant to go back to Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan's point on the commodification of queer culture being a platform from which queers can stake their claim toward societal recognition—the more exposed nonqueer people become with queerness, the more they are likely to accept queer people (2002). For example, the three cabaret performers believe that their jobs in cabaret shows have the power to shape a more positive public perception of transgender women as decent and productive members of society. Star for instance shares how despite her family's—her father especially—initial disapproval and unacceptance of her

gender, her ability to financially support her family through her job as a cabaret performer has led to her father being proud of her so much so that he often brags about her to his neighbors and calling her his daughter. But the capacity to incite positive social change is not limited to being a cabaret performer—although they are in the best position to do so, with the state's support. One common trait among all transgender women in this study, whether they are bar/cabaret performers or sex workers, is the fact that they send money back to their families. For the Thai respondents especially, providing financial support to their families has opened doors to become accepted by their families and communities. Lucky and Rika also send money back to their families in the Philippines. Lucky supports her niece and nephew's education because she feels it is important to help the future generation to live a better life than she did; while Rika is using her money to invest in housing for her family so they would have a more permanent home. When asked why she thought transgender women go through so much trouble to support their families, Rika said that it is because of the love that transgender women have for their families that they do this; even though work might be difficult, with little pay, and in spite of whatever discrimination they have experienced in the past. Rika's statement underscores the filial responsibility ingrained in Southeast Asian cultures. With respect to the social, political, and economic context in which transgender women are implicated in, their decisions to work in whichever occupation can provide them opportunities to prompt positive social change in their own ways. Unfortunately, not all transgender women benefit from the positive social change that transgender cabaret performers and bar performers can facilitate. Although there are a few—like Roxy, whose ability to support her family through sex work has led to family acceptance—many transgender women feel that being a sex worker perpetuates the negative stereotypes on transgender women in general. Gina feels this way and says that transgender sex workers do not want to portray their trans-sisters negatively. But considering the very limited options for transgender women to find work, they have little to no choice but to work as sex workers within Thailand or overseas. Gina's statement further complicates our understanding of the realities that transgender sex

workers face and rounds up the structural conditions that transgender women are embedded in; such as the limited job opportunities for transgender women, difficult working conditions, and structural discrimination and violence.

On this note, given that transgender sex workers are figured by the state as ‘perverse transgender woman’ who is subject to political, physical, sexual, affective, and discursive violence in the name of protecting Thai society and the state, has the Thai state fully recognized transgender cabaret performers as ‘normal transgender woman’? I think the fact that transgender cabaret performers still experience stigma and discrimination provides a persuasive contradiction against this; and Ruby’s own experience of police discrimination is an adequate example. This means that the cabaret performer is not completely ‘normal transgender woman’ as she is still subject to the discrimination and violence ideally reserved for the figure of ‘perverse transgender woman’. This is possibly because some agents of the state—like the police—do not differentiate between ‘normal’ and ‘perverse’; rather, they simply consider all transgender women as a figuration of the ‘perverse homosexual’. In other words, developing into ‘normal transgender woman’ by becoming a cabaret performer does not lead transgender women to the goal of realizing their rights, only to their commodification for the purpose of capitalism and national economic development. The fact that the Thai state does not completely recognize the rights of transgender people is a testament to this. Even though the Gender Equality Act has been signed into law, it still lacks enforcement. Moreover, legal gender recognition is still out of reach for transgender people in Thailand. This creates numerous barriers for them, particularly with regard to transgender people’s freedom of movement. For instance, Star and Ruby reveal that as long as they travel with the TAT, they will not have any problems going through immigration check points. But if they go overseas for personal travel, they will still be up for questioning by immigration officers. According to Ruby, it takes more time to explain their situation and make immigration officers understand. She says that

this is why it is important for them to have the opportunity to change the gender markers on their legal documents. For them, along with many other transgender women, legal gender recognition is one important step in a series of policy and societal changes that lead to the recognition, enjoyment, and exercise of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Challenging negative stereotypes in their own ways and desiring for legal gender recognition among other rights should be considered as legitimate forms of resistance; political acts that can be identified as an example of ‘perverse homosexuality’. Another political statement is given by Rika on unionizing and developing labour standards in the entertainment industry to give entertainers better wages and work benefits. These examples point to how ‘homosexuality’ and the ‘homosexual’ can be understood beyond the ‘normal’ versus ‘perverse’ dichotomy or singular *either/or* logics of statecraft as mancraft, but instead through plural *and/or* queer logics of statecraft.²³

4.4. Conclusion

Throughout the discussion of the experiences of the interviewees in this study, the Thai state’s discordant treatment of transgender women—their commodification on behalf of a neoliberal nationalist agenda—is one of the key takeaways with respect to the Thai tourism policy and its impact on the work and cross-border movement of transgender women. The conflict of interest between the fact that transgender women are used to promote Thai tourism, and the fact that transgender women are not afforded their rights and are continued to be discriminated is but one aspect of this. Although the Gender Equality Act of 2015 is a step toward changing societal perceptions and combating discrimination and stigma against transgender people, the use of this law

²³ For a discussion on *either/or* and *and/or* logics on queer international relations theory, see Weber 2016, 143-191.

and how effective it will be is yet to be seen. Much is also yet to be done in order to improve the quality of life for transgender people; most important is being able to change one's gender and gender marker in all legal documents since this has a direct effect on transgender people's right to freedom of movement.

However, transgender women's commodification and subversion by national patriotisms and neoliberalisms is not the only narrative in this study. Just as it is important to recognize how transgender women may be commodified, it is also crucial to pay attention to the forms of resistance—strategies to cope with and change structural conditions—that could be employed by transgender women.

But it is also worth noting that the interplay between Thai state politics and transgender people is circumscribed by Thai social and cultural norms. In particular, are the traditional gender norms and roles that pervade transgender people's lives as it influences transgender people's performance of feminine and masculine beauty, and their self-worth with respect to family acceptance. It is important to take into account that for many transgender women, their performance of feminine beauty is not simply based on personal preferences, self-worth, and confidence. A successful performance of feminine beauty can also determine a transgender woman's ability to work and earn an income; and by extension, her worth to society. I am not saying this to further exoticize and sexualize transgender women. But because of the value of feminine beauty to Thai society, it is the transgender women in the entertainment and sex industry that are often pressed to adhere to these beauty standards in order to access opportunities for work, social mobility, and family acceptance.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

Discussing the individual experiences of a diverse group of transgender women, this thesis explored some of the political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts that shape the labour and migration of transgender women into, out of, and within Thailand. The transgender women in this study have all, in some way, pointed to Thailand's tourism policy as a key factor in their access to work and income, their decision to migrate both internally and internationally, as well as their access to opportunities to travel and work overseas. Influenced by global and regional trends in the 80s and 90s, the Thai tourism industry has been mobilized to stimulate national development through increasing Thailand's global connectivity and developing the entertainment sector. But hidden beneath Thailand's move to globalization, the sex sector, with its historical roots preceding even the modern Thai tourism industry, has been steadily developing within the shadows of neoliberal globalization. In this background, the development of Thailand's tourism industry and sex industry has led to many transgender women in and around Thailand to flock to designated tourism zones in order to find work. This thesis also explored the social and cultural contexts in Thailand and the Philippines that circumscribe these political and economic conditions. Among these, family acceptance and the fulfilment of filial responsibility have been crucial driving factors in transgender women's search for work and income. The value of a successful performance of feminine beauty is also of key importance for the transgender women in this study, since it is a determining factor in their access to job opportunities.

The role of the Thai tourism policy in shaping transgender women's labour and migration brings into question how it positively and/or negatively affects transgender

women with respect to their human rights. In interviewing Thai and Filipino transgender women working in both the entertainment and sex industry, the study explored some examples of how transgender women are able to cope with societal stigma and discrimination through forming social groups among themselves. Interestingly, transgender women seem to establish an alternative 'family' which provides them care and support in the absence of their biological families. The concept of the Khun Mae serves is a testament to this and could be an indication of how transgender women organize themselves as a mothers and sisters. The Mama, distinct from the Khun Mae with her multiple roles that stretch from the personal lives of transgender women up to their working lives, holds great influence as well. As someone who has several years of experience in the sex sector and with years' worth of local and international connections, the Mama can drive a transgender sex worker's circular migration for sex work through her access to bigger transnational networks. Another topic that was explored in this study is how the Thai state both promotes and marginalizes transgender women. In particular, are the strategies employed by the Tourism Authority of Thailand to promote the tourism industry through the use of transgender cabaret performers. While the TAT may paint the Thai state as accepting and tolerant of transgender identities, the reality is that these transgender women are commodified and used to be productive for the Thai nation while withholding them their rights at the same time. The portrayal of transgender women as objects of fascination to draw tourists echoes what Cruz-Malave and Manalansan argue regarding the commodification of queer identity and culture. Transgender women's performance of feminine beauty, born from the pressure to blend in and conform to a heteronormative society, is transformed into an object of consumption and has manifested itself in different forms. On this end, it is imperative to look beyond this optimistic and positive representation of Thailand, for in spite of these seemingly progressive policies and attitudes, transgender women still experience severe systematic discrimination.

5.2. Research Considerations

Although this study has discovered some interesting information regarding the work and migration experiences of transgender women, part of any research endeavour is uncovering more questions for future studies. Moreover, considering the limitations of the research design as well as the challenges encountered during data collection, there are some important topics that this research is unable to further explore.

One of these is the organized network of people organizing and facilitating the cross-border movement of transgender women for sex work. Sally's testimony on her role as a mama puts the spotlight into the existence of a transnational circuit of third party actors. Unfortunately, more details on what happens after a transgender woman arrives in a country of destination or transit to do sex work was not given. Both Sally and Gina were not able to give further information on the third party actors operating on the destination country, including if they escorted transgender sex workers from airport to her accommodation, what type of accommodation was usually provided, and so on. The example Sally and Gina provided may just be one case of what happens when a transgender woman does sex work overseas. Other scenarios such as working in a bar and soliciting on the streets may possibly occur as well, and may also be facilitated by the same circuit. There are however, researchers whom have looked into these networks; most notable is Christine Chin who describes a collective of third party actors that take part in activities relating to transnational sex work in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Chin 2013). The occurrence of an international circuit facilitating the sex work of transgender women across Asia, even reaching as far as Europe, may not be fundamentally different from what Christine Chin describes. It is very possible to find the same mamas, brokers, pimps, drivers and escorts, and all other actors in the network involved in the cross-border sex work of cisgender women, also become involved in the occurrence of transnational sex work of transgender women. Regardless, it would be

interesting to see the differences between the experiences of women sex workers and transgender sex workers in the context of transnational sex work.

Other research topics that have also come to mind include:

- The prevalence of job discrimination for transgender people in specific industries beyond the entertainment, sex work, and beauty industries

Given that transgender people are marginalized into jobs in the entertainment, sex work, and beauty sectors, there are still some transgender men and women whom are able to enter other industries. In this regard, it would be interesting to find the quantitative data on the prevalence of discrimination against transgender people in particular industries.

- The working conditions of transgender women in the entertainment, cosmetics, and sex sectors²⁴

As previously mentioned, this thesis was not intended to provide a comprehensive account of the working conditions of transgender women in the entertainment, sex, and beauty sectors. On this note, working conditions (for women, men, gay, and transgender people) in these sectors are still relatively unknown. Understanding these conditions may prove helpful in protecting workers' rights and could even inform how states can address sexual exploitation, trafficking, and drug abuse that may occur within these particular job sectors.

- The role of technology in shaping contemporary sex work

One small but interesting finding in this thesis was Roxy's use of online dating apps to find her clients in Thailand and overseas. The development of technology in the past decade has drastically changed how we meet new people, develop new relationships, and maintain old and current ones. For sex workers, an online dating app could be an opportunity to meet and maintain clients with less risk of being arrested by the police

²⁴ The three sectors where transgender women are pushed into (Winter, 2006)

or being discovered by families and friends. It also makes doing sex work on the side possible; i.e. students and office workers, for example, can do sex work to earn additional income. In this context, how technology has shaped and/or continues to shape sex work for women, men, and transgender sex workers would be an interesting study that could help change how we view issues around sex work.

5.3. Conclusion

The marginalization of transgender women in Thailand can be seen as a result of the interplay between state policies and social attitudes. Thailand's drive towards economic development through its tourism industry has led to efforts, particularly from state actors, to improve the image of Thai tourism. This means transforming Thai tourism and eliminating or minimising its negative aspects such as its visible sex tourism industry. Already, efforts have been put into action to purge this negative perception from Thai tourism most epitomized by the renewed vigour to arrest sex workers and their employers in Pattaya. This has resulted in the profiling of transgender women as sex workers, and in association, drug abusers by the police in Pattaya; which has led to various cases of discrimination and abuse.

However, in spite of what appears to be the subjection of transgender women and the reproduction of stigma and discrimination, it is important to acknowledge the productive impact of more positive representations of transgender women that shape more tolerant and accepting social attitudes on transgender women locally and internationally. Among the interviewees, the bar performers and cabaret performers are seen to actively contribute to shaping a more positive image of transgender women. In this manner, they make use of the opportunities they get through the show performance as a platform from which they challenge negative stereotypes and claim social acceptance of transgender women. Moreover, it can also be said that given their ability to earn an income and support their families, the transgender women in this study are

also doing their part to change the negative perception on transgender people. Through working and sending money back to their families, transgender women have effectively changed how they were perceived and treated by the most important people in their lives: their family.

The key take away in this thesis is that transgender women in entertainment and sex work are affected by multiple political, economic, and social structures; most notably around tourism and development. While the positive impact of tourism on transgender women—i.e. positive representation and increasing opportunities for work and migration—can be easily perceived from the outside, policies for tourism development can negatively impact transgender communities and deepen existing societal stigma and discrimination. It is then imperative to pay attention to how these policies affect the individuals and the communities in question. Involving transgender people and listening to their needs and concerns throughout the policy-making process (from planning, to implementation, to evaluation) is crucial if the TAT would seek to engage transgender people as part of their tourism strategy.

Lastly, the transgender community and the broader LGBTIQ community should also be attentive to how the state attempts to divide queer populations between ‘normal’ and ‘perverse’ for the purpose of statecraft. Often, it might seem tempting to play into homonormative discourses in order to gain “victories” for the LGBTIQ community. But we must be wary of these temptations and seek to achieve victories that do not come at great cost.

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APPENDICES



จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
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APPENDIX A

Character Descriptions

Star, Ruby, and Jewel

Star, Ruby, and Jewel are three cabaret performers who came to Pattaya from different provinces in Thailand. Star identifies as a Sao Praphet Sorng as she identifies more as a woman, while Ruby identifies as transgender or Khon Kham Phet because she feels like her identity is beyond gender. Jewel on the other hand, identifies as a kathoey because she believes that different terms like sao prophet sorng, transgender, khon kham phet, or kathoey all mean the same thing. All three of them have worked as performers for at least 5 years. Prior to becoming a performer, Jewel was denied a job as a factory worker but was later introduced to cabaret by a former teacher. Due to her experience in performing arts at school, she was hired after an interview. Alternatively, Star was already 2 years into vocational school but strived to audition for the cabaret show driven by her passion for performing and her love of wearing costumes. Once she passed the audition, she left school and did not have any other job since. Ruby also did not have any prior job other than being a performer and just like Star, it was her dream to perform in the cabaret show ever since. Star and Jewel both support their families through their jobs. Ruby, however does not because both her parents have passed away.

Roxy

Roxy is a Thai transgender woman in her 30s, originally from Nakhon Pathom. Roxy is quite shy and usually responds with short answers. During the interview, Roxy also had some other work to do so her interview ran the shortest. Due to Roxy's disposition and the work she had to attend to, along with the translator adding her own opinions from time to time, it was quite difficult to ascertain whether Roxy was only giving answers to finish the interview as quickly as possible. Through some probing

however, I was able to get noteworthy information from our discussion despite the circumstances.

Roxy first migrated to Bangkok some 15 years ago, but later moved to Pattaya to do sex work. Before moving to Pattaya, Roxy had made friends with other sex workers who already stayed in the city and it was they who introduced Roxy to sex work. Once in Pattaya, Roxy stayed with her friends in a rented apartment and worked in a bar. Unsatisfied with the pay she received, Roxy decided to become a freelance sex worker. She does however, turn to her Khun Mae for serious problems and has a network of friends who help each other out in times of need.

Gina

One of the very first transgender women who came to Pattaya, Gina came to the tourist city 30 years ago from Northeastern Thailand. Now at 52 years old, Gina says that she wanted to go to Pattaya because she learned on television of how the city was being developed as a centre for tourism. Gina says that back in the 80s, she and many other transgender women regarded Chonburi as the “tourism province” and believed that they can find jobs, particularly in Pattaya, because of the burgeoning tourism industry. She points out that transgender women believed they can work there because they will be away from their communities and away from restrictive traditional gender norms. Aside from higher prospects of finding work in Pattaya, Gina also wanted to live away from her family and community due to the discrimination she faced as a transgender woman. Regardless, Gina says she still sent money to support her family out of filial obligation.

Gina was invited to Pattaya by her transgender friend who was already living in the city. Gina says that during that time, she did not have any information on how to do sex work and so she first worked as a waitress in restaurants. Eventually however, Gina

learned the tricks of the trade through observation and practice. Back then, Gina had to survive on her own and deal with her own problems. She said that nobody will teach you how to get clients, you had to learn by yourself and be strong because competition was tough. Despite the difficulties however, Gina says she preferred sex work because it was easy money and paid more than her job at the restaurant. With the money she earns, Gina says that she regularly sends money back to her family in the province despite their disapproval of her gender because she feels that it is her duty to support them.

During the 80s and the 90s, Gina says that transgender women had no real problems with police and law enforcement and had little interaction with either one of them. However, due to recent political changes in Thailand, this relationship has changed for transgender women in Pattaya. She says that since the Thai government wants to shift the image of Pattaya from being infamous for sex tourism into a more wholesome, family-friendly tourist destination, the police has begun targeting sex workers. Gina says that in the recent raids and other operations to arrest sex workers, transgender women are particularly vulnerable to police harassment due to the assumption that all transgender women were sex workers.

Sally

Due to severe time, logistical, and security constraints, Sally's interview transpired over the phone with the help of my contact who also translated for me. Despite these conditions and the limitations it presented, I was lucky enough to even get to talk with her and learn more about her position as a mama. Unlike other sex workers interviewed in this study, Sally was the only one who went on to become a mama after her many years of working as a sex worker.

Along with several other transgender women from the north-eastern provinces of Thailand, Sally migrated to Pattaya for sex work around 40 years ago. Sally stayed with other transgender women in a shared apartment owned by a mama. Similar to Gina, Sally also went to Pattaya after learning of the city's tourism industry and the opportunity it presented to transgender women and turned to sex work due to the easy money it presented compared to other jobs in the service sector. Just like the other transgender women in this study, Sally went into the sex industry in order to earn money to support herself and her family, and moved to Pattaya in order to escape restrictive traditional gender norms in her community in the province.

While working as a sex worker, Sally was mentored by her mama regarding sex work as well as on how to be a mama in the future. As a mama, Sally is an older transgender woman to whom younger transgender women can turn to for help, usually with regard to finances. Sally says that mamas often lend money to transgender women for various purposes including payment for emergency situations; for arranging travel documents to do sex work abroad; for gender and sexual reassignment surgeries; and even for bribing corrupt police and government officials or mafia members. Sally says that she sends Thai, Lao, and Cambodian transgender sex workers to Southeast and East Asia, as well as Europe to do sex work upon request by a client. On average, Sally earns 10,000 baht per transgender sex worker she sends on commission which does not include her share of the transgender sex worker's earnings as part of their agreement. According to her, she works for several people in other countries and that mamas are not the only actors involved in sending transgender sex workers overseas. Under these arrangements, Sally says that she has sent more than 100 transgender sex workers (Thai, Lao, and Cambodian) abroad to countries around the world including Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, etc. She also says that she either finds transgender sex workers to send abroad in Pattaya, or they find her. Sally never goes to provinces in order to directly recruit transgender women into sex work.

Rika

Rika is a Filipina entertainer in her early 30s who works closely with Lucky. Before coming to Bangkok, Rika was already a performer in bars around Manila. In 2015, Rika decided to become an English teacher in Thailand after hearing from her friends who were already teaching in Bangkok. She first came to Thailand on a tourist visa and did visa runs while applying for English teaching jobs. After a while, she was introduced to one of the bars in Bangkok by a friend who also worked with her in the Philippines and it was then that she began to work as an entertainer again.

Rika keeps in touch with her family and has very good relations with them. She sends money to her family every month and uses the money to invest in a house. She says that what she earns is enough and that her priority is in paying for a house for her family. Although some clients have joked around with her about sexual favours, for Rika, “sex work is a no-no”.

Lucky

Lucky is a transgender woman in her late 20s. When Lucky was born, her mother intended to abandon her child by the city's docks. Lucky's mother was stopped by the townspeople and brought her to an influential family in the city to give Lucky for adoption. With this family, Lucky grew up as a male. Due to the family's social and political position in the city, Lucky's true gender identity became a source of social ridicule. Her adoptive family saw her as a disgrace and often ostracized her; leaving her alone in their house while the rest of the family went away for family activities, and not attending any of her graduation ceremonies. Lucky has also mentioned occasionally being physically abused for her gender. Despite these circumstances, Lucky showed resolve and was determined to live a better life authentic to her true self. During the interview, Lucky exhibited her strong will and determination, saying that she would

like to move forward with her life despite difficult circumstances. She refuses to be weighed down by the difficulties she experiences and sees life as full of ups and downs. She says that the difficulties she has faced in her youth is what made her strong, but is also why she wanted to help others live a better life. While Lucky earns as a performer in Bangkok, she also sends money back home whenever she can to support her niece and nephew's education. She says she does this in secret, sending money directly to her niece and nephew, as she would like to keep her broken ties with her family.

While she maintains that she has broken her ties with her family back in the Philippines, Lucky still saves money to send back home. When she saves enough money, she sends them to her niece and nephew in the Philippines to help with their education. She does this without the knowledge of her brothers and sisters as she would like to keep it secret due to her strained relationship with the family.

APPENDIX B

Sample of Key Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

The researcher adapted the interview questions based on the answers of interviewees given that some of these questions may not apply to their personal experiences. These interview questions are as follows:

Migration

- Why did you decide to migrate to Pattaya/Bangkok?
- Did you know anyone in Pattaya/Bangkok prior to coming here?
- How did the people you know affect your decision to migrate?
- Have you experienced working outside Thailand? What kind of job? How long did you stay there?
- How did you find that job? Through a mama or client?
- Did you get help preparing travel documents? From whom?

Network

- Describe your relationship with the people in your network? Are they like family, acquaintances, friends, professionals to you?
- If you have a problem (emotional, financial, etc.), to whom do you go to?

Work

- Do you work in a bar/club? Freelance or sideline?
- How did you find work in a bar/club? Did you apply? Recommendation of friends/Mama/Khun Mae?
- Why did you decide to get this job?
- Describe your workplace/working conditions – cleanliness, treatment of boss and co-workers, treatment of clients, day-offs and sick leave, etc.
- If a client abuses you, who do you go to for help?
- How much do you earn every month? Do you have other jobs aside from sex worker/entertainer?

Police/Mafia

- Did you ever have an experience with police/mafia? What happened?
- Did you pay (bribe) for your safety?
- How often does this happen?
- Who do you go to for help for police? Mama/Khun Mae? Bar/club owner?

VITA

Leo Bernardo E. Villar was born in the Philippines on 11 December 1992. Throughout his life, Leo was taught about the importance of human rights through his mother and father who have been political activists in the past, giving him an early exposure to the concepts of human rights and dignity; particularly on children's and women's rights. In 2010, Leo began his Bachelor's in Social Sciences in the University of the Philippines Manila, where he learned more about the value of history, economics, politics, and culture. It was also during this time that Leo became exposed to both feminist and LGBTIQ movements, which has spurred his passion for gender equality.

Two years after graduating from college, Leo has decided to pursue further studies on human rights and development in order to broaden his experience and prepare for a career in development work. This has led him to enroll in the International Development Studies Program at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, which expanded his knowledge on various human rights and development issues and concepts. During his studies, Leo was able to get an opportunity to intern for the International Labour Organization, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. This experience prompted him to take interests on labour and migration issues in Southeast Asia. Bringing together his interests on LGBTIQ rights, gender equality, labour, and migration, Leo intends to learn more and work on these issues in order to advocate for the rights of the most marginalized and disenfranchised members of society.



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