The Global-Local Nexus of Western Male Sex Tourism in the South
-a case study of Thailand

Author: Michaela Re

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Michaela Re
Abstract

This is a study about Western Male sex tourism in the South. It is also a call for political scientists to finally acknowledge the importance that tourism has on the international political agenda. Finally it is a denounce against sex tourists and against their behavior. Sex tourists not only exploit women rendered marginal by global and local forces. Their behavior in the South might also have deep health repercussions here in the West as the unwillingness to use condoms and to rape the women engaged in prostitution demonstrates.

Using a theoretical framework that includes theories about prostitution, gender, sex tourism, tourism, development studies, globalization and identity, this Master thesis presents a model that has the purpose to-at least partially-fill the gap left by previous studies upon sex tourism. The model is applied to the case of Thailand. It is argued that only examining the interplay between what is global and what is local it is possible to understand the development of the illegal industry.

The model will be applied first on the structural determinants of sex tourism such as development planning, laws, law enforcement and gender roles. Secondly, the model will serve to understand the personal reasons beyond western men’s decision to travel to the other side of the world to buy sex from locals and why Thai women decide to cater for westerners. The purpose of such multi-dimensional approach is among others to challenge the stereotipized images of ‘the prostitute’ and ‘the client’ that are widely present in popular literature. It will be argued that these types are individuals composed by multiple identities in need for further research. Apart from gender and identity, concepts such as The Other, race and class will be highly relevant to determine the nature of the relationship between demand and supply.

At the end of the study, a metaphorical understanding of the global-local nexus will be presented in order to exemplify how exogenous forces unite, melt and fragment with local ones, both at the structural and at actor level. This space has been called the ‘take out bar’.

**Keywords**: sex tourism, prostitution, globalization, identity, gender, tourism

*Note: The photographs published in this thesis where taken by me and by male assistant Sillas. None of the subjects portrayed has been interviewed. The pictures are used to illustrate different types of open-ended prostitution.*
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1. Introduction: investigating sex tourism

I met Tuk in Pattaya on the beach promenade. She is a 19-year-old girl, an adult for national and international law. She comes from a village in the North East. Her mother works in a bar as mamasan. Her father, a motorbike-taxi driver, was often drunk and used to beat her mother before they got divorced. Tuk started to work in a go-go bar as lap-dancer when she was 16. At present, she is working as a freelancer with Western men. She told her parents she works in a department store. When she is talking, she is hiding her face behind her long hair while nervously playing with a pink Hello Kitty-comb. She says that when she has a problem, she does not talk to anyone. She goes to her room, locks the door and cries. When I met her, she was waiting for her regular customer to come to Thailand. He is a Canadian in his forties and he has two children. As my assistant translated: “The Canadian told Tuk that he chose her because he said that she looks like his daughter” (interview, 22-06-2002).

This study is about the Canadian men, about Tuk and about her family. It is an analysis of local politicians that choose to criminalize Tuk and welcome instead the Canadian men. It is an investigation on the police that controlled Tuk and immediately released her because she is 19, no problem (ibid). She can continue to cater for tourists who come to Thailand and who contribute to boost both the police and the country’s earnings. But this is also a study about us. It is a study about our society and about the silences that here in the West as well as in the South have fostered through development planning the global sex tourist industry. Tourism has until now widely been ignored by political science studies (Richter,1989:3). This is an attempt to bridge such gap. Tourism is not only the world’s biggest industry (Jenkins in Go&Jenkins, 1997:49). Tourism has also been used as a political weapon and as a political bridge among nations1. Tourism planning is moreover the key to understand why the Canadian man can travel to the other side of the world and buy sex from Tuk.

1.1 Aims of the study

The aim of this study is to try to offer a more complex understanding of the underpinnings of sex tourism than has been offered until now. It is also a call for the West to recognize its responsibilities and challenge the demand side. Taking these points into considerations, this study is an attempt to give a preliminary answer to the following questions:

Theoretical question:
-How are globalization and development planning related to Western sex tourism in the South?

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1 Tourism as weapon has been used for example by the US forbidding its citizens to travel to the PRC and Cuba for many years. On the other hand, American tourist flows to for example Israel reinforce the support for this nation (Richter, 1989:6-7).
Empirical questions:
- Why do Western men travel to the other side of the world and buy sex from locals?
- Why does a Thai woman decide to enter prostitution and cater for westerners?
- How do race, gender, identity and class play a role in constructing the ‘Thai Feminine Other’? How is this construction related to sex tourism?

1.2 Methodology

My initial intention was to try to answer the question: *Why do Thai women migrate to Bangkok and enter prostitution?* After an initial impossibility to come in contact with local NGOs, I decided to try to directly contact the sex workers in the red light districts. I employed four assistants that worked with me interchangeably during days and especially at nights in the course of my fieldwork. Three young Thai women worked as my translators and helped me to find secondary material. The Dutch male assistant worked as interviewer of Western sex tourists. My decision to focus on the Western demand was motivated by the fact that the women I interviewed and that were working in the bars in all the tourist resorts I visited were ONLY catering for westerners. My focus shifted therefore from local based prostitution to sex tourism. I visited almost all red light districts in Bangkok that cater for farangs. I also visited Pattaya several times and another tourist resort which name, for ethical considerations, will not be revealed. I chose to use semi-structured interviews which allowed me on the one hand to follow previously established interview themes. On the other hand, this type of interview allows a flexibility that is necessary to grant information that would otherwise be left unexplored by a structured interview guide. I taped whenever possible the interviews. Sometimes I had however to take notes only either because permission was denied or due to security reasons. The interviews with the men were conducted both by me and by a male assistant and were done separately. The male assistant’s help was fundamental for the information I obtained. My gender was in fact an obstacle to the sincerity of the sex tourists. The use of young Thai female interpreters (aged 20 to 25) helped the interview situation to be more relaxed and these women (aged 19 to 47) to be less suspicious. My own age (25) helped also in this sense. My race and maybe gender were an initial impediment. Many of these women had never talked to a female farang before and especially not about their difficulties, dreams and hopes. The interviews were initially conducted in the bars and on a beach promenade in Pattaya. I later decided to take the girls ‘off’ from the bars and conduct the interviews in the relaxed milieu of a café. My biggest problem in this sense was that I had to pay the bar owners and/or the mamasans to take the women ‘off’ the bars. Moral consideration prevented me to do so at the beginning. I definitely did not want to contribute to the illegal economy nor to the owners’ profits. Initially, I did not even pay the women for their time spent talking to me because of the fear of being accused of ‘buying’ the information. It was soon evident however that I was taking precious working time from these women. When I started to take the women ‘off’ and pay bar owners, I even started to pay the girls for their time. The women where offered 500

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2 The term farang will be used throughout this whole study. It is the Thai word for white Westerners.
(a sex tourist pays from 500 to 2000 bath for a whole night). The interviews ranged from 30 min at the beginning to 240 min in one occasion. The latter interview was conducted together with a female Phd student in sociology. We paid the woman 500 bath each since both of us where interviewing her. I am aware of possible accusations. I do not regret however for paying these women for their time after having heard all their life stories. They are working and their time is worth as any other worker doing a different kind of job. Semi-structured interviews where also used while interviewing experts that grated me interviews at the end of my stay. The key informants where contacted either by door knocking, through the help of my assistants or through a gate-keeper. The questions asked to the experts ranged from information about their organization, to laws, to their personal opinion gathered through research and contact with the women and sometimes even with the Western customers. While sex tourists and the women will be used in this study as respondents, experts will be used as informants. Interviews with the latter group will be used to problematize and add information to the secondary literature. A triangular method was used to gather information and verify the validity of the answers. I tried to keep a diary every day where I wrote down my field observations. Given the multi-dimensional and complex nature of sex tourism, a qualitative method has been chosen to gather information.

1.3 Prior research

A fairly great amount of popular literature written on sex tourism exists in commerce. I have avoided to use this kind of literature and concentrated instead on academic studies that focus both on the actor level (O’Connell Davidson, 1998, Cohen, 1996, Seabrook, 1996, Law, 2000) and on the structural level (Truong, 1990, Leheney, 1995). Only a few studies attempt to investigate the subject from both perspectives (Ryan and Bishop, 1998). There is evidently the need for further research on the subject.

1.4 Material

It is impossible to find precise statistical information about an illegal industry, even if attempts have been made. Moreover, if we take the case of Thailand, there is reason to suspect that the existing national statistics are biased in order to challenge the Thailand-brothel-of-the-world-label that sensationalistic papers have used to describe the country, especially after the AIDS pandemic. The use of statistics has therefore been limited. I have instead preferred to analyze my interviews with prior academic studies on sex tourism, tourism, globalization, development studies, prostitution, international political economy, gender, race and identity. I have avoided popular literature. Even if no study can be totally objective about the sector given the gender of the researcher and the many feelings that arise when undertaking this kind of field work, I have tried to use literature that tries to problematize sex tourism from different perspectives.

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3 I SEK=4,75 THB
4 See for example Phongpaichit et al. (1998) 'Girls, Gambling and Ganja’, in particular chapter nine.
1.5 Ethical considerations

Thailand is not the only country where sex tourism and prostitution occur. Thailand just happens to be more famous than Milan, Stockholm, Hamburg, Cuba, Bali, Ghana, etc…due to media attention. I completely understand NGOs skepticism towards my study. Too many times in fact the information has been abused or distorted. I have tried to avoid an objectification of all the parts involved. I have decided not to publish the name of the tourist resort given the fact that Swedish law punishes customers. All names of both sex tourists and workers have been changed. I am definitely not protecting the exploiters and the abusers. What I am protecting is these women and their only chance at present to make a living, to send money home, let their children be able to go to school and thereby guarantee them a brighter future than their mothers’.

1.6 Limitations

The underlying Master thesis is about adult heterosexual western men travelling to the South buying sex as part of their holiday from female, heterosexual, adult (according to the UN, above 18 years old) ‘voluntary’ sex workers. Even if I have interviewed one young male sex worker, the information I have is too restricted to allow further considerations about a male supply. This study does moreover not attempt to analyze trafficking for sexual purposes, even if the ‘voluntary’ and ‘forced’ industries are overlapping in many aspects. Western women’s sex tourism has been left out given their minor-albeit not absent!-presence. The homosexual population has also been left out for time reasons. Given the complexity of the theoretical framework that has been used, it has been impossible to go into details of every topic as I had wished. For these reasons, an investigation of NGOs activity has been left out. Finally, this study does not aim to provide precise policy recommendations. Even if missing an important point, space limits were an impediment of this initial aim. I have chosen instead to report and analyze what I have witnessed and leave the suggestions for amelioration as a future task.

1.7 Thesis outline

This study is composed by six chapters. Chapter one has presented the aim and methodology of the study. Chapter two discusses the theoretical framework and presents a model to illustrate this Master thesis understanding of sex tourism. Chapter three investigates the political economy of tourism and sex tourism. Chapter four analyses the relationship between demand and supply. Chapter five examines a physical and metaphorical space where these encounters take place. This place will here be called the ‘take out bar’. Finally, chapter six presents the conclusions of the study.
2. Theoretical Framework

In order to address this complex problem and to answer the research questions, it is necessary to apply a multi-disciplinary approach. What will be proposed here is a theoretical framework that tries to overcome the gaps left by previous studies on sex tourism. Such framework has not to be seen as exhaustive but as a contribution that highlights aspects in need for further consideration.

2.1 Tourism—much more than just holiday making

Given the pivotal role of tourism in today’s world economy and politics, tourism cannot anymore be neglected as a subject of primary importance for the international political agenda. But tourism is not only a mere industrial activity. As stated by Enloe, “tourism is as much ideology as physical movement” (Enloe, 1989:26). This Master thesis shares the view of the emerging literature about international tourism seeing the sector as an industry influenced by economic, social, cultural and political factors that deeply affect tourist-sending and in particular tourist-receiving countries, especially if these countries are those belonging to the so-called ‘South’.

In the following paragraphs tourism will be briefly discussed in relation to development policies, to globalization and localization, to prostitution, to gender, race, class and identity. Finally, we shall see how these aspects unite in the glocal industry widely known as sex tourism.

2.3 Development theories and globalization: common roots and differences in the analysis of the West-South relationship

The theorization of the relationship between the West and the so-called Third World has its origins in the field of development studies. It is with president Truman’s speech in the 1940s that the term underdevelopment areas became part of the international agenda setting. Truman saw poverty as the main handicap that was affecting both these countries and the West. The cure to such handicap was seen in the 1950s to be increased economic growth while the goal to reach was modernity (Potter et al. 1999:4). Developing countries were considered to be characterized by a dualistic relationship, e.g. a dual structure which was modern civilized on one side and backward and traditional on the other. Modernization theory was based on the assumption that the ‘gap’ of (economic) development which existed between developed and developing countries could gradually be overcome on imitative basis or as Hettne expressed it ‘in practice, modernization was thus very much the same as

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5 It is necessary to say that a country can at the same time be both a sending and a receiving country of tourists. In Asia, for example, Japan can be defined in both ways. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that not everyone in the West can afford to be an international tourist or for that matter, to be a tourist at all. However, the inequality between classes of the majority of the countries belonging to the South is undoubtedly more prominent than in the North. Dividing countries in ‘receiving’ and ‘sending’ countries of tourists is certainly a simplification but it helps to illustrate the case that only a few of the world’s citizens are de facto entitled the possibility and thereby the right ‘to have leisure time’ to spend on tourist activities.

6 For a critique of the term Third World, see Potter et al. (1999), chapter one.
Westernization. One of the leading strategies supported by this school was based on the argument that the polarization between backwardness and modernity was a characteristic of the early stages of economic development and that if governments managed to develop the core, growth would finally trickle-down to backward regions (Potter et al., 1999:46). Albeit modernization was implemented through different economic and political systems (be it liberalism and export oriented economies or socialism and import-substitution), the development of the industrial sector over the agricultural one was (and I would argue still is in the South) the chosen strategy for development.

2.4 Liberalism: tourism as a trickle-down strategy of growth

The new generation of liberals tend to argue that despite areas of concern, “tourism has made a major contribution to Third World countries and [that] this contribution will continue in the future” (Jenkins in Go&Jenkins, 1997:62). Given the fact that the major consumers of international tourism are residents of developed countries of the world (Jenkins in Go&Jenkins, 1997:52), tourism becomes for developing countries one of the most important net earners of foreign exchange and can therefore alleviate balance of payment problems (Walton in Hitchcock et al., 1993:170). Tourism is moreover praised for its linkage effects and in particular for its ability to create employment in activities both directly and indirectly linked to tourism (Walton in Hitchcock, 1993:171). As stressed by Leheny, “a strategy of development can be smart and profitable not because it facilitates growth in tourist expenditures as such but because it places the country on a springboard to further development” (Leheny, 1995:371). Among the spill-over effects often quoted to support tourism there is for example an increasing demand for locally produced food and handicrafts (Walton in Hitchcock, 1993:216). Moreover, as Jenkins notes, given the narrow resource-based economies of most of developing countries, tourism is seen as an industry that can utilize what developing countries seem to be richly endowed with such as natural wildlife, beaches, mild climate for long periods and cultural and social places of interest that allow tourism to develop at fairly low economic costs (Jenkins in Go&Jenkins, 1997:53). Finally, tourism is also praised for being able to overcome regional disparities in areas situated far from the main centres of economic activity, such as capital cities (Walton in Hitchcock, 1993:216, Jenkins in Go&Jenkins, 1997:55). In the light of these considerations, it is not surprising that developing countries decided to make tourism the key for their economic recovery. Tourism was seen as the answer to their ‘backwardness’ and an engine of growth that together with a massive industrialization would lead these countries towards modernity. In Asia, for example, “the introduction of tourism as an engine of growth was part of a wider economic strategy and that begun in ASEAN countries in the 80s” (Hitchcock in Hitchcock et al., 1993:3). It is important to acknowledge that such modernization strategy was the result of both national strategies and of recommendations from the major developing agencies such as the WB and the IMF to shift production from

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agriculture to the development of the industrial sector. Even today, despite the shaking effects of the economic crisis in 1997, the majority of Southeast Asian countries continue on the industrialization path. As noted by Dittmer, some countries have responded to the economic crisis by turning inwards. Others have responded by accepting the IMF bitter medicine (Dittmer in Kinnvall&Jönsson, 2002:30). Thailand was among those countries ‘curing’ globalization (intended here as liberal reforms) with more globalization (Dittmer in Kinnvall&Jönsson, 2002:29).

2.5 Challenging liberalism: the dependency school

As a reaction to the modernization school ‘the South’ responded with among others, the structuralist and the dependency schools. Prebish and Furtado argued for example that the present structures in Latin America where the result of the countries incorporation into the world capitalist system. Modernization theory was seen as an Eurocentric model and thereby looked upon as a disguised colonialism (Potter et al.,1999:63). This model was however criticized for being too focused on the internal relationship within the single countries-such as class struggle- while at the same time aiming at de-linking from the global economy in a time when the capitalist world system was becoming more global. Wallerstein’s world-system model had the merit to overcome the internal-external agency debate (Potter et al., 1999:65). Wallerstein argued that there is just one type of capitalism, but that this economic system could develop differently in different parts. Countries, he argued, are either peripheral to such system or central. In between there are semi-peripheral countries either on their way to become ‘core’ or having lost this status and are on their way to the ‘peripheral’ status. Above all, there is one hegemon that not only controls the system but that is also a guarantor for the cohesion of such system. Wallerstein develops his theory discussing along the lines of the dependency school.

2.6 Dependency Theories and Tourism

Tourism becomes for dependency school affiliates a destructive force for local cultures, for the environment and for the economy itself. In particular, tourism is seen as detrimental due to the penetration of foreign conglomerates able to gain enormous profits that do not stay in the host country but are remitted to the countries of origins. Moreover, tourism is denounced for having a low entry-skills threshold. Jenkins praises this fact since it permits the employment of people who require limited training and have limited skills (Jenkins in Go&Jenkins, 1994:53). The problem is however that these employees are not only likely to stay in low paid jobs. They are not even able to upgrade their skills in the tourist sector. As the prime minister of a Caribbean country expressed it: ‘tourism has turned us into a nation of barkeepers and waitresses’ (Jenkins in Go&Jenkins, 1997:54).

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2.7 Beyond the dependency school

Despite the merits of the model to denounce the inequalities present both in single regions and in countries and at global level, the model fails however to capture two key-dimensions. One is the fact that semi-peripheral and peripheral countries are not merely subjects and totally irresponsible for their own development. Secondly, Wallerstein’s model is principally an economic model and thereby bypasses central social and individual components that characterize human relationships both at national and international level. We need therefore a more complex model than the one offered by development theories to understand the bases of sex tourism. The body of literature examining globalization might offer a viable alternative.

2.8 The Globalization discourse

Wallerstein’s model is re-interpreted and further problematized by Robertson. Robertson goes ‘beyond Wallerstein’ (Robertson, 1998:65) by introducing an explanation of the world as constituted by four aspects. As he states, ‘[t]hese are: national societies, individuals, or more basically, selves; relationships between national societies, or the world system of societies; and in the generic sense, mankind, which to avoid misunderstanding, I frequently call humankind’ (Robertson, 1998:25). Robertson stresses that these aspects relate to each other diachronically, e.g. the model implies changes within and among these four aspects and is therefore, contrary to Wallertsein’s world-system, a flexible model. Robertson’s model is flexible because it among others does not see capitalism (as the world system model instead does) as the only economic system that countries can adopt. It must be stressed that Robertson has not been uncontroversial in academic debates. His most controversial statement has been that “the trends towards a unicity of the world are inexorable” Robertson (1998:26). Critics have accused Robertson of seeing globalization as an unavoidable uniformizing process. The researcher has responded to such critiques arguing that his understanding of ‘unicity’ should not be seen as global unity which ‘implies a social integration in a strong sense’ (Robertson, 1998:prologue). He points out that while the system integration of the world has led to an interdependence on a global scale, social integration has not reached the level of the latter (ibid). This means that while he acknowledges a trend of the world’s countries towards capitalism (e.g. the system integration), he highlights that the relationships binding people across the globe (e.g. the social integration) is not completed. Robertson has the merit to see globalization and localization as forces that not only collide and clash with each other. The notion ‘glocalize’ indicates the meeting of an exogenous force with a local one and its adaptation to local conditions. The outcome of these two dimensions is generally called in the globalization literature as the global-local nexus.

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10 The European Union is a good example of what Robertson means: while the economic integration and partially even the political one are gaining momentum, people in Europe still conserve strong local traditions and cultures. While there is an integration at the structural level, at actor level this integration is far from being completed.

11 See also Featherstone, (1995:118).
2.9 Localization: a response to globalization

The term ‘localization’ indicates a reaction against globalization intended as the global influence of capitalism and Western values. Globalization is seen as a destructing force operating on local communities that must react against this ‘alien menace’ in order to protect traditional values and cultures. Localism has however often been used as a rhetorical instrument to praise successes or to justify failures. This study argues with Dittmer that national states are not blameless victims of global influences. The political and economic forces that lead to development are the product of both global and local forces. I would even argue that one could not exist without the other. In order for local communities to organize and resist they need something to react against. On the other hand, in order for capitalism to penetrate a country, it needs local consensus and pre-existing structures to grow. More specifically, capitalism needs a population that would work for very low wages and the collaboration of local élites that would favour financial conditions facilitating global conglomerate’s entrance. The same process dynamic is valid even for tourism and sex tourism. What locally supports the sex tourist industry is a widespread corruption, biased laws, skewed development policies and last but not least the role of local élites. As stressed by Fanon in 1961,

“The national bourgeoisie will be greatly helped on its way towards decadence by the Western bourgeoisies, who come to it as tourists avid for the exotic, for big-game hunting and for casinos. The national bourgeoisie organises centres of rest and relaxation and pleasure resorts to meet the wishes of the Western bourgeoisie. Such activity is given the name of tourism, and for the occasion will be built up as national industry”

(Fanon, 1990:123)

Apart from ‘big-game hunting’-today replaced with safari and jungle trekking-the picture has not changed very much. 2003 as well as 1961 still witnesses collusion between what is ‘local’ and what is ‘alien’.

2.10 The global-local nexus: an attempt to analyze sex tourism

Ideas of the meetings of the universal and the particular are not an invention of the contemporary world but are to be found already in classic literature (Robertson, 1998:54). However, due to the speed in which transactions and movements of goods and people take place today, the clear-cut division of what is global/alien and of what is local/traditional is very problematic. Robertson sees the global-local nexus as a ‘twofold process involving the interpretation of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism’ (Robertson, 1998:100, italics in original). An example of the universalization of particularism is the global capitalist market where

12 As example we could quote the Asian Values discourse often used to justify human rights abuses claiming protection of the local population while upholding inequalities and illicit violence.

13 This concept will be more clear when we will discuss for example MNC exploitation of pre-existent gender segregating structures. See also Lim in Visvanathan et al. 1997, chapter 19.
the supply is mainly composed by low-paid workers around the world (read: the South) while the demand comes above all from one specific region (read: the West). To explain the particularization of universalism, Robertson argues that particularism always develops in response to international influences. As an example, Robertson quotes the revival of Islam.\(^{14}\) The two concepts can be clearly explained by the response of sex workers to structural pressures. Sex worker’s decision to enter the sector is as we will see an individual response to both local pressures and international cultural, political and economic influences. Robertson’s analysis points out in a vivid manner the complexities of globalization involving both movements of homogenization and compression. Culture is another central element of the globalization process. As stressed by Featherstone, “the process of globalization suggests simultaneously two images of culture. The first image entails the extension outward of a particular culture to its limit, the globe. Heterogeneous cultures become incorporated and integrated into a dominant culture that eventually covers the whole world” (Featherstone, 1995:6). In this sense, tourism is one of these homogenizing forces. English is certainly the official language of tourism as it is for international business transactions; multinational companies lead tourists all over the globe providing accommodation, food and relaxation; films, books and culture in general travel with tourists on a global scale and reach outmost places, etc. The second trend indicated by Featherstone is the one that favours “contacts and juxtaposition” (ibid). Local cultures are preserved in that travellers buy local products and at the same time they try to adapt to the local characteristics and customs (Wolf in Hitchcock, 1993:216). In this sense, tourism might be seen as a force contributing to the conservation and fostering of local traditions that might or might not (more of the former I believe) adapt to tourist tastes. Despite the fact that the two flows of globalization and localization influence each other, it must be stressed that, albeit interacting simultaneously, they do not always have the same scale of influence upon structures and individuals. As argued by Paolini, “to state that globalization, especially in its more visible economic role, influences the Third World and that we are all part of that interrelated “global system”, is something completely different than stating that it has the same effects for all parties involved (Paolini in Eriksson et al, 1999:67). Post-colonialist analysis has tended in particular to stress such power difference at economic level by seeing globalization as disguised colonialism. The approach that will be adopted here is however not to use-in Hoogvelt’s words- post-colonialism as critique but as analysis of a condition (and which ultimately might result as a critique)\(^{15}\). In reference to the localization debate, Hoogvelt has the merit to point out how the South is not a uniform entity but can be divided in segments that in themselves present internal differences. The region ‘Asia’ is for example analyzed while taking into consideration one group of countries (the so-called NICs) having in common the same characteristics of the developmental state. The 1997 crisis might have shown the inconsistency of such ‘developmental’ state. However, Hoogvelt’s analysis is still relevant in that it highlights a key-notion for the understanding of

\(^{14}\) Robertson argues that Islam’s resistance is not only directed towards globalization but also as an opposition to the conception of the world as ‘culturally equal, relativized, entities or ways of life’(Robertson, 1998:102).

\(^{15}\) For more details, see Hoogvelt,(1997: 159).
Southern states’ response to ‘capitalism’. Hoogvelt’s analysis could be understood as an attempt to show that the South has not simply been a mere assimilation (or ‘market conforming’ to use a liberal term) but an adaptation of capitalism to local characteristics. Hoogvelt argues against neo-liberal assumptions that ‘strong’ states (read: the core, the West) have imposed an export oriented economy to ‘weak’ countries (read: the periphery, the South) that have always not been able to respond to such pressures. Hoogvelt shows that capitalism could not have penetrated the South (and in particular in the NICs) if it was not for an extensive direct government intervention (Hoogvelt, 1997:203-210). Finally, another merit that has to be ascribed to Hoogvelt is her cognition of the inequality between North and South. The author argues that core-periphery is becoming a social relationship and no longer a geographical one (Hoogvelt, 1997:145). The deepening of capitalism corresponds to a deepening of the marginalization and expulsion of areas both within the core and especially within the periphery (Hoogvelt, 1997:129). Strictly speaking, a specific group of the world’s population consumes what a marginalized group produces. In this group, women are the most vulnerable in that they are marginalized both by local and international forces. The North is disrupting traditional gender roles and creating new forms of dependency. However, this disruption and exploitation could not take place if it was not for pre-existent patriarchal structures and class biases. We shall now briefly present some of the ‘dimensions’ intimately linked to sex tourism. These dimensions are gender, race, identity, class and prostitution.

2.11 Gender, Race, Identity and Class

Gender, e.g. the cultural and social construction of the biologically given sexes ‘man’ and ‘woman’, is one of the pivotal elements that have to be taken into account when analyzing tourism and sex tourism. Gender is moreover a key element when we investigate the effects of globalization on these two industries. On the one hand, gender analysis help us in understanding the power structures embedded in prostitution and sex tourism and intimately linked to the creation of masculinity and femininity. On the other hand, adopting gender lenses is necessary to “valorize components of the economy that have been devalorized through their being evicted from the center or because they were never installed in the center” (Sassen in Torres et al., 1999:356). Sassen shows in her analysis that the wealth produced in both developed and developing countries is also (or we could say mainly) due to the work of women. Both MNC and local firms tend in fact to mainly employ women because their work is considered to be worth less than their male counterparts. In particular, the construction of a ‘Third World docile Other’ depicts women as more docile and less likely to protest against low wages. Due to this essentialization and consequent marginalization into low-paid jobs, the importance of their contribution to the world’s economy has not jet been recognized. They are instead described as “the other who holds the low-wage jobs that are supposedly only marginally attached to the economy” (Sassen in Torres et al., 1999:364). This apparently marginal jobs and ‘minor contribution to the economy’ here be represented by women in prostitution catering for Western tourists. In particular, when we investigate tourism as a development strategy, the GAD approach
Gender is intimately linked to the concept of identity in that both are socially constructed. Calhoun’s analysis of the concept of identity points out among others—four elements linked to the concept of identity: essentialism, recognition, role and multiple identities. As Calhoun states, “we cannot really stop thinking at least partially in categories—and therefore in at least something rather than an essentialist manner” (Calhoun, 1994:19). In order to understand reality, we tend in fact to ascribe specific characteristics to specific individuals. This essentialization leads therefore often to the stereotypization of people. Variations within the single groups are therefore overlooked and people are described as ‘types’. In reference to sex tourism, such essentialisation is the stereotypization of the type ‘sex tourist’ and the type ‘prostitute’. The first is seen as ‘perverted, sick, drug addict, coming from a low-class and almost abnormal’17. The second type is also seen as ‘deviant, perverted and infected with venereal diseases’18. What hides beyond these constructions? How do they think of themselves? And of ‘the Other’? How does the ‘Asian woman’ look in the eyes of a farang and how does the White westerner look in the eyes of a Thai sex worker? Race and the construction of an imaginary ‘Other’ is a key element when we analyze sex tourism. Race becomes central in that both the ‘farang’ and ‘the Thai worker’ are believed to posses specific characteristics given by their ‘race’. Such typification leads to the acquirement of specific roles, be they inscribed on the bar scene and beyond or be they pivotal for the whole economy of sex tourism. The concept of multiple identities will help us to go beyond stereotypes and situate the demand and supply in a more nuanced dimension. According to Calhoun’s definition, identity is not a uniform process but a “tension inherent in the fact that we all have multiple, incomplete and/or fragmented identities (and sometimes resistances)/…”(Calhoun, 1994:24). Finally another key element for the understanding of the construction of identities is the concept of recognition. In Calhoun’s words “we face problems of recognition because socially sustained discourses about who it is possible or appropriate to be”(Calhoun, 1994:20).

Finally, another pivotal dimension that needs to be considered in relation to the sex tourist industry is class. The unequal distribution of world’s resources leads on the one hand to the developmental gap between North and South. An exogenous force
operating on host countries and exploiting the gap is constituted by MNC. These companies employ often low-skilled personnel, the majority of whom is constituted by women. The salaries are very low and working conditions often not responding to official international standards. Especially in the South, a restricted oligarchy is in possession of the majority of land estates and in total control of the productive activities within a country. The majority of the populations are in a varying degree deprived of the entitlements that on the contrary are a *de facto* for such élites. Facing both the international and national inequalities, one of the strategies adopted by local populations is to migrate towards urbanized centers, either abroad or within their own country. Some among the migrants are able to find a properly paid employment. Lacking skills and vocational training, the majority of these individuals come however to enlarge the masses of the low paid at best or of the unemployed at worst. One way out for these individuals is to sell the only thing that makes them valuable for the national and international market. Among these migrants, some decide eventually to enter prostitution.

### 2.12 Prostitution: the debate

The feminist literature examining prostitution has tended until recently to take a dichotomous character. Feminist authors either condemn prostitution as the extreme manifestation of male power and patriarchy (Dworkin, 1983, Pateman, 1988, Jeffreys, 1997) or see it as a form of work\(^\text{19}\). Moreover, we have to add even those who argue that prostitution is a form of sexual liberation for women and a manner to render women economically independent\(^\text{20}\). The fact that the literature has taken such a dichotomous character is not surprising. As indicated by Shrage in her book (Shrage, 1994), prostitution is certainly one among the most prominent ‘moral dilemmas’ of feminism. The question whether ‘a whore’ can be a feminist seems for many a paradox: how can a woman be advocating women’s rights and at the same time be a sex worker?\(^\text{21}\). After a review of the literature about prostitution and after having talked to both experts and workers themselves, the aim of this Master thesis is to discuss prostitution taking in consideration the following three points: 1) analyzing *prostitution* is not the same thing as analyzing the life of an *individual* involved in the industry; 2) working as a prostitute is *not* the expression of the *identity* of a person and 3) being trafficked or *forced* into prostitution is not the same thing as *deciding* to enter the sector. This study is therefore a critique against radical feminists who see prostitution as merely a form of slavery for women. This does not obviously mean that the argument of this study rejects the virtual slavery in which *de facto* many women and children are confined. Too many individuals are in fact today kidnapped, raped, imprisoned and forced to sell their bodies for sexual purposes. Despite this acknowledgement, it would be an hypocrisy to state that all those individuals involved

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\(^{19}\) The sex work is work manifest of NGOs such as Empower and FFW. See also Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998.

\(^{20}\) See for example the international Committee on Prostitutes Rights.

\(^{21}\) This was one of the reasons why Jill Nagle edited the collection ‘Whores and Other feminists’. Her desire was to give a voice to those individuals that were directly involved in the sector. The motive of the collection was that until then the writing about sex workers had been done by non-prostitutes which-Nagle says-‘alienates the laborer herself from the process of her own representation’ (Nagle, 1997, introduction).
in the sector are selling their bodies because they have been lured to do so. It is certainly not innate characteristics of these individuals that have led them into the sector but economic restraints and/or personal biographies (O’Connell Davidson, 1998:105) are the causes why they have decided to sell sex for money. Moreover, I do not argue that so-called ‘voluntary’ women engaged in prostitution do not face serious abuses and daily difficulties. The position of this study is the one adopted by O’Connell Davidson when she states that she is ‘in complete sympathy with “sex work” feminists’ calls for prostitutes to be accorded the same legal and political rights and protections as their fellow citizens’ while at the same time she condemns ‘the existence of a market for commodified sex’ (O’Connell Davidson, 2002:1).

2.13 Sex Tourism & Prostitution

Sex tourism and prostitution have until now been examined alternatively as one the subset of the other. Oppermann argues instead that “while prostitution and, at last, sex tourism are highly interwoven, they are not the same” (Oppermann, 1999:252). The reason for this difference is for this author the fact that “tourism involves more than ‘the monetary exchange’ so often associated with prostitution” (ibid). This study accepts the thesis that prostitution and sex tourism are two, albeit close and overlapping, different industries. This study rejects however the argument that the motive of the difference is the different role that the money transaction takes in the two sectors. Oppermann accepts the thesis that sex tourism is different from prostitution in that it is not only about money transaction. The reason of difference is for Oppermann that a tourist buys sex as part of a holiday while “prostitution often occurs without any travel involved” (Oppermann, 1999:252). I would argue instead that not only the money transaction is present in both and therefore can lead to a shorter sexual transaction, but I am also firmly convinced that in both prostitution and in sex tourism, the money transaction is just the most evident-albeit sometimes disguised in the form of ‘gifts’-form related to both industries. This thesis accepts therefore the argument of O’ Connell Davidson that both prostitution and tourism are not just about money but about power (and, by reflection, about freedom). O’ Connell Davidson argues for a “critical analysis of the class, gender, race, and global power relations that underpin the contemporary sex industry” (O’Connell Davidson, 2002:87). While she leaves however the examination of IPE of sex tourism as a future task (O’Connell Davidson, 1998:87), we will in the chapter about Thailand see how the interaction of

22 For further comments, please see Opperman (1999).

23 O’ Connell Davidson’s position is appealing not only because she attributes freedom to the client but also, partly, to the sex worker. Such freedom is linked to the ability of the worker to have control over the transaction and ‘contract’. It is important to notice, however, that when she illustrate such ‘freedom’, she takes the example of a western worker catering in London for westerners. The degree of freedom of a Thai girl catering for farangs might be different-albeit not always!- due in primitis to the ability of the worker to speak English and thereby be able to contract in advance which services will be provided. Moreover, due to the often ‘open-ended’ nature of sex work in Thailand, the services are not fixed exactly in advance as they might be here in the West. We shall later return to this point. What is important to notice here is that Davidson’s theory has the strength to see the complexities of both the tourist and non-tourist related prostitution. The advantage of her theory is to nuance on one side the stereotypes of prostitution as exclusively ‘sex for money’ and on the other the common assumption of customers as ‘absolute’ masters over another human being and mind.
global political and economic forces have interacted with local institutions and rendered possible sex tourism in Thailand.

2.14 Theorizing Sex Tourism

**Eric Cohen’s theory**

Eric Cohen called the relationship between Western men and Thai sex worker as ‘open-ended prostitution’ and he described it as ‘a kind of relationship between a prostitute and her customer which, though it may start as a specific natural service, rendered more or less indiscriminately to any customer, may be extended into a more protracted, diffused, and personalized liaison, involving both emotional attachment and economic interest’ (Cohen, 1996:274). He illustrated the relationship with four categories:

1. mercenary-based on an emotionless “economic exchange”
2. staged-also based on an economic exchange but accompanied by faked or staged emotions on the part of the woman;
3. mixed-based on both “economic exchange”, as well as emotional involvement on the part of the woman; and
4. emotional-based primarily or exclusively on emotional involvement or “love”.

(Cohen, 1996:278)

Eric Cohen was certainly a pioneer in describing the relationship between western customers and local sex workers as open-ended. Despite recognizing this merit, I am reluctant to use his classification for my own analysis for two motives. First of all because Cohen’s analysis is totally deprived of gender lenses. Cohen describes for example the western men as ‘often attractive foreigners’(Cohen, 1996:257). At the same time, the sex workers become for him loose women in seen as merely faking or staging emotion (Cohen, 1996:278). As we will see in chapter four, the *farang* men are not these naive and loving individuals (or lovelorn as Cohen claims) as the sociologist tries to portray them. I therefore prefer to use O’ Connell Davidson’s model for my analysis.

**O’ Connell Davidson’s Theory**

O’ Connell Davidson’s understanding of prostitution is based on Braverman’s statement that what is being bought is not labor per se but “the power to labour over an agreed period of time” (O’Connell Davidson, 1998:9). As such, prostitution becomes sex work and as any other form of labor cannot be separated from the person that is selling his/her labor to an employer and/or to a customer. O’Connell Davidson diversifies prostitution in six different categories. The categories arise from the interplay between on the one axe, three levels of freedom of a worker whether she is self-employed; enslaved or indirectly employed. On the other axe, the researcher separates the contractual form between worker and client into two categories:
informal, diffuse contract and formal, commodized contract. The model becomes however highly problematic as Davidson herself acknowledges since 1) the degree of freedom of a worker is dependent on her autonomy from a ‘third’ part (be it a pimp, a tout or a taxi driver making a profit from the work of a prostitute) and 2) the contract between customer and worker becomes blurred when the companionship of the worker becomes a ‘partnerhood’. In this sense, Cohen’s classification of open-ended prostitution helps us to understand the nature of such relationship. However, one critique must be made to O’Connell Davidson’s model. Very often, it is not only the tourist who migrates (be it for business, cultural holiday or simple relaxation) but also the sex worker (Oppermann1998:17&1999:260). All the women whom I met in Thailand had in fact migrated from the poorer North/North Eastern provinces (with exception of one of them, migrating to Pattaya from Kho Samui). O’Connell Davidson certainly acknowledges the fact that the majority of the workers she interviewed in among other Thailand come from rural provinces. She unfortunately misses however to take the provenience of both the demand and supply as highly relevant factors. I believe that a woman coming from for example Russia and catering for Japanese or Thai men, would face somewhat different constraints than a Thai girl catering for Thai men. Her position might be similar to a Thai bar girl going out with farangs (both come from a different place than the customers which implies among others that their background and many times even their language are far from the same as the customer’s). There might also be some key differences that matters on their working conditions. Albeit this thesis is focusing primarily upon Thai sex workers selling their bodies and company to farang men and is not taking into consideration different forms of prostitution and sex tourism, it is important to acknowledge the fact that even the provenience of both a woman in prostitution and of her customers plays a pivotal role for her life and working conditions. O ‘Connell Davidson’s model should therefore be completed (albeit not exhausted!) by the migration component.

**Model 1: Power relation, prostitution contract and provenience of demand and supply**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prostitution contract= informal, diffuse</th>
<th>Prostitution contract= formal, commodized</th>
<th>Domestic tourist</th>
<th>International tourist</th>
<th>Domestic sex worker</th>
<th>Foreign Sex Worker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Enslaved’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Directly/ Indirectly employed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted and enlarged from O’Connell Davidson (1998:10)*
Despite the disadvantages of using a clear-cut model for sex tourism and prostitution, such scheme might however be useful at least to illustrate the theoretical framework followed in analyzing the relationship between demand and supply. The advantage of using O’Connell Davidson’s analysis is to be found in the argument that prostitution is composed and uphold by various power dimensions: gender roles in society and economic structures that force women in need to search for alternative employment; the contractual from between customer and worker; the pressures of a ‘third part’ that profits from a worker’s labor; broader economic factors that shape the relative powers enjoyed by workers. The researcher moves away from the understanding of prostitution as merely shaped by patriarchal structures and calls for an analysis of demand and supply that takes account of the inter-relationships between race, class, sexuality, power, ‘choice’ and economic factors. Taking in account all these factors is obviously an herculean task. Nevertheless, an understanding of sex tourism in its different dimensions is necessary if we want to move away from simplified analytical frameworks. Following O’Connell Davidson’s understanding of prostitution, I will analyze the relationship between male heterosexual tourists and Thai women stressing the categories of gender, race and class. Moreover, this thesis will add the concept of identity to the analysis.

2.15 The global-local nexus: Finding a model to examine sex tourism

Albeit being in principle contrary to models in that they tend to crystallize a process or a subject, I find it useful to graphically illustrate my understanding of sex tourism. Such ‘model’ has in no manners to be seen as exhaustive (as the ‘model’ presented in the foregoing paragraph), but only useful to illustrative the position and understanding adopted by this thesis about the sectors. The ‘model’ is useful to analyze sex tourism not only in reference to Thailand but to all the international flows of tourism towards the South. Sex tourism is in fact not a phenomenon that has developed in Thailand. As argued by Oppermann, ‘Sex Tourism and prostitution take place just about everywhere. It is not restricted to certain countries, areas, cities, or seedy parts of a city. It is only more apparent in some places rather than in others, either because it is in fact more prevalent or because it is in a form that attracts more public and police attention’(Oppermann,1998:9). The ‘model’ indicates the twofold relationship of globalization and localization. The arrow ranging from the global paradigm is by purpose bigger in that it indicates the different degree of influence of one paradigm over the other. Tourist flows and tourist structures come in fact mainly from the West to the South. Moreover, the bigger arrow indicated the biased political and economic power in the hands of the West. It is important to stress that despite the fact that the West has a strong uniforming force, this does not mean that the South is left totally powerless. On the positive side, many NGOs are responding with resistance.

24 It is important to acknowledge that Western tourism to the South is only one type of tourist flows. Tourists travel in fact in their own country (the so called ’domestic tourism’), within the same region ( we must not forget for example that the majority of tourists in Thailand come from Japan and Malaysia), or among nations in different continents, be it from the North to the South or vice versa. This ‘model’-without excluding the possibility to apply it on other forms of tourism-is valid only for the analysis of Western tourism in the South.
and fragmentation to globalization. On the negative side, many local élites are assimilating global (read: capitalist) recommendations and adapting them on local conditions. This adaptation contributes to further ostracize the already poor and marginalized individuals from the global wealth. Sex tourism is one of the outcomes of the interactions between the two ‘flows’. The model has been discussed here in relation to sex tourism and to the dimensions of gender, race, identity and class. Needless to say, these categories are only a sample of the ones that could be analyzed.

**Model 2:** The global-local nexus of Western sex tourism in the South
3. Globalization in Thailand—the political economy of sex tourism

In the theoretical part we have presented a framework aimed at understanding Western male sex tourist flows towards the ‘South’. We shall followingly see how the global-local nexus interact in Thailand at the structural level with particular reference to tourism. Before proceeding with such task, we need however first of all to individuate Thailand's position in the ‘global system’.

3.1 Thailand—a southern country?

Applying the ‘South’ label to Thailand might at first seem a paradox given the international acceptance of the country as a NIC. According to Wallerstein’s world system model, Thailand could be classified as a semi-peripheral country. Albeit more nuanced than the modernist school, even Wallerstein’s mainly economic model might not tell the whole truth about the country’s position in the world system. How can we then classify Thailand? This study supports the argument that a country’s GDP growth is not the sole measure of development. What is argued here is that the level of development of a country is given by an equal distribution of resources among genders and classes and by the level of their political, environmental, social and geographical marginality. Analysing Thailand’s distribution of resources, Pongphaichit states that “[i]n 1981, the top 10 percent of households earned seventeen times as much as the bottom 10 percent. By 1994, the multiple was thirty-seven times” (Phongpaichit&Baker, 1998:281). On the regional basis data from the same period shows that, “income of people in the Northeast was 10.2 times lower than those in Bangkok in 1991. The gap widened to 11.2 times in 1993, and tended to rise further to 11.9 times in 1994.” To regional and national income disparities, it must be added the rapid deforestation as a consequence of industrialization policies that reduced the forest coverage from 71% of the territory in the 1940s to 20% in the mid 1980s (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey in Somswasdi&Theobald,1997:95). As a consequence of land shortages, many people were but forced to migrate in search for an employment that could guarantee to themselves and their families a living. Moreover, studies demonstrate that access to health care is biased towards certain classes as well as access to education and political participation are restricted to a skewed proportion of the population. As for politics, women's access to political power has been severely limited, with women constituting less than 6 percent of the total number.

25 This definition of development as marginality and exclusion is taken from Rigg (1997). It must be pointed out that Rigg uses his model applying it mainly to minorities' marginality. I believe however that such model can be applied to a totality of a population. When corruption and a skewed power structure renders a majority of a population excluded by denying it an equal access to resources, then even a majority of a country’s population can become a minority through marginalizing practices.

26 Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, www.thaiembdc.org/economic/dplan8.htm

27 As a study on access to health care in a large urban area found out: “the underprivileged were more likely pay out of proportion to their household when compared with more privileged groups” (Pannarunothai&Mill 1997:17).

28 As argued by Tantiwiramanond and Pandey,'[s]ince secondary education is neither compulsory nor free’ the number of drop out is very high. As a consequence of this, ‘/…/ the majority of Thai people have only primary education’ (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey in Somswasdi&Theobald, 1997:101-102).
of members of parliament. This is so partly because of the low participation of women in politics, and partly because of the unequal opportunities for women and men (http://www.nso.go.th/eng/stat/gender/gender.htm#p7, Thai Statistical Bureau).

In the light of these data, Thailand is therefore considered here as a country where a minority of the population is favored by a skewed distribution of economic, social and political privileges while the majority of the population is de facto excluded. Among marginalized groups, minorities, poor women and sex workers in particular are the most vulnerable individuals.

3.2 Globalization in Thailand: an exogenous and exploitative force operating alone?

As stated by Hamilton-Hart, “[t]he Thai economy is characterized by an extremely high level of structural integration in the global economy” (Uhlin in Kinnvall & Jönsson, 2002:152). Western economic influences are to be found already during the colonial era. Even if Thailand was never formally colonized, the ancient Siam “began, under British prodding, to emerge as a major producer and exporter of rice” (Phongpaichit, 1980:4). Whereas rice was for a century Thailand’s major export sector, the share of GDP of rice export has nowadays been surpassed by tourism. Data indicate that while agriculture had 10.3 percent share of GDP, the service sector occupied 54.6 percent (www.nso.go.th/eng/indicators/tab_e.xls). The Thai development strategy in making tourism at the center of Government investments was a consequence of both the World Bank’s and the United Nations’ recommendations for developing countries to solve the economic problems by fostering this sector. Conferences and special institutions where promoted for such aim. Among these, we can mention the United Conference on International Travel and Tourism of 1963 it was explicitly stated that ‘government should, whenever possible, avoid any kind of activity hostile to tourism’ (UN, 63:29) and that ‘[t]he recognition of the industry’s importance should result in the inclusion of credits in the tourist development plans, and in some cases in awarding priority to those credits in such plans’ (UN 63:31. Both extracts are quoted in Truong, 1990:121).

On the other hand, the World Bank showed its commitment in fostering tourism through massive loans devoted to the promotion of tourism and by financing airport projects (Truong, 1990:122). At the end of the 1970s the tourist industry was criticized as having negative social consequences for the host country’s populations. In response the critics, the World Bank and UNESCO jointly financed a conference and a report aimed at assessing international (read: western) tourism’s social effects on Southern populations. What is astonishing is the fact that not only sex tourism was ignored and not considered to be an outcome of tourism (De Kadt, 1979:64). Despite the fact that two of the researchers in the report financed by the World Bank and UNESCO clearly stated that not only prostitution but even the number of bars was growing (De Kadt, 1979, studies on Mexico and Bali), the report did not include recommendations to redress sex tourism. Even if the report did not examine Thailand, evidence shows that sex tourism was a growing phenomenon even at this early stage of tourism in the country. A tourist guide working for a Scandinavian company in the early 1970s
recalled that not only hotel personnel offered the company’s guests the services of local girls. The guide recalls that even the Scandinavian male guides used to benefit from such services. Would the situation today be different for many developing countries if the report had acknowledged sex tourism as a negative outcome of development plans?

3.3 Multinational Companies and gender labor: mutual benefits or exploitation?

A widely debated subject when discussing globalization’s effects on host countries in the South is the issue of MNC. Liberals argue that transnational companies create jobs, contribute to ease a country’s foreign exchange-debt and help to fill the technological gap of host countries through the introduction of know-how and innovation. Critics argue instead that these companies create an undesirable effect on host countries by creating enclaves that only use a few local citizens, that acquire supplies from abroad and not locally and finally send earnings to home countries. Given the hatred debate, how do MNCs effect women’s lives? It might be true as stressed by Gilpin that the relationship between MNCs and host countries must not necessarily be ruinous for the latter group as what he call the blanket criticism argues (Gilpin, 1987:248). As argued by Lim, MNC offer migrant women a possibility of an employment and allow them to “leave the confines of home, delay marriage and childbearing, increase their incomes and consumption levels, improve mobility, expand individual choice and exercise personal independence” (Lim in Visvanathan et al.1997:225). The problem is however that these companies exploit cheap labor as their major comparative advantage. Women are considered to be the biggest target group in that their labor is regarded by these companies to be unskilled and cheaper than their male counterparts. MNC might offer to women an alternative to the work in the rural areas. The problem is however the extremely low salaries and the working conditions. As stressed by Pongpaichit, “most of the available jobs entail hard labor in horrifying conditions, and ill-health or debility will cut short the working career at an unusually young age” (Pongpaichit, 1980:34). Even if Phongphaicit wrote her study in the 1980s and working conditions might be slightly better nowadays, there is evidence that much more must be done to ensure a safe working place. A worker that I interviewed had for example injured himself working for a gas Thai-Western company. He injured his eyes with the light while welding steel. After the incident, he was forced to leave the job. Among the few alternatives available, he chose to come to Pattaya to search for a job. Not being able to find a regular employment, he decided to enter prostitution (interview, 22/06/2002). MNC are moreover accused to impede the formation of a proper training of the local population. Transnational companies operating in the tourist sector offer an illustrative example of such skewed relationship in favor of western conglomerates. Not only such companies hold both the knowledge and the management skill that allow them to control host countries’ tourist flows (Truong,

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29 My informant is a family acquaintance. The interviewee wants to be anonymous. Interview, 9-10-2002.
30 For further discussion about MNC effects please se Spero (1997) in particular, chapter eight.
31 For more details, please see Lim’s study in Visvanathan 1997, chapter 19.
32 Think of hotel chains such as for example the Hilton, Le Meridien or the Sheraton: who occupies managerial posts and who cleans instead your room when you are abroad?
1990:11) but they even segregate local people on the workplace not permitting them thereby to acquire management skills necessary to administer tourism. As a result of this segregation,

“economic opportunities that tourism provides for local people are mainly in the informal sector/…/. The informal economy includes women, men and children working as unregistered taxi drivers, guides, souvenir sellers, fruit sellers, shoe-shine boys, masseuse, manicurists and cleaners in private apartments /…/. It also often includes prostitution”

(O’Connell Davidson, 1998:76-77)

Important to notice is that MNC constitute one of the major pull factors for migrants coming from rural areas. We shall now examine the push factors of this migration flow towards urban areas.

3.4 Globalization’s effects on Thai women’s decision to migrate

As underlined in the introduction to this chapter, Thailand is characterized by a skewed distribution of resources between classes. Class inequalities are however not the only feature that creates inequality. As indicated by Tantiwiramanond and Pandey, to the seven centuries long class inequalities we must in fact add the contemporary regional and rural-urban bias inequalities (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey, 1997:89). Thailand is divided into four regions but only the Central plan has been the one favoured by infrastructural reforms (Phongpaichit, 1980:4). Bangkok is the major pull area for migrants in search for an employment that can guarantee both to themselves and their families a better living standard. The result is that 15 percent of the population produces 50 percent of national wealth (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey, 1997: 84). Concentrating investments in the urban areas, deforesting large land estates and the introduction of a market-based economy has even led to a social disruption of traditional roles. Men are forced to migrate to find an employment and thereby save money to pay for an inflated bride price. Women’s inheritance rights have been severely affected by deforestation. The scarcity of land has led families to allocate lesser land to their daughters. Women are therefore using migration towards urban centra as both an individual and a household strategy to survive. Women are in fact more than men tied to their families by filial obligations and considered more trustable to send money home33. All the sex workers I interviewed (apart from one that lost her parents) stated that they all send money home. Remittances often constitute half or more of their monthly salary34. Remittances are used by their families to renovate the house, maintain their children, buy medicines or pay for workers during the wet season in the rice fields. Remittances are also used to buy durable goods such as fridges or tv-sets and agricultural machines and equipment. The reasons for the sex workers to migrate are various. Among the most common answers there’s the necessity to

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33 The information quoted above are taken from Witthaker in Jackson&Cook, 1999, chapter two.
34 Loy told me for example that in the low season she earns as freelancer 10.000 bath and sends 5000 bath home. (interview, 16/08/2002). The same share is confirmed also by other workers. The only thing that might differ is the monthly income.
maintain one or more children who are being taken care of by their parents and/or siblings. Another reason is missing companions (and thereby an income) because their husbands or boyfriend have left them for another woman, have found a job abroad or just did not want to take responsibility of their children. Some of the women confessed that they had run away from their husbands because they were often drunk and hit them. Some families are not aware of the type of employment of the girls. They think they work as sellers in a shop or in a supermarket. Others know and as more than one woman told me, “they understand and accept my sacrifice”. Education is moreover an important factor why these women do not see an alternative to sex work. The majority of my interviewees had in fact only frequented primary school (six years). Interesting to notice is that despite the social stigma sex workers have to endure during the time they are in the prostitution sector, many men are ready to marry a former sex worker “because she has become wealthy” (interview, 08/07/2002). Women become therefore squeezed into an apparent paradox: on one side they are ostracized by society because they are migrants and because some of them finally decide to become a sex worker. On the other, families and brothers accept such sacrifice as part of a daughter’s obligation towards her family members.

3.5 Local responses to globalization

Development policies

As we read in the United Nation report on internal migration, “[f]aced with a deteriorating balance of trade and a mounting of foreign debt, the Government actively promoted the service sector, especially tourism and international labor migration, to earn foreign exchange” (Phongpaichit, UN, 1993: 179). Thailand translated the World Bank’s, the IMF and the UN recommendations in its Economic and Social development plans, (in particular with the sixth plan) to promote tourism as engine of growth. The strategy was to attract as many tourists as possible. Tourism is nowadays the major source for foreign exchange revenue for Thailand. This was achieved by aggressive international advertising campaigns (www.thaieconwatch.com/articles/m98_1/m98 _1.htm). Recommendations from international institutions took even the form of increased liberalist reforms aimed to attract foreign investors to the country. As argued by Hewison, it was in particular under the government led by Chuan Leekpai that ‘Thailand announced its full commitment to the IMF’s economic programme’ (Hewison, 2000: 284). These measures took in particular the form of a rising number of MNC investing in the country.

An image that sells: tourist advertisements and the construction of the ‘Thai Woman’

Thai Airways has for long time been criticized for exploiting the image of ‘smiling and feminine Thai women’ to advertise the country. The reader probably recognizes Thailand as ‘The Land of Smiles’. Such images helped to construct the image of a

servile and obedient Thai woman that-as we will see later-is deeply rooted in every sex tourist mind\textsuperscript{36}. As argued in Morgan and Pritchard’s study upon tourist images, women and children are most of the times portrayed as decorative and welcoming. Their images have no context and are merely seen as attractive individuals. In the researchers’ study this type of images correspond to level I (the lowest level) on their sexist scale\textsuperscript{37}. The union of infrastructural spending for developing tourism and the massive advertisements exploiting Thai women was that ‘[t]he period between 1987-1996 can be termed the Golden Decade of Thai tourism. The number of foreign tourists increased from 2.6 million in 1987 to 7 million arrivals in 1995’(www.thaieconwatch.com/articles/m98_1/m98_1.htm). In 2001 the number of arrivals surpassed 10 million (TAT, 2001 statistical report). It is not possible to know how many among these tourists are also sex tourists. The fact that the top three most visited resorts in Thailand corresponds to the resorts where the major number of “entertainment places” offer sex might be an indication of the strong relationship between tourism and prostitution\textsuperscript{38}.

\textbf{Élites}

As Truong shows in her work, there was a tight collaboration between the ruling class and international conglomerates that made tourism have such a prominence in Thailand’s economy. The military élites stipulated in particular in 1967 a treaty that allowed US military soldiers stationed in Vietnam to come on Rest and Recreation leave in Thailand. Since then, prostitution has become industrialized and modernized (Seabrooke,2001:71). As stated by Truong\textsuperscript{39}:

\begin{quote}
Negotiations /…/ where conducted by a general of the Thai Royal Air force whose wife was the co-ordinator of the first travel agency-Tommy Tours-together with a foreign Air Force officer .
\end{quote}

(Truong, 1990:161)

Does the Thai élite-foreign tourist conglomerates liaison still continue today? Even if the military era is over, there are reasons to suspect so given the prominence that tourism still has for the country. The tourist industry amounted in 1996 to $10 billion while the flesh trade economy is estimated at between $18-$22 billion. It corresponds to roughly 18-20 percent of GNP (Bell in Somswasdi &Theobald eds, 1997:56&77,note 5)\textsuperscript{40}.

\textsuperscript{36} As I could observe on my flight to Thailand, Thai Airways has responded to the critique by for example introducing a steward in the film showing security on board. It is the hostess however who has the duty to show the passengers how to relax their muscles after the long flight. The woman is therefore the one portrayed as having ‘healing capacities’. The man is however also stereotyped as self confident and having a firm voice.

\textsuperscript{37} Sexism is divided in Morgan and Pritchard in four levels according to women and men’s portrayal of roles in tourism advertisements. Level I sees women and men portrayed as one-dimensional sexual objects or decorations. (Morgan&Pritchard,1998. See in particular chapter ten).

\textsuperscript{38} The data comes from a confrontation between TAT statistic of 2001 (in English) and the Health Department Statistics of January 2002 (in Thai).

\textsuperscript{39} Other sources quoting élites involvement are Ponghpaichit&Baker(198:289) and Karnajanauksorn (196:20) quoted by Bell in Sosswasdi &Theobald eds (197:77) .

\textsuperscript{40} It is important to stress that these are rough estimates given the illegality of the sector.
Localisation: Resistance or political rhetoric?

After the economic crisis, the new social movements tended in Thailand to take the form of a populist challenge towards globalization, liberalism and Westernization (Hewison, 1999:285). These social movements see the community as the key-feature in the movement and as an antithesis to urbanization and industrialization. The strategy proposed is to de-link agriculture from market economy and turn to self-sufficiency (Hewison, 1999:286). The global market is seen as leading Thailand towards the ‘lust of consumption’ (ibid) and must be challenged with traditional values. Hewitt states therefore that:

“for localists the community is not simply a source of empowerment for really existing villagers. Rather, the community is an ethical construction. The community and its values become a mean of resistance to globalization and for reasserting values identified as appropriate”

(Hewison, 1999: 287)

What we could call ‘rural localism’ is however not the only form of resistance that has been identified. Some feminists see for example sex workers’ decision to enter prostitution also as a form of resistance41. The question is however if both the ‘rural localism’ and sex worker’s decision can be seen as an organized resistance against globalization. Hewison argues that localism in Thailand has nowadays tended to become a middle-class and political discourse shifting from grassroot level to academia and party politics (Hewison, 1999:290). Localism becomes therefore emptied from its original meaning to serve the interests of the ruling classes. As for sex workers, the fact that many women enter the sector is hardly an expression of self-empowerment (not at least in terms of mental self-empowerment). They might gain an economic amelioration, but the fact that both families and third parts profit from their earnings make the women I interviewed hardly independent. Paradoxically, even local people are seen as resisting prostitution. Sex workers catering for westerners are in fact seen as challenging ‘Thainess’. The argument is that sex workers catering for farangs challenge true Thai values of decency and Buddhist principles (Morris, 2002:52). Not only this overlooks the fact that prostitution is first of all rooted in local costumes. Morris argues that sex workers challenge first of all what is deemed to be ‘the other’, namely polygamy (ibid). While a man can be polygamous and while laws institutionalize this right through loopholes in legislation, women must conform to a specific monogamous role of ‘good women’. As for ‘rural localization’, the challenge to Thainess becomes therefore a political discourse aimed at justifying male privileges to have more than one companion as symbol for their masculinity.

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3.6 Gender roles in Thai Society

If we look back in history, it is a widely acknowledged fact that traditionally women participated equally with men in agriculture, often outnumbering them in trade (Tantiwiramanond&Pandey in Somswasdi&Theobald,1997:88). There has been no seclusion between women and men and women’s position in society was generally ‘visible, mobile and active’ (ibid). However, to attribute only to capitalism the present gender bias in society might be misleading. Even if Thai women had a key position in society and de facto were entitled inheritance rights, their role was seen as indivisible from her procreative function. Their duties where seen as confined to the private sphere and they could not be ordained as monks and thereby receive an education (Witthaker in Jackson&Cook, 2001:46). Even if a woman is nowadays in Thailand granted the right to receive an education she is however still “trained in areas which in effect have reinforced and strengthened their traditional roles as housewives” (NCWA, 1995:12-19). Gender biases are particularly evident in the private relationship between men and women and in discriminatory laws.

**Sexuality: a double standard**

While I was doing research about different perceptions of gender roles in Thailand a young woman stated that:

“I would tolerate if my boyfriend sleeps with a prostitute but it’s different if he sleeps with another girl. You know, with a prostitute it’s just about sex while sleeping with another woman can mean love and involvement”

Gender discrimination in Thailand is related more to the personal relationship between the sexes (Gray et al.1999:4). In particular, there is as noted by the report an unequal power in the practice of polygamy. As two of my informants pointed out, Thailand is nowadays by the law a monogamous society. Polygamy is however still widely practiced (interviews, 26/06/2002 and 28/08/2002). The practice to have a minor wife, even if officially Thailand is a monogamous society, is widely accepted and a common practice among Thai men. ‘Most Thai women have been socialized to tolerate the male’s practice of visiting prostitutes by the older generation’ /.../men are brought up with the belief that this is part of their masculinity’( NCWA,1995:12-14). Another highly worrying fact is the acceptance for women that their partners do not use condoms. Women tend to accommodate to ‘choose’ a female contraceptive method instead (Gray et al. 1999:7-8). Socializing women into accepting their mates’ decisions to visit prostitutes and their companions desire not to use condoms infringes not only to their liberties as women to decide over their own bodies and sexuality. It is a direct threat to their health that must be redressed.

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42 Part of a preliminary questionnaire, 19-06-2002.
3.7 Laws: an institutionalization of gender biases

Women in Thailand are not only discriminated *de facto* in their private sphere but also *de jure*. An illustrative example is given by laws regulating rape within wedlock. As stressed by Sanitsuda Ekachai, ‘[o]ur people’s charter guarantees gender equality and respect for human dignity. But its legal sanctity stops at our bedroom door’ (Bangkok Post, June 2002). The journalist was in particular referring to the Council of States position on rape within marriage. As she writes, the Council condemns marital rape only ‘given two circumstances: when the husband has a severely contagious disease, or when the couple has been separated under a court for at least three years’ (ibid). This attitude reinforces the practice according to which a woman is the propriety of her husband that can dispose of her however and whenever pleases him. Even wife battering is as well as rape considered as a crime of minor importance. In the penal Code it is classified as ‘ordinary assault’ while evidence demonstrates that whenever a woman reports a case of wife battering to the police, she is dissuaded, ignored or convinced by the police that it is a husband’s right to beat her (NCWA, 1995:12-17). Other legalized discriminatory practices are laws regulating divorce. Among these for example, while a woman cannot sue a husband for compensation if he has an affair, he can on the contrary find support in the law. Moreover, while a woman’s married title is accompanying her throughout her life, a man is always called with the same title. This means that laws theoretically allow a man to have several marriages since his fraud is not likely to be discovered (NCWA, 1995:12-10). Finally a last example of biasing laws are the ones that while punishing a woman for marrying a foreign by depriving her the right to inherit land, the contrary is not valid. By the law in fact, a foreign cannot own land and since the woman’s possessions are seen as common properties with her husband, she looses the inheritance rights if she decides for example to marry a *farang* (NCWA, 1995:12-12 & 12-13). Despite of not being directly related to laws regulating prostitution, the institutionalization of biased gender practices contribute to see women as less worth than their male counterparts. Legal discriminatory practices uphold the idea that women are a man’s possession and that he has the right to have several partners while women are expected to conform to a specific subordinate role within society and in relation to a man.

3.8 Prostitution and sex tourism in Thailand

As we have seen previously, the socialization of men in Thailand include the acceptance for a man to have extra-marital relationships. According to statistics, ¾ of all urban Thai men have their first sexual experience with a sex worker (Phongpaichit & Baker, 1998:293). Moreover, ‘offering a woman’s body has become often a way to close a business transaction as part of the local ‘hospitality’ (NCWA, 1995:8). Despite official statistics in English claim that prostitution is decreasing, data from the Health Department in Thai show the contrary. Data from the Thai statistical bureau stops moreover at 1998. According to statistics in English, the number of workers diminished from 85, 126 in 1989 to 61,135 in 1998. Statistics in Thai show instead an increasing number of sex workers: in January 2002 the numbers were...
68,974 (Health Department, 2002 report). The bias is probably due to attempts from the government to ‘clean’ Thai image abroad, in particular after the HIV pandemic (Pongpaichit and Baker, 1998:289). Instead of covering statistics, there is an urgency to report the real numbers. Swedish statistics show for example that one out of five patients infected with HIV has contracted the virus in Thailand. The group that is the most infected by the virus is the one of heterosexual men who has visited Southeast Asia. It is important to specify that the blame should NOT be attributed to the sex workers. As it emerged from my interviews, all of them are very well aware of the HIV risks to due the Governments campaigns and thanks to the work of NGOs. The problem lies in the behaviour of sex tourists who very often do not want to use a protection. The reason why a woman might accept not to use a condom is the economic need (Wawer et al, 1996:459). Given the fact that many of these sex tourists are married or have a girlfriend in Sweden or somewhere else in the West, there is a pressure to at least responsibilize these men to use a condom. Another problem connected with official data on the actual number of sex workers, is that they do not include all freelancers. It is difficult even to establish how many sex workers cater for tourists and how many for locals. In all the tourist places I went (pubs and discotheques), there was an evident presence of freelancers drawn by the demand of both older and younger Westerners. More studies are needed to nuance the present statistical reports.

3.9 Loopholes that allow the business to flourish

Prostitution was firstly regulated and controlled by the 1909 Venereal Diseases Control Act. It became later seen as a criminal offence with the passing of the Prostitution Suppression Act of 1960. Now this Law has been further revised but still punishes solicitation. Also the Penal Code of 1956 punishes procurers of women for sexual purposes, both nationally and infractions committed abroad. More than the description of the single laws, it is interesting to examine why prostitution, despite an official criminalization is permitted to flourish in the country backed by evident loopholes. The major ambiguities are offered by the so-called Entertainment law. Under the label ‘entertainment’, customers and the owners of these places entertainment places are able to exploit the somewhat regularly employed ‘waitresses’ and ‘masseuses’ and make profits even from the selling of these girls bodies. The women are used both to attract customers and make them consume large amount of alcohol at western prices (while only 20% goes to the woman herself). The bar owners even ask the customers to pay the bar to take the girls ‘off’ as we shall see in the last section of this thesis. The result is that ‘while the existence of prostitution is legally suppressed and deformedized, entertainment places (pimping) become formalized to protect owners and customers’(Truong, 1990:156). This is only one example-albeit perhaps the most evident-of the many loopholes that regulate prostitution in Thailand.

43 Out of 277 HIV cases in Sweden last year, 48 had contracted the virus in Thailand
44 For more information on laws covering prostitution in Thailand, please see the FFW special study (1995), Boonchalasksi&Guest, 1994, chapter IV.
45 See previous footnote.
It is however exemplificatory why a country that formally condemns solicitation of customers de facto permits prostitution and thereby sex tourism to flourish. Not surprisingly, even male politicians are using the sexual favors of workers, be they adult or underage\textsuperscript{46}.

### 3.10 Maintaining loopholes strong: police and corruption

One of the major problems connected to the regulation of prostitution is as acknowledged by many informants the fact that the police itself does often not implement laws. When the police is visible on the bar scene it is either because of crackdown has consequence of media’s attention on prostitution (FFW-special study,1995:22-23 and Boonchalaksi and Guest, 1994:19). Police officers are moreover seen in the entertainment places either as spectators of shows themselves or as buyers (my own observations). Police attitudes toward prostitution is highly deplorable also due to the monthly bribes that police takes from the owners (as one interview stressed, 15,000 to 20,000/month). After crackdowns, workers risk even to be harassed by the police personnel.

### 3.11 The Issue of ‘Choice’

The official position of NGO groups in Thailand is that sex work is work and that prostitution is about choice. The government should therefore grant to sex workers the protection that other workers are alleged (FFW and Empower’s position). The contrast picture is offered by the Government position. Women selling their bodies are criminalized and as we have seen in the chapter about localization those catering for farangs are even seen as defying ‘Thainess’. The national Human rights commissioner I interviewed argued that these women should be granted rights when they are at their workplace but not when they go out with customers because that is their choice. Prostitution should be challenged but laws should not punish neither workers, nor the families and not even the customers. The justification for not punishing the latter two groups was that in Thailand prostitution has a long tradition. The situation will not change unless society changes first (interview 28/08/2002,Human Rights Commissioner). It is of primary importance to solve the issue of ‘choice’. Should workers’ agency be recognized or should they be seen as merely victims? As the situation is now, if a woman need help from the State, she has to quit the profession (interview,28/08/2002). She will be hosted in a center but her economic nor maybe health problems will not be solved. On the other hand, the government do not seem to accept a liberalization of prostitution in the country. How to solve the dilemma? As argued by Jean D’Cunha, there should be much more focus on the position of these women as survivors (interview, 08/08/2002). Even if these women enter the profession voluntarily, they do so compelled by the marginalization that gender and minority biasing policies have provoked. As we have seen in this chapter, Western influences have brought in Thailand a market liberalization that has disrupted traditional social

\textsuperscript{46} Article appeared in the Bangkok Post on the 20\textsuperscript{th} January 2001.  
http://scoop.bangkokpost.co.th/bkkpost/2001jan20010120/200101_news02.html
roles. However, the labour exploitation that is occurring for example in MNC could not be brought about if it was not based on a patriarchal society. Even if Thai women are better off than their counterparts in other Asian countries, they are rendered vulnerable both *de jure* and *de facto*. Filial obligation compels them to send money home as a family strategy of survival. Hard working conditions and low salaries might make them sick or unable to endure such life. Moreover, they might have one or more children to support. Prostitution might represent for them the only way out to escape from their lives in the rural areas.

**3.12 Conclusion**

The analysis of Thailand’s strategy to adopt tourism as an engine of growth offers an apparent contrast picture. On the one hand, Thailand is a ‘weak’ country. Following international organizations’ and financial institutions’ recommendations, Thailand introduced an export-led strategy based on industrialization and upholding tourism as an engine of growth. Thailand could however be seen as ‘strong’ given civil society’s resistance towards globalization. The government has moreover through the eight economic and social plan re-directed investments towards the agricultural sector. Localization could therefore be seen as a ‘strong’ response against an exogenous capitalism. Thailand remains however ‘weak’ due to corruption, élites collusion and the marginalization of the population. Given the juxtaposition of what is global and local, the concepts ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ state are not sufficient to characterize Thailand’s position in the global system. The failure of the Thai developmental state to reach a ‘growth with equity’ can find a more encompassing and nuanced explanations through an examination of the global-local nexus. MNC for example, can certainly be seen as an exploitative force in that they have ‘pushed core capital out into the periphery in the search for large amounts of unskilled labor power’ (Hoogvelt, 1997:204). As we have seen, however, such exploitation could not occur without patriarchal structures that construct women as less worth than men and thereby renders even their labour less paid. The introduction of cash in the agricultural sector has certainly disrupted ‘complementary roles’ (Withhaker’s study in Jackson&Cook, 2001). However, such capitalist transformation could not have the present effects on their lives if women already traditionally were not relegated in the household economy in virtue of their procreative role. Their inheritance rights have certainly diminished as a consequence of deforestation following a market-economy led planning. But how can we then justify the fact that even in the rural areas women are less paid than men if not thanks to a cohabitation of an ‘exogenous’ economy and a traditional characterization of women as less worth than men? Moreover, examining the tourist industry it is obvious that such introduction in developmental schemes was the result of a recommendation (or maybe imposition in some cases given US aid in the aftermath of the second world war) by international institutions (IMF *in primis*).

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47 ‘Strong countries’ are usually seen to belong to the center while a ‘weak country’ is seen to belong to periphery (Hoogvelt, 1997:208)

48 NIC states were before the crisis in 1997 praised for having reached GDP growth through an equal distribution of resources and thereby seen as successful in building a sustainable growth. The thesis did not hold however in the light of a re-examination of the country’s development programmes in the aftermath of the crisis.

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However, if a local élite had not seen in tourism a viable mean to make private gains, tourism would not have had the prominence it de facto has and had for development plans. As for sex tourism, certainly military bases gave it a consumeristic character. However, if it were not for the polygamous right men are entitled of locally, maybe sex tourism would not have had the prominence it has nowadays. Servicing and pampering tourists is therefore possible thanks to both global and local forces that construct the Thai woman as submissive, vulnerable, ready to service both local and global tourists in the ‘Land of Smiles’.
4. Global Tourists meeting a local supply: the global-local nexus at actor level

4.1 Who holds the Power: the sex contract

As argued by O’Connell Davidson, “prostitution is an institution that allows clients to secure temporarily certain powers of sexual command over prostitutes” (O’Connell Davidson, 1998:3). The same power relations are also present in sex tourism. Albeit the two industries differ from each other due to the component of travel, both prostitution and sex tourism are more than just sex (Jeffreys, 1997:62). We shall now see how such ‘power of command’ is contracted. Dirk argued for example that having a sexual intercourse with a woman in prostitution was like ‘taking a pee’ (interview, 10/06/2002). Apparently he was only trading sex for money. A closer examination at the context reveals however other aspects. Dirk is a tall, very slim man in his forties. He wears thick, round small glasses and is completely bold. He is in other words not a man that a fashion magazine would choose for its ‘model of the year’ front page. Dirk is not married and has never been. He wants to become an English teacher in Cambodia because, as he said, they needed people like him that could do some good in the country (ibid). When I met him, he was surrounded by five good-looking girls. Would he be granted the same attention in Europe? Probably not. I believe that one of the reasons for being in a bar in Pattaya was a way for him to re-enter the world that had ostracized him because of his appearance. Dirk was in Pattaya for a couple of days and every night he had ‘taken off’ a different woman/girl from the bars. Dirk held a double power over the sex worker: on the one hand the woman he ‘took off’ when we were there knew only some words in English. The women’s contracting power was therefore limited. On the other hand, even if one of them was insisting that he should take her ‘off’, Dirk just ignored her. Since the girl was telling Dirk that she loved him, Cohen would have called this kind of relationship ‘staged’. Cohen explains such kind of relationship from both a Western and a Thai perspective. From the former point of view, Cohen says it is a trick used by the women to bolster the customers’ ego. From a Thai perspective, he describes it as ‘a playful display of personalized service’ expressed by the woman to please her unloved partner and show her obligation to those in a higher hierarchy (Cohen, 1996:279-280). Despite the fact that Cohen has undoubtedly more authority than the underscribed to analyze Thai culture, I find his explanation rather ethnocentric. There are aspects that Cohen’s explanation totally bypass. First of all, given the young age of the woman, was Dirk her first encounter? The answer to such question is highly important given the value attachment of virginity in Thai culture. Conversations with young women granted me the insight during my field study that traditions are certainly changing and so do young people’s attitudes about their own sexuality. However, the first sexual encounter is still seen by the women as the encounter with the man who will later become their husband. As Noi, a sex worker I interviewed in Bangkok confessed, she was hoping to marry her

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49 To ‘take out’ a woman from a bar or to ‘take her off’ is the same thing.
‘second one’, e.g. the second man she had had a sexual encounter with\(^{50}\). Secondly, these women try to minimize as much as they can both the duration of the single sexual encounters and the number of men they are going to sleep with (insight given by a sex tourist, 31/07/2002). Having already been taken out once by Dirk, the girl of the bar in Pattaya knew what was expecting her. She was probably hoping moreover for Dirk to be her ‘boyfriend’ be it because she really had feelings for him or because in Cohen’s terminology she was staging them. No relationship on the bar scene is a given and well-defined one. Nor is it always the women staging emotions to prolong the contract as the information I gathered demonstrate. We should therefore try to examine with more attention at the single and contingent situations instead of trying to essentialize the relationship between farang men and Thai bar women. Despite Cohen’s unfortunate classifications, his greatest merit is to have recognized the open ended character of sex tourism. As the girls I have interviewed stated, they sometimes are taken by their customers on a “vacation” to a tourist resort. Such “vacation” (the brackets refer to the fact that the women are de facto working) can last from a couple of days up to two months. The relationship is often prolonged after the man’s departure through e-mails. The letters are translated by either special services or acquaintances. One woman told me that she writes a letter every day to a man she has been to Krabi with for one week. She pays from 20 to 80 bath for the translation service, depending on the length of the letters (interview, 16/08/2002).

This is however only one example of contract that has been maintained. The sex tourists are well aware of the fact that they are buying a worker given the many transactions that they have to pass through in the bar. However, not only many men deny that they are buying a prostitute. They even deny that they are customers paying for a service that might or not include sex\(^{51}\). These men convince themselves that the girls they have taken ‘off’ from the bars are ‘regular’ girlfriends while they—the sex tourists—take for themselves the role of generous boyfriends. The payment and successive money remittances are seen as ‘gifts’ given to the girls or their families and a sign of such generosity and ‘love’. Graham and Jonas stated that they are helping these girls to alleviate their poverty (interviews, 17/08/2002 and 24/08/2002). The open ended character of sex tourism and the denial to be a sex tourist might be an important reason for the refusal of men not to pay the workers. Another reason could be a cultural misunderstanding. The man thinks: “why should give her money if I already pay for her food, clothes, etc.?” (Interview, 1/8/2002). I would even argue that many customers do not want to pay out of pure ethnocentrism and arrogance. Let’s examine for example the story that Markus, a Swedish dentist, told to my male assistant. Markus remembered that during one of his frequent visits to Thailand and to Patpong (Bangkok’s open-air brothel area-cum-night-market), he and his friend where threatened with knives. His friend was supposed to have a “contact” and thereby allow them a “real bargain” when buying out two of ‘the beautiful girls with numbers and

\(^{50}\) They got to know each to her when she was working as a seller. One day, the phone rang and it happened to be the man’s wife. He had not told her he was married. Noi left him and pressed also by money necessities, she decided to work in a bar.

\(^{51}\) A study demonstrates that out of 661 interviewee who de facto where sex tourists, 78.1 percent denied to be a sex tourist (Kleiber and Wilke’s study quoted in Oppermann, 1998:11).
stuff” as Markus expressed it (interview, 17/08/2002). As it turned out, the contact did not work out and the price was higher than they had expected. They were asked to pay 2500 bath each (approximately 620 Swedish crowns). As Markus stated, they refused to pay and where thereby threatened. As he said:

“You know, we’ve got a lot of money and we have good jobs back in Sweden but we got a little bit drunk and we didn’t want to pay more /…/ At the end, we had to pay a lot of money to get out-5000 Bath-just to get out of the bar. A very bad night. No women” (ibid).

The fact that the two Swedes got drunk certainly contributed to their decision of not wanting to pay. And yet, their attitude is not at all different from the one of many tourists I have met in Thailand. One of the main reasons for coming to the country is the fact that prices are much lower than in the West. Such attitude is moreover confirmed by Markus and his friend Jonas when asked why they came to Thailand:

-“You know, everything in Thailand is possible! Nice beach, nice girls you know” (Jonas)
-“Yes, and you can have as many as you want. And it’s so fucking cheap! It’s very different from Sweden. In Sweden it’s like 10.000bath for a nice lady and in Thailand it’s 400-500 bath” (Markus) (interview, 17/08/2002)

As the UNIFEM officer summarized this attitude of sex tourists: “I have money. I can buy your country, I can buy your women” (interview, 08/08/2002). Markus did not want to pay more than a woman was worth for him in Thailand. The price she was worth was for him the price of a cinema ticket in Sweden. Nothing more.

Another pivotal element in balancing power in the bargaining phase (and even afterwards) is the knowledge of English. The more a woman’s English language skills are developed, the more she can control the amount of money she will receive. Her knowledge of English is also extremely important for the woman’s physical and health safety in that she might be more able to control the situation once alone with her customer. English becomes for the strict business transaction important in that it gives a worker a bargaining power. Theoretically, if she commands the language, she is able to contract a price for a longer or a shorter service and even for specific services. There is however a difference between a sex contract in the West and in Thailand. O’Connell Davidson describes the bargaining power of a London worker as freedom in that this is able to impose on her client in advance an x price for an x service (O’Connell Davidson, 1998, chapter five). Women working in bars in Thailand do not employ such strategy. This obviously gives a stronger bargaining power to the customer. He is able to ask several requests to the sex worker (ranging from washing his clothes to sex) and he would only pay for such ‘slavery package’ the price for a night out. Moreover, the ‘price’ of a woman is-as if she was cattle-decided

52 Two organizations, namely Empower and The Fountain of Life, have incorporated English tuition in their programs in helping the women in prostitution. Apart from English, they even teach the girls German and Japanese. An NGO member even told me that they might need someone speaking Norwegian (interviews, 13/08/2002 and 27/08/2002).
by her appearance more than her working hours\textsuperscript{53}. Another problem in this skewed business transaction is given by the fact that the women do not usually ask for a fixed price in advance. The majority of them say that a customer ‘should’ pay at least a certain amount (it varies from woman to woman. A common answer is at least 1500/2000 bath). This is said by both Cohen and O’Connell Davidson to be a strategy employed by the women hoping to earn more money than they could receive from fixing a rate price in advance. By not deciding a price beforehand, she can hope to ply for the man’s generosity\textsuperscript{54}. This could even be a way to ‘disguise’ the \textit{de facto} sex transaction she is trading for her company. However, this might be a risky attitude since many men, as we have seen, either because of a cultural ‘misunderstanding’, or because they fool themselves that this is an “ordinary love affair”\textsuperscript{55} or because of simple imperialistic arrogance, at the end use the women without paying them.

Another interesting phenomenon noted by one worker was the fact that, according to her experience, men do not want girls that can speak English fluently. The motive, she said, is that the customers think that a woman that speaks English has worked for a long time with customers. If she is on the contrary not able to speak this language ‘this means that she doesn’t know too much’ (interview, 16/08/2002). The man’s ‘choice’ could be based on two grounds: on one side, as the worker acknowledged, these men want a ‘fresh’ girl that has not gone out with many men. On the other side, this might also be part of the construction of the ‘Asian feminine other’. If she does not speak so good English, this means that she is maybe more exotic. Above all, she is more vulnerable and in the hands of the buyer. On the other hand, the same woman confessed that even Thai girls do not like \textit{farang} men that speak good Thai. As the worker confessed, tourists that speak good Thai have been in Thailand for a longer time. She does not mind that they know much about her country as such. What worries her is the fact that knowing the dynamics of the bars, he knows that he can have a discount on the price. Instead of giving her at the end 1000 bath she might give her only half of it (16/08/2002). Evidently, a man’s strength becomes a woman’s weakness. Theoretically, for having a balance in the transaction, the girl should speak very little English while the man should not be able to be speak a word of Thai\textsuperscript{56}. However, the balance would still be skewed towards the tourist since the girl would not be able to make him understand neither her quotidian needs such as the food she likes and dislikes\textsuperscript{57} nor the woman’s limits when it comes to the sex act. Knowing how

\textsuperscript{53} As accounted by Pongpaichit in her study on Bangkok’s masseuse, the girls are divided into two groups according to their beauty. Prices vary therefore according to such appearance. See Phongpaichit (1980:36).

\textsuperscript{54} See O’Connell Davidson (1998) and Cohen’s (1996).

\textsuperscript{55} it is certainly difficult to establish what such an affair might imply. Many radical feminists argue for example that marriage itself is a kind of prostitution in that it implies an exchange of services. Even if I agree that many women marry to status, power and money, I would not go as long as radicals in their claims about marriage. What I mean with ‘ordinary love affair’ is a balance of power within the relationship which puts the two partners on a similar-if possible equal-position within such relationship, Utopically speaking at least…..

\textsuperscript{56} As one tourist told me during my observations in the bars: ‘It’s disgusting. There are girls who go out every time with a different guy. More frequently with those that have just arrived’. In the light of what has been discussed above it is evident that the more the tourist is new on the bar scene, the lesser knowledge he has of how to deal with the transaction, and the more power of transaction the girl in question has.

\textsuperscript{57} Empower dedicates entire lessons at teaching these girls common food terms that we take for granted but that for the women become daily survival strategies in the frustration of their job.
to convince a man to use a condom can mean for these girls the difference between life and death.

4.2 Through a sex tourist’s eyes: constructing the ‘Bar Thai Lady’

The issue of identity

In the previous chapters, a fundamental issue has been introduced in the process of identity formation, namely the denial of being a sex tourist. As well as workers, sex tourists employ what in psychology is called ‘dissociation’.58 Workers employ different techniques of dissociating their feelings and self from their bodies. As one woman expressed it “I am now working numb” (17/08/2002). In order to cope from what is happening in their lives these women might for example either dress differently when they are working and in their free time59. Another way of dissociating is as well as sex tourists to deny both to themselves and to their surroundings what they are doing and maybe not ask directly for money. As we have seen this is a ‘strategy’ to get a greater income. It could however even be interpreted as a way to disguise that they are de facto selling their bodies and company for money while acting as a ‘normal’ girlfriend. A sign of this dissociation can be seen also in the way these women call themselves. None of them say that they are prostituting. They are tham ngaan khap farang, e.g. they are working with foreigners. A study on child workers in Thailand stressed the fact that these children:

“/…/ actively try to form reciprocal arrangements with their clients and the rejection of labels such as prostitution is not simply a denial of reality but a way of manipulating that reality. They recognise the structural power their clients have over them and do their best to direct it to their benefits” (Montgomery in Kempadoo&Doezema, 1998:146).

I personally do not agree completely with Montgomery’s standpoint in that I consider child prostitution and customer’s exploitation of these children as-albeit not entirely-different from buying an adult woman’s body60. I however agree with the researcher when she claims that the rejection of labels is a way to employ at least some control over the workers’ own identity, be they adult or children. The social stigma that they daily face (and that the sex worker I interviewed probably thought I also agree with) made one of them say “I work in a bar, I know I am bad” (interview, 23/07/2002). To dissociate this woman called the buyers either customer or more often boyfriends. I believe that the same dissociation technique is employed by sex tourists. As previously stressed, sex tourists deny what they are. Two of the sex tourists stated that “This is not prostitution”(interviews, 24/08/2002 and 25/08/2002) Such attitude of both

58 Dissociation is a defence mechanism employed to protect oneself from abuses. See Jeffreys (1997:271).
59 As one girl expressed it “I don’t like make up. In my free time I never wear make up”. What is for us only a detail, becomes for these women a ‘sign’ to dissociate their occupation in the bars from their free time.
60 I maintain that there is a difference between a voluntary sex worker and a child, even if she or he are voluntary deciding to sell their bodies. There is a very thin line sometimes between a child and an adult as the girl quoted in the introduction to this study might demonstrate.
workers and more specifically of sex workers can be explained through what Calhoun calls self-knowledge and recognition. As Calhoun states:

“We face problems of recognition because socially sustained discourses about who it is possible or appropriate or valuable to be inevitably shape the way we look and constitute ourselves, with varying degrees of agonism and tension” (Calhoun 1994:20).

As it has been argued in the theoretical part, identity is a social construction. As such we are often judged-or our position in society is being recognized-first of all from the way we act and behave in our surrounding’s eyes. Visiting a prostitute in the West or as in Thailand ‘taking a girl off’ from a bar is seen by the majority of us non-buyers as something depraved, as something that we condemn as an act that ‘you just don’t do if you have a slight respect for a human being’. Paradoxically such stigma attached to the customers is derived by the stigma that a moralistic society has for long time attached to the women themselves (and who therefore as seen as prostitutes not as individuals doing a work to make a living). Customers become in this way ostracized by society not because they are ‘abnormal’ but because they buy sex from people that have been marginalized by society. As one customer expressed it when asked why he came to Bangkok to buy sex:

“I would never jump in my car and visit prostitutes back home. I would have to freeze and hide, drive to a periphery and make everything very quickly. Here instead everything is done under the sunlight. It becomes normal to go to the bars and take a girl home”

(Interview, 31-07-2002)

Identity formation is moreover linked to another dissociation technique. Sex tourists tend often during the interview to accuse other tourists of being ‘the perverted ones’ and those who should be blamed. Johnny, after claiming that he had bought sex wherever he had been travelling, quickly added that when he was in Mexico he saw men having sex with animals and thought: “this is really disgusting” (interview, 22/06/2002). Dirk, on his hand, after having interviewed him, told me and my Swedish friend:

“Look at those old men. They come here, take a beer, maybe they sing a song. They are men who no one has ever loved and who here receive the girls full attention”

(interview, 10/06/2002)

Dirk is certainly right when he states that these men find something in Pattaya they are missing in the West. These men, as well as many others individuals here in the West are living an alienated and lonely life. Dirk’s main intention was not however to give a social analysis of our Western world. Both Johnny and Dirk justified their presence in Pattaya and their buying these women ‘off’ by blaming other men considered to behave worser than them. We could even go as far as to claim that they are trying to sell (to me as Western woman first of all) the image of ‘good men’ in comparison to
other sex tourists. Dirk’s and Johnny’s self-identity becomes therefore paradoxically shaped by what they are not.

4.3 Race-the other reconstructed

We have seen in the chapter about migration how a racialized construction of the ‘Asian Woman’ as low-skilled and docile plays a role in the recruitment of women in MNC. There are reasons to believe that race plays even a pivotal role as a pull factor for many tourists towards the South. We have already mentioned the exploitation of women in tourist advertisements. We shall now see how these constructions play a role in combination with male sex tourists stereotypizations of the ‘Bar Lady’. Let’s examine for example the situation I faced during my fieldwork in a red light district in Bangkok.

After having interviewed a male tourist in a red-light district, me and my female assistant where literally pushed by the same tourist into a show. He made us sit in front of the scene where acrobatic girls where jumping in the air and then ‘landing’ with their heels smashing heavily and by purpose on the floor. Around us, a crowd of excited and screaming men was satisfactorily watching the show. The tourist started commenting what he was seeing:

“Look at their bodies! Look at their movements! [he is contemporaneously following the acrobacies painting lines in the air]. Look at their tiny, sinuous, perfect bodies! Now, look at that girls eyes: who do you think is the hunter? Look at that man [a middle-aged man is surrounded by two girls. While he has his hands on one of the girls’ bottom, the other girl is caressing both his bold hair and his prosperous stomach]. He is the king of the world! These girls don’t care if he is fat or ugly: they can tell if it is a good man just watching him in the eyes!” (Interview, 25/08/2002)

Bob’s attitude is not only very revealing of what these men search in the bars and of what as he stated “a Western woman would never do for us”(ibid). His viewpoint is also extremely contradictory. During the interview he had granted me, he was praising the pureness of Thailand and Thai girls. “This is a dignified people within a dignified country”, as he said. However, once entered the bar scene, even if he maintained at the beginning ‘the pure girl’-discourse, the girls became hunters. Their eyes changed for him and when he said the word hunter he put his pointing fingers around his temples to symbolize a bull or a devil’s horns. Bob’s attitude is however only apparently incongruent. His attitude reveals the double-image that the Thai bar girls have for sex tourists. On one side, the view them as tourist brochures presents them, e.g. ‘smiling

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61 When I told him that I was compensating the women for the loss of working hours when they agreed for an interview, he laughed and called it a ‘silly thing’. He wanted me to buy a drink because ‘that’s polite’ towards these people as he said. He then he whistled to a girl and took her on his lap. While he was asking her questions in Thai and translating them to me in English ‘giving me a hand’ in my fieldwork (even if I had not asked him to!) he continued stating that this girl had ‘pure eyes’ and that she was-through her pureness- able to read a man’s heart beyond his appearance. Later, this attitude changed and the girls on the scene became ‘devil-like’.

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and almost child-like, delicate and vulnerable and very traditional. On the other side, the commercialization of their activity to suit western’s taste renders these girls sexual object to be manipulated and used (the fact that he whistled to the girl and sat her on his lap is a telling sign of the men’s general attitude towards the workers). On the other side, when they ‘respond’ to the mere objectification and demand something in exchange-be it a payment for their services or money for their families-they become devil-like and someone almost ‘to fear’. Other sex tourists’ descriptions of these girls follow these two paths. Olle told me that there is an ‘exotic charm’ that attracts him (21/06/2002) while Johnny stated that he finds the women ‘pathetic individuals with no education’ (22/06/2002). Interesting to notice, when these men are asked to compare Thai women with Western women, what emerges is that both are constructed as ‘docile and vulnerable’ on one side and ‘educated and choosy’ on the other. As an American tourist stated:

“Women in my country are trying to be tough, strong, powerful, rich /…/ When I was younger, I wanted a girl that was a doctor and that played many sports and was just equal but then I got some girlfriends like that and…Afterwards, you spend too much time competing. You don’t want to compete with your mate. You want to love your mate. I want her to take care of me and I want to take care of her” (Bob, 25-08-2002)

A Swedish man shared the same opinion as Bob when he stated that

“Women in Sweden they want to talk, they are educated. In Thailand girls say: ‘Give me love, love!’ There is no foreplay. You just jump to the cake” (Markus, 17/08/2002).

These two men come from societies where women certainly have reached greater social status. Despite this, the process of reaching a full equality with men is far from completely achieved as for example differences in income demonstrate. From the interviews, we could conclude that both western women as well as Thai women are essentialized into categories that help these men on one side to justify their behavior (they buy sex because “women in the West have changed their biological role” as Bob told me; interview, 25/08/2002). On the other hand such construction contributes to reinforce a masculine role that they evidently feel being threatened in the West.

4.4 The Gender Dimension: a local adaptation of universally constructed roles

As stressed by Hart, some authors, even if they reject the notion that men have a greater sex drive that woman, admit that there is ‘something’ in men that make them go to prostitutes (Hart in Cornwall&Lindisfarne, 1994:52). Both the ‘men’s sexual outlets discourse’ and the ‘man has ‘something’ discourse’ imply the acceptance of the notion that differences between man and women are biologically given and not constructed through socialization. Such believes are well eradicated in sex tourists believes about why a man feels ‘the need’ to go to a prostitute. Dirk stated for example that:

62 We have already seen how Thailand used this image of Thai women to promote the country (chapter three).
“There are two phases in a woman’s life. When she reaches the menopause, the man has the right to go to prostitutes. There is no sentimental bonding with them. It’s just plain sex. When he can’t have sex with his wife he needs someone that offers him a relief. In this sense we could say that prostitutes are social workers” (interview, 10/06/2002).

Dirk’s statements evidence the gender construction and the expectations attributed by society on men and women. As Dirk stresses a woman has for him a double function: a caring and nurturing function (the phase of procreation) and the one when she cannot satisfy a man’s sexual needs. She has however still to serve her mate with her presence (Dirk stresses several times during the conversation that the fact a man visits prostitutes does not mean that he wants to break up the relationship with his wife). She can still remain a wife and thereby accomplish her social function of giving status to the man. As we have seen previously Dirk felt pity for these older men that where alone and that eventually came to Pattaya. Evidently for Dirk, a woman that stays with her husband and accepts his ‘needs’ to visit sex workers, accomplishes her function of giving status to the man as ‘wife’. We have previously seen how the issue of dissociating from other sex tourists helps these men to justify their behavior and manipulate their identity. Pointing out the difference between them and the other tourists has also the function to uphold their masculinity. They are the ‘real men’ in that they have sexual intercourse with several women. They are also ‘real men’ that ultimately will find a place and status in society through marriage which others-what Dirk called ‘pitiful men’-have not been able to accomplish. Masculinity is moreover expressed through the competition that arises among ‘sex-tourist fellows’ when they come to Thailand. As Markus and Jonas admitted to my male assistant at the end of the interview:

“We should get going now. We should meet up with some girls we met yesterday. Really good girls. We are going to give them one more try! Truthfully we get new girls every night. It’s like you don’t want the same girl. Our policy here is to have sex with as many girls as we can. We’ve got to try it” (Markus and Jonas, 17/08/2002).

Markus and Jonas are clearly expressing some sort of macho-attitude they would hardly show (at least in public) in Sweden. Their willingness to stress that they are in power (‘we want to give them one more try’) and the contest they have with each other (to have sex with as many girls as they can) are the expression of a seemingly fulfilled desire of total freedom that cannot be manifested in the West. At home, in fact, they act as loving fathers while as they said ‘playing soccer every day with my son in the garden’ (17/08/2002). About the ‘secrecy’ of their vacation Jonas and Markus had a different attitude. Jonas stated that “it’s a secret” what he is doing here. Markus said instead about his wife that “she knows but [that] she doesn’t want to know”(ibid). I am not able to tell whether this is a further justification about his behavior (he adds later that their marriage ‘is not working out so well’) or if he is telling the truth about his eyes turning a blind eye. If his statement is true, what motivates in this case this
woman to accept Markus behavior? This is a question that needs further consideration but that cannot unfortunately be answered here.

4.5 Other Reasons for coming to Thailand

For many men, coming to Thailand and buying sex becomes a way to arrest time and gain what many tourists call ‘Paradise’ (interview, 24/08/2002). As George confessed:

“I’m 71…back home. Here in Thailand, I’m 20. The majority of us really think like that. We come here, we all dress up before we go out; we take on perfume, we shave /…/ I have been through the mall. I have been married eight years, six of which where hell”
(interview, 27/08/2002)

Johnny who is 62, supported this view when he stated that:

“there’s nothing nice here in Pattaya. The sea is very polluted and the beach is just awful. We come here because of the girls”(interview, 22/06/2002)

He added later that:

“I have reached a certain age and young women don’t find me appealing anymore. I guess I search for an ephemeral relief and a bonding that is not prolonged”. (ibid)

He also stated that he could never marry a Thai girl because there where too many cultural differences (ibid). Olle declared that he bought sex in Thailand because of the availability of such possibility (21/06/2002). Dirk stated that ‘having sex with a prostitute means that you can do things that a wife or a girlfriend wouldn’t want to do’ (10/06/2002). Buying sex did moreover not involve ‘so many questions’ (ibid).

Another motivation is the difficulty of having a relationship with a Western woman. As the sister of a sex tourist told me

“My brother is an intellectual. He would never stand close to a woman in a queue to a cinema and start talking to her”

She said her brother had been left by his girlfriend who ran away with another man. He had decided to come to Thailand to buy sex but he would never think of marrying one of the bar girls because as his sister told me: “he wants to be able to have an intellectual conversation with his mate”.
4.6 Tham ngaan kap farang (working with westerners): Thai Women’s voices

“I work in a bar, you know. Sometimes good men sometimes bad men”
(Interview, 23/07/2002)

Women working in prostitution tend as well as their customers/boyfriends to characterize through dichotomies the other. The ‘good man’ is attributed a ‘good heart’. The meaning of ‘good heart’ varies however of meaning depending who is employing the term. For the girls it usually means ‘him give me money, him not lie. He take care me, him good heart’ (interview, 23/07/2002) while for the men as we have seen to have a good heart means that a Thai girl will individuate his qualities beyond his physical appearance and love him for what he really is (in particular interview, 25/08/2002). The men are also ‘good’ for the women when they pay the bar for a longer period and take them on vacation to a tourist resort. Men are good when they buy the girls drinks and thereby contribute to their earnings. Men are ‘good’ when they take the girls ‘off’ from the bar, pay for their ‘temporary release’ and take them out for a dinner or to a discotheque using them only as escorts, without requiring sexual services. Men are also and maybe most importantly-‘good men’ when they finally marry the girls and as the women express it ‘take care’ of them. It happens however that men propose to marry the women but without leaving their wives. The Thai woman would in this way become his ‘second wife’ (interview, 17/08/2002). But men can also be ‘bad’ men. A ‘bad man’ is a man that ‘talk no good’ (interview, 23/07/2002), e.g. that insults them and is rude to them. A ‘bad man’ is a man who does not pay after he has used a her body for sex as we have seen. A ‘bad man’ is a man that cannot stay faithful (the women call this type a ‘butterfly’). A ‘bad man’ is a man who requests sadomasochistic or oral sex (26/08/2002, 02/08/2002 and 23/07/2002). Finally, a ‘bad man’ is a man who uses violence in various manners. Two women accounted for a death of two different women, one in Pattaya and one in Bangkok. I am in possession of one article that proves one of these murders. The murderer was an American man aged 24 who stabbed a sex worker to death 22 times. He was on drugs and his motivation for murdering the woman was that she did not want to have sex with him twice (Thairat, 19 February, 2000).

4.7 Through a worker’s eyes

The ‘good farang man’

Despite acknowledging the fact that many of the western tourists get drunk and are sometimes very violent to the point of rape and even murder, these women expressed an overall idealized image of the farang man. As we have seen in the chapter about migration, many of these women have children and have been left by their men. Sometimes they have however themselves escaped from a marriage characterized of beatings and their mate’s alcoholism. The farang man is constructed as a Thai man’s counterpart: he is not only wealthier and can therefore guarantee a life-long insurance for themselves and for their families. He is even represented as kind, “take-carer” and affectionate towards children. The majority of these women whish to marry a Western
man because he is not deemed to run away under the childbearing phase as their Thai men have done. One woman was however afraid that this would happen again and did not express the willingness to become mother again, neither with a farang, nor with a Japanese man and absolutely not with a Thai man (17/08/2002). As for Western tourists constructing an image of an ‘educated and strong western woman’, even Thai women essentialize the Thai man as ‘drunk, violent and that likes gambling’. There might be some truth in their representations of ‘the Western other’ and of ’The Thai man’. The images of the Other helps both farangs and Thai bar women to construct their identity: the open-ended partner is considered to be “better” than the one both the men and the women have met in a life outside the sex sector. The image that these women have is obviously essentialized and in many cases wrong as it is evident from the previous section. Farang men are not “much more civilized and respectful” as a western sex tourists expressed it (27/07/2002). The fact that Westerners construct ‘Thai men ‘as lesser civilized obviously justifies their self-believed generosity and is expressed both by giving money and gifts to the workers and by treating them-as sex tourists sustain- in a ’civilized manner’ The difference between Thai men and western men lies in the different socialization that the two groups have had.
5. The take out bar

Setting

There is a net segregation in all the places I have visited in Thailand between farang and Thai entertainment places. Not only the urban areas of brothels and red light districts differ from each other but also the entertainment characteristics of the places, the demand and the consequent supply. As one informant stressed it,

“In the tourist sites you have specific locals, used by specific tourists, who demand specific kinds of women /…/”

(interview, Dr. D’Cunha, UNIFEM, 08/08/02)

In the sex tourist industry there is a clear division of races and nationalities who usually do not ‘cross’ another nationalities or sexual preference border. If we take as an example Bangkok, Patpong 1&2 are crowded of farangs and surrounded by Western hotels; soi Tanya is characterised by Japanese financial and shopping complexes and attracts mainly a Japanese clientele while a soi called ‘Boys’ is dedicated to the male homosexual population. Thai bars are to be found in other areas like for example Suttisan. The so-called Chinatown area caters mainly Chinese and Thai-Chinese demand. The same division is to be found for other entertainment places, but these are however beyond the scope of this study. What is important to notice here is that while Thai and Chinese men demand women (often girls) with a whiter complexion, the women to be found in the bars frequented by westerners are generally very often of a darker complexion. I am not able to tell whether western sex tourists demand for this specific type of woman (the tourists I have interviewed answered however negatively when asked if they had some preferences for a particular skin colour). It would be interesting to know whether there is such discriminatory attitude at the workplace and if this is used, both by Thai and foreign companies, as some sort of ‘employment selection strategy’. More studies are needed on the subject to answer to this question. As a general characteristic we could say that normally Thai people prefer a fairer complexion. The girls I have interviewed expressed almost a dislike for their complexion (almost all of the had a darker skin colour) but added that this helps them in their work with Western men. The bars I visited consist usually of some tables on the premises where the women are used to sit together with customers and a bar in its common sense where customers are used to order large amount of beer and drinks. Walking around, there are mamasans (often former sex workers who have ‘upgraded’) controlling the transactions (they are not forcing the women to stay in the bar but given the fines and threats these women face, I would not go as far to say that sex workers are completely ‘free’). Sometimes even the owner of the bar is to be found on the scene.

63 It is a take out bar because women leave momentarily their occupation as waitresses or dancers after the customers have paid the bar-fee and follow the customers, generally to a hotel room.

64 The Health department individuates twenty different entertainment places where sex and other services are traded for money. They all follow this ‘ethical segregation’ of demand and supply.
The owners

They are both Thai and Western. According to the law a foreigner cannot own a business in Thailand but ‘there are ways to circumvent the law’ as a former sex tourist now owner of a restaurant told me (interview, 27-07-2002). The Danish owner stated that he had come to Thailand because of the climate and to escape from the cold and boring gray North. About the women working at his bar he said that they are lazy and create a lot of problems (17-08-2002). The Swedish owner I interviewed told me that in his bar ‘no girl is selling sex’. He said however that he has to introduce this ‘facility’ soon for his clients if he wants his business to survive (17-08-2002).

Touts, tuk-tuk and taxi drivers

A tout is a red-light district guide. He or she advertises a place with the help of a menu where he/she shows the customers the different shows being offered (the infamous banana shows, razor blade show, snake show, ping-pong show, etc.). The guide I interviewed receives 6000 bath/month as salary. Even tuk-tuk and taxi drivers profit from the women selling their bodies. The tuk-tuk driver I talked to has a coupon booklet: for every customer he takes to a massage parlor he receives 20 bath. Both the tuk-tuk driver and the tout are often tipped by the customers. The guide usually receives 150/200 bath for accompanying a customer to the place he wants to visit. The tuk-tuk driver usually earns 200 bath when he waits for customers outside the massage parlor (interviews, 23-08-2002).

Working conditions

Working hours are from five in the afternoon to two in the evening in Bangkok. In Pattaya and the tourist resorts the clock out is usually one-to two hours earlier. A sex worker has only two days off per month. Since she will be fined if she does not turn up at the workplace, this means that she will work even under her menstruation period. The salary paid by the bar ranges from 2500/3000 bath for ‘waitresses’ and from 4000 to 8000 bath for go-go dancers (the difference is due to the skills of the woman to perform a particular show). The customer has to pay a fine to the mamasan and/or bar owner if he wants to take a girl ‘off’. The fine ranges from 300 to 500 bath. The workers are granted by the manager usually 20% of the price of a drink or a beer if they get the customer to buy them a drink. There is an obligation for the girls to go out with the customers. Both Empower and two advertisements found in the premises of two go-go bars advertising for dancers confirm that the girls have to go out with the customers if they want to get paid. If they do not do that, they are fined (interview, 13-08-2002). None of the women knew about the rights they were entitled. Being employed as waitresses or dancers their work is covered by the Entertainment act. Once a man demands their services, the legal protection stops to be valid. The motivation is-despite evidence of the contrary- that it is the woman’s own choice to go out with customers (interview, 28-08-2002). If workers come late to work or they are sick, they get fined. As the female bar owner told me, “one minute, one bath”: for
every minute the women are late, they get fined one bath (interview, 26-08-2002). As for health conditions, a sex worker has usually the obligation to be tested once every three months. Even freelancers do test themselves. The tests consist in both gynecological check ups and HIV-tests. If a woman results positive to an HIV-test her picture is put in the toilet of the establishment and she gets fired (confirmed by the female owner and Empower). All the workers claimed to use condoms, ‘no condom, no sex’ was the most common response. If the condom breaks, apart from the gynecological control and the blood test, they either take the morning after pill or a very dangerous home-made ‘poison’ aimed at neutralizing the risk of getting pregnant. It was impossible for me to know exactly what the ‘medicine’ contains due to language problems. Very often customers do not want to use a condom. The majority of women confirm that Western men often try to have an encounter without protection. One woman confirmed that she did not use the condom when she had the one-year relationship with her farang boyfriend. She stopped working but he always wanted to go to the bars. One evening she found him in bed with another sex worker. When the man refuses to use a condom, they all said that they go away. Jonas claimed however that he usually uses the condom but that he did not a couple of times since “everything can be fixed here in Thailand” (interview, 17-08-2002). One woman in Pattaya was very worried when I spoke to her. At the end of the interview, she took my hand and told me that

“I have tested myself three times [HIV test]. Now, I expect the result of the fourth test. This time I am scared. You know, men are big. Sometimes I just cannot fight back”.
(interview,10/06/2002)

This woman had evidently been raped by a customer who was too strong for her and who forced her to have sex without a condom.

5.1 The take out bar: a glocal space

The bar is a metaphorical encounter between two cultures. It is the meeting of two worlds, two desires, two ways of fulfilling needs that apparently cannot be exhausted in another manner. It is the encounter of a Thai woman and of a Western man. She has to maintain her parental family, her siblings and her own children. She often comes out from a broken family with a husband leaving her during her childbearing period for another woman, due to lack of responsibility or to find a job somewhere else. It is a woman who has often tried other jobs before. These jobs did not however give her the money she needed or sometimes the ones she had hoped for before migrating. It is a woman who has “two desires: either find a man that would love and take care of me or at least to be able to save some money and build up a future” (interview, 16/08/2002). He is a western man who is too scared to have a relationship with a woman in the West; who is overweight, skinny or not good looking; who is sometimes violent and sometimes has a good heart. He is a man who do the dishes back home or who plays with his children in the garden of a villa in a rich neighborhood. He is the worker who saves all the year round to be able to come to what he thinks is a man’s paradise. It is a
good-looking man, gentle and apparently educated. It is the businessman in Thailand for a short period trying to make profitable investments and delight himself with locals while wife and children are expecting him in the West. It is the man who has left the gray and boring North to find a new life and has set up a take-out brothel. It is an arrogant imperialist who only thinks of exploiting the country. He is the timid backpacker at his first trip to another country.....The sex tourist as well as the women he buys have many faces, many identities. The actors multiple self transforms many times when confronted with an idealized other. The encounters take place in a third space (Law,2000:48), a space where none is resident and where all actors moving on the setting are momentaneous guests. But the bar is also a very political space. It is a space that is protected by local institutions, a space defended by law enforcers; it is a space build with foreign capital thanks to local connivance; it is a place where the global and the local find their outmost exploiting union. In the middle the women are surviving. They are surviving men that they sometimes cannot fight back against. They are surviving a ‘third part’ (tuk-tuk drivers and bar owners among others) who are profiting from their bodies being sold. They are surviving for their children back home so that they will have a better future than their mothers. They are surviving a system that did not provide them an education or the means to take a share of the wealth that élites hide in their gate-communities. They are surviving an international division of labor that excludes and marginalizes them. They are surviving an international unequal system that permits some of us the luxury to be a tourist and the majority of the world’s population to be deprived of often even from leisure time. They are surviving the same men they one day hope to marry. In one sentence, these women are surviving the global and local male privileges, silences and profits that permit the sex tourist industry to continue to operate on a global scale.
6. Concluding remarks

As we have seen in the course of this study, the global-local nexus of sex tourism is a complex web of relationships that shapes the lives of individuals both at the structural and at actor level. In particular, sex tourism grows strong due to the penetration of capitalism and is favored by both local élites and corrupted officials. Capitalism certainly disrupts traditional female roles within the household. However, we must not forget that responsibility has to be attributed in equal manner to local development planners seeing tourism as one pivotal sector to promote the economy. Facing severe challenges, some women who might already have a child and who have been abandoned by their companions, might turn to prostitution to guarantee both to themselves, their children and their parental families a secure income. Examining sex tourism at the actor level, we have seen how the construction of ‘the Other’ plays a role in fostering both demand and supply. For the Western customers, Thai women represent an alternative to Western women. Thai women are portrayed as exotic, docile and feminine while the latter are competitive and open for physical and intellectual confrontation. For the sex workers, western men might represent an alternative to the Thai husbands or boyfriends that were used to beat them and who often abandon them. A life with a farang man represents the way to obtain a different life than the marginalized one they are facing as single mothers and sex workers. However, sometimes even Western men are particularly violent and aggressive. The cases of rape and murder that has been mentioned might illustrate that Western sex tourists are not necessarily these ‘good men’ as many Thai bar women believe them to be. Male sex tourists’ attitudes represent moreover a direct threat not only to Thai workers but also to Western women. The fact that many of the sex tourists do not choose to use a condom certainly passes diseases to the workers that in their turn might transmit them to other clients. It becomes a vicious circle in which not only the South but even the North are threatened.

How can the situation be redressed? Localism might represent a way to empower these women creating a way out from sex work. Strengthening communities and focusing on the rural sector might be an alternative to a development strategy based on tourism. A strategy based on industrialization has evidently had terrible consequences for local populations, in particular for women. A community-based development plan might be a viable alternative together with other reforms for a country like Thailand. As for sex workers, in order to be able to call their response to poverty as ‘resistance’, there is the need for them to organize themselves in order to be able to foster their rights.

Government resources should be directed at improving the life of the very same individuals that are right now commercialized and whose image is sold internationally to promote the kingdom. A responsible and human rights oriented ruling élite should recognize the status of sex workers as citizens and grant them protection instead of exploiting their bodies for GDP growth.
As for us, it is time for the West to recognize sex tourism as an international problem that has to be redressed. Prostitution in Thailand might well be local based, but all the tourist resorts I visited show that the West is also pivotal in fostering the illegal economy. As stressed by Ryan,

“The issues that arise from sex tourism—the needs for pair bonding, sexual adventure, fantasy, sexual exploration—and exploitation, do not start in the ‘over there’-they begin here, in our places of home and work, and in ourselves”

(Ryan in Clift&Carter, 2000:37)
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Appendix

List of interviewees

Key informants (taped interviews)

- Dr. Malee, Director of Women and Youth Studies at Thammasat University (she was recommended to me by my supervisor and my assistant). 26/06/2002

- Dr. Jean D’Cunha, UNIFEM (I went door knocking at the UN and after having collected secondary material I asked a secretary if I could speak to an officer working with prostitution and/or trafficking. I was introduced to Dr. D’Cunha who gently agreed to meet me the day after). 08/08/2002

(note: The views expressed in the interview are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations. The designations employed and the presentation of the material of this Master thesis do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers and boundaries).

- Dr. Siriporn Sakrobanek, co-founder of GAATW (Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women) and founder of the FFW (Foundation For Women. The FFW is among other activities helping workers in need by providing them counselling and legal assistance).01/08/2002

- Dr. Naiyana Supapung, officer at the National Commission for Human Rights. I went door knocking at the Commission and a week after I was received by Dr. Nayana).28/08/2002

- Three staff members at EMPOWER (the single organization in Thailand that specifically addresses specifically sex workers. I was introduced to the Co-Ordinator of Empower by Dr. Sakrobanek at a conference).13/08/2002.

- Sister Supaporn (working for the Fountain of Life, the single organization in Pattaya that works among many other activities helping the workers with counseling and vocational training. I read about the organization in a report and finally found the number of Sister Supaporn who gently agreed to meet me three days afterwards).27/08/2002.

- Dr. Chalidaporn (professor of Political Science at Thammasat University). The appointment was recommended to me by my assistant. 28/08/2002.

- A tourist guide working in Asia in the early 1970s. The guide is a family acquaintance, but has asked me to remain anonymous. 09/10/2002.

Among other experts I met, I would like to quote the professor from Mahidol University Population Studies Programme, a program officer at GAATW, and two journalists from the Nation. The meetings gave valuable information about Thai society and about prostitution and have been used as part of the theoretical information needed to write this study.
I also interviewed other experts, but for reasons of space they could not be referred to in this thesis. These informants where:


-Dr. Somsri Tantipaibulvut, Chief Counselor, Anonymous Clinic (.Dr Somsri is a psychologist working at the Thai Red Cross. I gathered useful information about the accessibility of the cures for poor people and obviously among these, for sex workers). 24/08/2002

**Workers**

-Lek. works in a bar in Pattaya. I met her at my first time in Pattaya in a bar. 10/06/2002

-Noi works in a bar in Bangkok. I was introduced to her by a customer, a friend of a common acquaintance. 23/07/2002 (taped interview)

-Pat works as a go-go dancer in Bangkok. She was introduced to me by Sheila’s colleagues. She asked us if we wanted to see the show and after two hours of thinking we agreed. 02/08/2002. (taped interview)

-Muu was visiting some old friends and colleagues in a bar in Pattaya. She’s married to a Western men and was waiting for her visa to Europe. 21/06/2002

-Puy. She is working in a bar in Pattaya. 21/06/2002.

-Tik. She is working in a bar in Pattaya. 21/06/2002. (taped interview)

-Tuk, She is working as a freelancer in Pattaya. 22/06/2002.

-Nan. She is working as a freelancer in Pattaya. 22/06/2002

-Nok was used to work in a bar and go out with customers. She’s now the owner of the bar where we met her in Bangkok. 26/08/2002. (taped interview)

-Loy. She meets the customers in a bar but she works as a freelancer. The bar owner just let her be there to attract customers to the bar (tourist resort). 17/08/2002. (taped interview)

-Ang and Lee where interviewed together. They where introduced to me by my Dutch assistant who had asked them if they wanted to give an interview (tourist resort). 17/08/2002 (taped interviews)

-Chaat, the only boy I interviewed, works as a freelancer in pattaya. 22/06/2002.
**Customers and bar owners**

- Dirk, Dutch. My first encounter with a sex tourist in a bar in Pattaya. 10/06/2002

- Johnny, American. I meet him while having breakfast in a hotel in Pattaya. 22/06/2002

- Olle, Swedish. I met him in a ‘normal’ bar in front of the bars where girls where working in Pattaya. 21/06/2002.

- Marco, Italian. He was introduced to me by a common acquaintance in Bangkok. 31/07/2002 (taped interview).

- Antonio, Italian. I asked him for information about the bars since his restaurant was in a red light district and he turned out to be a customer as well (tourist resort). 27/07/2002


- Sören, Danish, customer and bar owner (tourist resort) 17/08/2002. (taped interview)

- Göran, Swedish, customer and bar owner (tourist resort). 17/08/2002

- Alex, Australian. Interviewed by my male assistant in Bangkok. 24/08/2002 (taped interview)

- Graham, English. Interviewed by my male assistant in Bangkok. 24/08/2002

- George, English. I met him at the Burger King in Pattaya. He was together with a friend ordering tender chicken. They looked very old to me and I just chanced to ask them if they wanted to be interviewed. George finally accepted. 27/08/2002.

- Bob, 39, American. I asked him to grant me an interview in one of Bangkok’s red light district quarters and after the conversation he literally dragged me and my assistant to see a show. This experience, although shocking for the quickness me and the Thai girl found ourselves in a crowd of screaming men (and without being mentally prepared for it!) was very good for the information I got. Bob was commenting without any rest what he was seeing on the stage. I therefore got so to speak the chance to see ‘through a sex tourist’s eyes’. 25/08/2002. (taped interview).

Moreover, I managed to interview even a ‘tuk tuk driver’ and a ‘ghost guide’ (Thai expression for touts) during my visits to the red light districts (taped interviews). 23/08/2002
Appendix: questions for respondents

Questions for key-informants/girls

Age:
Provenience:
Education:
Status:
Family: nr of people:
    working sector:
    education:
Children: Age:

Worker and family-from childhood to present condition

1) Is this your first job? What jobs have you changed in your life till now?
2) What were the reasons why you started to work?
3) Can you tell me something about your childhood?
4) Why did you come to Bangkok (Pattaya or X)? Is it the first place where you moved when you left your native house?
5) Do you send money home? How much/month? How much do you gain/month?
   -How does your family spend the money? (have they bought a tv, a video, a pick-up, a fridge, air-condition; have they restored the house; build a new one, etc…)
6) Have you ever been married? Divorced? Why? (did your husband beat you?)
7) How important is money for you?
8) Where do you live now? (share appartment; live alone; how much do you pay for the rent/month? Do you have hot water? Air con? A tv? A VCR? Stereo? Mobile Phone?
9) Can you describe a typical day in your life?

The Clients

1) Who are they?
   -sex
   -profession
   -nationality

2) What happens when a customer comes to you? Or do you approach him first?
   Describe…..(any contracting about the price? Do you stay in the bar? Do you go to his hotel or somewhere else?)

3) How do you protect yourself? If it’s a man, what happens if he doesn’t want to use a condom? Has it ever happened to you? How much power do you think you have to decide about what you are going to do with a customer?
4) What do customers ask you to do? (make them company for the night/week/month?)
   - What are their requests? (do they want you to cook for them? etc…)
   - If you are with a client for a longer period, what activities do you engage in? (cinema, restaurant…….)

5) Would you like to marry a ‘farang’? Why?

   The profession

6) Do you often/seldom/never do check-ups? Does your employer want you to do check-ups?

7) Who is your employer? Man/woman? How did you meet?

8) At what age did you have sex for the first time? What did it mean to you?/how important was virginity for you at that time? Do you think that virginity is important for a woman? Why?

10) To whom do you turn to if you have a problem?
   - A personal one?
   - At work?

11) What does a customer expect from you?

12) What do you expect from him?

13) Have you ever felt in love with a customer?

14) Have you got a health insurance? Does your employer pay for it?

15) What does your family think about your work? Do they know about it?

16) Do you know that prostitution is illegal in Thailand?

17) How do you cope if you don’t feel good? (Do you use any drugs? Alcohol?)

18) What do you know about laws? And about your rights?
Questions for clients

Age:                               Age:
Profession:                        Nationality:
Education:                         
Status:
Children:                            

1) Have you ever bought sex or are you planning to do that?
2) Why did you come to Thailand?
3) Why did you come to Patpong? (or Pattaya or X?)
4) Who told you about the possibility to buy sex?
5) Is it the first time you are in the country for buying sex? First time in Patpong? Have you been to some other places in Thailand for sex purposes? And abroad?
6) Why are you buying sex?
7) What does these girls mean for you?
8) What do you think about Thai girls?
9) What do you expect from a girl?
10) Do you buy her or her time?
11) Do you use condoms? Why?
12) How much do you pay? Do you pay directly to the girl or to the bar?
13) Have you ever bought any present to the girls? Why?
14) Do you speak Thai? How do you communicate with the girls? Is communication important or not?
15) Some men I’ve talked to say that they don’t want to bother to spend time in their countries in getting to know girls. They say that here in Thailand is much easier. Do you have any comments on this?
16) Do you ever feel guilty by buying sex? Why?
17) What do you think you can offer to these girls?
18) What makes you travel all around the world to come here and buy sex?
19) Do you feel that you have difficulties to relate to girls in your own country?
20) Have you had many disappointments? (love affairs gone wrong….)
21) Do you know that prostitution in Thailand is illegal?
Questions for Owners of the take out bars

1) When did you start this business?
2) Why did you decide to invest your money in this activity?
3) Are profits high?
4) Who are the clients that come to your bar? Can you try to sketch an identikit?
5) Who are the workers? What’s the average age?
6) How do you recruit them? Do they come to you or do you offer jobs? Do you announce them in newspapers, put an add to the window of you office/bar? Through girls that already work here?
7) What relationship do you have to the girls?
8) What are their duties towards you and the bar?
9) And you to them? Do you protect them? From Whom?
10) Do you pay them every month? For what? Do you pay them extra if they go with a client?
11) Do you feel that you are facing risks? Which kind?
12) Why do you think the girls are doing this job?
13) Have you ever had any problems with some of them?
14) What is your relationship with the police? Is it the tourist police or the ‘regular police that usually intervenes?
15) How do you deal with the fact that prostitution in the country is illegal?
Appendix

The take-out bar
Appendix

Images of Western Male Sex Tourism