Invisibilized routes to prostitution: Complexity of the dynamics among migrant sex workers

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During an exchange programme in Italy in 2006, on a number of occasions, after learning that I was from Bulgaria, people asked me if I offered sexual services. My reactions were along the lines of offence and frustration, yet the questions encouraged my initial curiosity in the sex industry, and specifically in the characteristics of the Bulgarian migrant sex workers. Given my general interest in equality issues, I first approached the thesis from a feminist perspective, and perceived prostitution as a type of modern slavery. My main question was in terms of the persistence of the sex industry in the European Union, representing itself as a model for human rights. Thus, during an interaction with a regular buyer of sexual services, I was struck to hear his ‘contradictory’ perspective. He placed the sex workers he had known into three categories: those who were forced into the industry and were subjects of physical and psychological abuse; those who were forced into the industry, yet had adjusted to it and were able to appreciate certain benefits from their work; and finally, those who somehow had ended up being sex workers and were enjoying themselves. Although I still do not agree entirely with such a simplification, the categorization made me rethink my initial bias, and led me to start consulting different types of sources. In my attempt to become a more objective researcher, I decided to visit the other side of the debate. Hence, I attended a conference at the Jagiellonian University, where the notable civil rights activist Laura Augustin presented her argument. It would be an exaggeration to claim that I was immediately or fully convinced in the opposing perspective, yet I give the speaker credit for making me aware of a number of valid issues. The two confrontations along with my interactions with Bulgarian sex workers led me to modify my perceptions. This development was further supported by various academic discussions, in which I participated during an exchange programme in India. That is to say, if in a single country women involved in the sex industry had tremendously diverse experiences depending on their caste and religious upbringing, it seemed to me rather limiting to adopt either a forced- or a voluntary-prostitution perspective. In a time of ‘liquid modernity’, multiple identities and temporary mobilities, facilitated by the processes of globalization, I thought that it would be more useful to consider the interaction of the variety of influential factors, examined from an interdisciplinary approach.
1. Approaching the field of prostitution

What I often find to be neglected in the public sphere is the diversity of experiences pertaining to the sex industry, especially in the last decade of increased labour migrations and temporary mobilities. Accordingly, the research question asks which are some of the diverse factors influencing the entrance in the sex industry and the concomitant migration, and contributing to the continuation of sex work among Bulgarian migrant women. Hence, the central aim of this thesis is to enrich the academic discourse, by investigating the complexity of the dynamics within the sex industry, given an assumed interaction between and among the relevant structural factors and human characteristics. For the purposes of this introductory chapter I briefly examine certain issues of the dominant discourses regarding prostitution, in addition to the significance of migration as part of the expanding sex industry; subsequently, I look at some tools for grasping the complexity, and inspired by these I advocate for a more revealing approach. The thesis then proceeds with an overview of the methodological explanations and concerns (chapter 2), followed by an elaboration of the theoretical framework (chapter 3). The subsequent two chapters (4 & 5) offer an analysis of the contexts of interest, corresponding reports and case studies, while the conclusion is the means for synthesizing all of the available information from a different angle.

1.1. Dominant discourses about prostitution

According to the media, foundation of the average person’s outlook, the stereotypical profile of a prostitute tends to be a woman in high heels and promiscuous clothing, waiting on a curb of a busy highway or searching for potential clients in the dark alleys of the metropoles’ suburbs. ‘She’ is often perceived as morally deviant either due to personal characteristics or as a consequence of an abusive family. The ‘lack’ of the required educational and social skills to function ‘normally’ put ‘her’ into one of the lowest strata of society, which is usually looked down upon—be it with contempt or pity. Interestingly, however nude models and celebrities are praised for their beautiful bodies.
while porn stars (although not respected by many) do not necessarily suffer from any stigma, and indeed could even prosper.\footnote{Some famous (and admired) porn stars include Evan Stone, Jenna Jameson, Ron Jeremy and Tera Patrick.} Hence, the scepticism towards prostitution is not simply a matter of rejection of overt sexuality, nudity and consumption of sex. Rather, the negative associations with prostitution have been socially constructed throughout history, and one could argue that presently these are further elaborated by means of increased media sensationalism, the campaigns of many NGOs and by government policies aimed at the abolition of prostitution through criminalization. Accordingly, a single media web page reveals numerous ‘prostitution’ hits, the majority of which however are in terms of trafficking, sexual slavery, abuse and exploitation, thereby reinforcing the typical prostitute profile\footnote{Among the top hits for ‘prostitution’, the following articles came up on \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/} (Retrieved on Sep.5, 2010): “At least 2,600 women are working as prostitutes in England and Wales having been trafficked from abroad, research for the police suggests”; “Nigerians lured to work in Italy”; “Woman forced back into prostitution”; “Sex slavery widespread in England”; “My name is Nicoleta, from Romania, and my life has been very hard. When I was 18 I was trafficked into prostitution in the UK where I worked 11 hours a day, seven days a week, for over three years”.}.

Certainly, the academic discourse concerning prostitution appears to be less narrow-minded. For instance, we now rarely find writings from a moral-ethical perspective (prevalent until the earlier part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century), which viewed prostitutes as morally deviant women (Sanghera, 1997). Nevertheless, the present-day perspectives tend to be well distinguished from one another, based on the specific set of factors examined in accordance with the scholars’ bias. Some authors point out that despite the richness of the feminist literature, there are two dominant, polarized perspectives: radical feminism, according to which prostitutes are exploited subjects, and liberal feminism, which looks at prostitution as a form of chosen work. (Sanders, O’Neill & Pitcher, 2009). The former is founded on the idea of a hegemonic patriarchal system, and subsequently women involved in prostitution are seen as men’s ‘sex objects’ or even ‘sexual slaves’, thereby perceiving them as victims of the system (Barry 1995, Raymond 1999, Farley
2004 cited in ibid). The work of socialist feminists also confirms the existent gender oppression displayed through the sex industry, yet this related approach is governed by concerns about the inequalities within a capitalist system (Munck, 2005). Conversely, liberal feminists maintain that sex workers have power over their sexual relations, in opposition to the ‘bonded’ housewives, and therefore propose that sex work has liberatory and empowering effects for women (Sanghera, 1997). However, such approaches tend to analyze the field of prostitution in terms of the ‘prostitute body’, while constructing the dichotomy between victims and liberated women (Bell, 1994 cited in Gangoli 2001). On the one hand, the debate reinforces the stereotypes that voluntary sex workers are guilty of transgressing the sexual norms (and could be criminalized for doing so), while forced (and often poor) women are innocent victims; this in turn seems to deny the human rights of sex workers (Doezema, 1998). On the other hand, Weitzer (2005) suggests that few of the feminists’ claims are falsifiable: many writers deliberately select the worst available examples, while liberal feminists tend to romanticize prostitution, both groups thereby falling in the trap of essentialism. Moreover, it has been pointed out that these dominant perspectives rarely take into account global historical developments, the geographic area of interest, and the social group to which the women belong prior to the entrance in the sex industry (Sanghera, 1997). Additionally, Weitzer (2005) advocates for the acknowledgement of the vast diversity among sex workers in terms of the services, job satisfaction, self-esteem, status and health, all of which vary significantly in accordance with the type of prostitution. Hence it is hard to divide sex work into either empowering or exploitative practices, as both could be experienced by a single sex worker, and are shaped by the circumstances; in any case, however, it seems that violence could not be said to be an intrinsic characteristic of prostitution per se.

1.2. The significance of migration and increased analytical complexity
Doezema (1998) points out that there is no agreement on ‘voluntary prostitution’ among the various perspectives, which seems to be further obstructed in times of increased mobilities when migration is often concomitant of the entrance in the sex industry. On top of the dominant discourses concerning the status of prostitutes (ex. liberated or exploited women), those who are also migrants become subjects to additional scrutiny.
Accordingly, the author observes that migrant sex workers are often referred to with emotive words such as ‘duped’, ‘tricked’ and ‘lured’, which together with the emphasis on poverty and youth, contributes to their ‘victim’ status. Along the same lines Sanghera (1997) implies the need for new approaches to prostitution precisely because in the last decades there have been substantial global changes such as the transnationalization of the sex industry. In order to go beyond the dominant discourses (especially those constructed by sensationalist media), the author finds it necessary to avoid the extensive use of the concept of ‘trafficking’ when it comes to the expanding sex trade, involving growing numbers of migrant sex workers and sex tourists. “Whether opting to migrate voluntarily to sites of sex trade, or trafficked through means of deceit or coercion, prostitution has increasingly become a means of sustaining and maintaining vast numbers of 3rd world women and their families” (Sanghera, 1997, p.45); that is to say, the emphasis on trafficking denies agency to the women who ‘end up’ being migrant sex workers. Presently, the most significant source delineating the internationally agreed understandings of the buzz term is the Palermo Protocol adopted in 2000 as part of the ‘United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime’. Yet, the analysis of the articles on trafficking and smuggling leads some scholars to suggest that the corresponding gendered language contributes to the infantilization of women who together with children seem to be the passive victims of trafficking, especially for the purposes of ‘sexual exploitation’; on the other hand, smuggling appears to be more applicable to men given their compliance in the illegal migration (Augustin, 2006; Skillbrei & Tveit, 2008).

It must be understood that various structural and personal factors influence both migration and the entrance in the sex industry. For this reason Augustin (2006) has proposed that the migrant sex workers should be studied as “active agents participating in the globalization” (p.44) and as transnational migrants, who like other migrants have diverse experiences. In a context of unequal and sometimes limited opportunities, it seems more reasonable to talk about rational choice (out of a limited set of options) regarding migration and entrance in the sex industry (Chapkis, 2003; Gangoli, 2001), both of which could be ways for improvement (be it economic or social) of one’s quality
of life. Interestingly, Chimenti (2010) observes that sex work has rarely been studied in terms of either labour or migration analysis. Yet, based on her interviews with migrant sex workers, she deduces that the factors shaping the decision-making (even if not well-informed) concerned with the concomitant choices are similar to those influencing other labour migrants, including personal goals and capitals, household dynamics and social networks.

1.3. Grasping the complexity
Since the sex industry continues to expand and diversify, one should not deny the presence of migrant sex workers who are rational (‘purposive’) agents (defined in chapter 3). The ‘Transnational AIDS/STD Prevention Among Migrant Prostitutes in Europe/Project’ [TAMPEP] conceptualizes ‘migrants’ in Europe as all those, including EU citizens, who live and work in a country other than their native one. This rather broad definition allows the project to report data pertaining to a wide range of realities characteristic of the various sectors of the industry; additionally, due to the omission of a duration term, the intensifying temporary mobilities of the sex workers are also accounted for. Indeed, it is this definition of ‘migrants’ that is reflected in my research. However, one modification that I make is the substitution of ‘country’ with ‘area’, as I also pay attention to sex workers who are involved in internal migrations on the territory of Bulgaria.

The emerging academic shift from the limiting, normative discourses becomes implemented not only through the understanding of sex workers as labour migrants (where applicable), but also by means of the increased utilization of concepts such as ‘sex industry’, ‘sex trade’, ‘commercial sex’, and ‘sex work’. The latter has been coined by prostitute Carol Leigh in order to avoid the connotations of shame and guilt, constructed by the moral-ethical perspective (Sanders et al., 2009). Additionally, given the transnationalization and expansion of the sex trade, Weitzer (2000) implies that ‘sex

3 According to UN Eurostat, migrants are those who have lived in another country for more than one year, although in many cases further national particularities apply (cited in Kofman, 2000).
work’ is a more useful concept in that it portrays the complexity of “sex services, performances, or products given in exchange for material compensation” (p.3, my emphasis). Such a definition allows for the acknowledgement of the wide range of sex-related activities carried out by call girls, brothel workers, models, escorts and porn actors (Pickup, 1998), along with the understanding that the compensation is not necessarily in a monetary form, but could include addictive substances, commercial goods and rent; it could even be in terms of non-economic advantages (ex. getting a higher social status), or as advocated by civil rights activists sex work might be another way of expressing human sexuality (Gangoli, 2001). Along these lines, the sex industry is understood as the variety of “organizations, owners, managers, and workers involved in commercial sex enterprises” (Weitzer, 2000, p.3). A similar broad definition of the sex industry is utilized by Augustin (2005), who also justifies it with reference to the intensifying connectedness between the sex, entertainment and tourism industries, consistent with the idea of a transnationalizing and expanding sex trade. Accordingly, she advocates for a socio-cultural approach, which would have more potential for grasping the complexity within the sex industry by looking at the intersection of commercial sex with tourism, entertainment, ethics, family life, criminality, sexuality and social markers such as ethnicity, class and gender.

1.4. Contribution of the thesis

1.4.1. Relevance

Inspired by the growing acknowledgment of the diversification within the sex industry, I have attempted to examine the variety of factors, which play a role in the decision-making concerned with the initiation and continuation of sex work, along with the concomitant migration. The globalization processes shaping the labour market at large, the interconnectedness among different industries and social networks, the transforming sexual ethics, and the intensifying mobilities are kept into consideration throughout the thesis. Accordingly, I analyze ‘invisibilized’ routes to prostitution in the sense that I move beyond the trafficking and the forced labour perspectives in order to see how certain contexts, influenced by the globalization processes, enable women to profit from opportunities, which have not been possible before (at least for the Bulgarians), as in the
case of self-employed sex workers relying on the internet, or students who sustain
themselves while abroad by means of sex work. Certainly, different structural factors
limit the set of available employment options for some women, but as much as this is
taken into account, my emphasis is on the extent of human agency (i.e. decision-making
and behaviour) in relation to the circumstances; hence, while some of the paths to
prostitution have been well-established (ex. through criminal organizations), they have
rarely been looked from such a perspective. That is to say, I try to analyze in a more
objective manner the experiences that have often been overlooked due to their contrast to
most of the dominant understandings about prostitution. Despite the emerging
liberalization of the sexual norms, the public along with numerous scholars seem to be
reluctant to acknowledge that seeking pleasure and intimacy might be among some of the
motivations for women to become sex workers. Moreover, the diversifying factors
facilitating the expansion of the sex industry correspond to the presence of women with
‘atypical’ profiles (ex. students) who become attracted to sex work. Many of these are
migrants who have restricted employment options, but women are also increasingly
migrating with the intention to or at least knowingly that they will be involved in the sex
industry. The word ‘routes’ has been selected in order to highlight the significance of the
various mobilities in terms of means, duration and contexts. The plural is intended to
emphasize not only the wide range of these mobilities, but also to signify the parallel
between prostitution and migration, which are increasingly concomitant of each other in
the presence of different globalization processes. These routes are not only in terms of
trafficking and coercion, but could be traversed by rational agents; additionally, they
could also be interpreted in a non-geographical way as evident in the case of work via the
internet, or even in the sense of personal developments in terms of one’s values regarding
sex work, in the process of performing it. In order to bring the attention to an implied
paradox about the invisible routes, in the title I use the term ‘prostitution’ precisely
because of the prevalent connotations with victimhood. However, in accordance with the
examined conceptualizations, I avoid the discussion of the moral issues concerning the
nature of prostitution, and the ‘exploitative’ or ‘empowering’ practices involved in it;
rather, I focus on the complex dynamics among the sex workers, whose similar choices
(i.e. the concomitant migration and sex work) seem to be influenced by a variety of structural and personal factors, rendering them ‘active participants in the globalization’.

1.4.2. Specific aims

Throughout my research, the bias that I developed sides with the perspective that prostitution could be voluntary, although I do not advocate for the empowering or liberatory implications for sex workers. As explained in chapter 3 the largely sociological framework which I adopt allows me to investigate both constraining and enabling structural factors; nevertheless, my bias becomes evident in that I emphasize the degree of human agency even in circumstances of restricted options (i.e. rational choice), the aim being the opening up of the discourse concerning the invisibilized experiences, while enriching the existent understanding of both novel and persistent routes. The interaction between the wide range of factors, which I examine by applying different paradigms, is intended to demonstrate the complexity of the dynamics pertaining to the sex industry. Moreover, the interconnectedness between the global structures, institutions and markets is grasped through the dual analysis of the entrance in the sex industry and the concomitant decision to migrate. I focus on Bulgarian female sex workers, as these constitute the dominant group of the Bulgarian sex industry. As the majority of them are very mobile, I examine aspects of internal (national) migration, and external migration to the European Union, specifically to Italy, as rationalized in chapter 4. Both types of migration for the purposes of sex work have rarely been studied by those who apply migration paradigms. Such research usually concerns non-EU citizens working in Western Europe, (Augustin, 2006; Chimenti, 2010); consequently, by focusing on Bulgarian migrant sex workers I hoped to offer an original contribution to the field. Additionally, I expected to witness more agency among my subjects especially since the entrance of Bulgaria in the European Union, given the increased rights and opportunities, along with the global intensification of (temporary) mobilities and social networking. Certainly, due to the limited volume of the thesis I fail to consider some of the numerous influential factors, but by adopting an interdisciplinary approach, strongly recommended by the Euroculture Erasmus Mundus Master Programme, I have attempted to keep
myself sensitive to as many issues as possible in order to contribute to an enhanced understanding of the complexity characterizing the experiences of sex workers.

1.4.3. Exclusions

Not only is my analysis not exhaustive of all the factors influencing Bulgarian migrant sex workers, but I have also deliberately chosen to exclude certain subjects from the group of interest, in accordance with the examined aims, and in order to narrow down the focus of the thesis. As mentioned, I only speak of the female subjects, as they form the dominant group, although it would certainly be interesting to research the sexual services offered by the largely ignored members of the Bulgarian LGBT community. Moreover, for the purposes of avoiding moral discussions, while concentrating on the extent of rational choice within the different (restrictive) contexts, I leave out the issue of child prostitution, even though it is a significant one and must be addressed. Similarly, I am by no means denying the existence of trafficked persons for the purposes of sex work, but due to my focus on human agency I speak of migration for sex work; the omission of trafficking discourse is also consistent with the observations in chapters 4 and 5 that in the last decade the Bulgarian migrant sex workers appear to be more active participants than victims exploited by criminal organizations. This might also be related to the proliferating indoor (and cyberspace) sectors of the industry, where agency-related experiences appear to be more likely; consequently, this, along with the characteristics of the Bulgarian and Italian contexts has led me to leave out the discussion of women with ‘typical profiles’ (i.e. streetwalkers). Hence, my original contribution in the form of case studies remains limited, despite my acknowledgment that it would have been valuable to include information concerning more Bulgarian sex workers.
2. Methodological explanations and concerns

In accordance with the research question my desire was to obtain as much relevant data as possible from field research dealing with Bulgarian migrant sex workers, the hypothesis being that human characteristics play a significant role and are thus strongly interrelated with different structural factors in the decision-making concerning the entrance in the sex industry, the concomitant migration (or temporary mobility), and the continuation of sex work. Nevertheless, from the very beginning I came to realize that reaching the subjects of interest would be obstructed by physical distance, the limited number of primary sources that could be useful, and various ethical issues. My first step was to contact some of the most prominent NGOs dealing with (migrant) sex workers, among which only a few answered my emails; moreover, the majority of the replies were either in order to refer me to other organizations or to existing reports, or to reject my request for assistance with contacting (migrant) Bulgarian sex workers. For instance, from Assosiation Animus in Bulgaria I was explicitly told that due to ethical considerations I could not be provided with the desired assistance; nevertheless, I was allowed to administer questionnaires (to be filled out both by willing sex workers and by staff members who were in direct contact with them), which unfortunately had a 0% return rate. These discouraging, initial research experiences reminded me of Laura Augustin’s remark that studying the sex industry is often obstructed unless it is part of outreach projects (conference lecture, May 29, 2010). This on the other hand produces skewed samples based on victim incidents (usually of streetwalkers), thus contributing to the neglect of experiences, which remain invisibilized. Certainly, part of the latter issue is due to the fact that the majority of the sex workers (or at least the Bulgarian ones) remain in the shadow, given the hidden nature of most of the sex venues or concerns with social

4 Among the international organizations: TAMPEP, SWAN, La Strada, BLinN; Italian organizations: Comitato per i diritti civili delle prostitute, Magliana 80; Bulgarian organizations: Assosiation Animus Bulgaria, HSED.
status and reputation (explained in chapter 4). Sanders and colleagues (2009) confirm that many sex workers are simply not interested in participating in studies, and therefore cooperating with certain agencies remains one of the few alternatives for the researchers. In such circumstances, I decided to contact all my acquaintances who I considered to be potential mediators between myself and sex workers or other industry members. The problems resulting from this strategy were in the form of missed or fake appointments, untraceable subjects that were referred to me, and certain situations involving monetary costs and safety concerns. Yet despite the time-consuming and challenging networking, some of the contacts turned out to be fruitful (examined in section 3 of this chapter).

Meanwhile, I was aware of the necessity to consult existing literature and data, the main reason being my interest in both personal and structural factors influencing the initiation and continuation of migrant sex work. That is to say, since my assumption was that I could analyze human agency only with a prior understanding of the encompassing contexts, I wanted to examine the characteristics of and the dynamics within these, namely Bulgaria at large, the corresponding sex industry, the one in Italy (as an example of a prevalent destination for labour migration), and the overall implications of various globalization processes. Hence, I decided to develop the thesis in a general-to specific format, starting with the discussion of some relevant theories and propositions, followed by an analysis of the Bulgarian and Italian contexts, and ending with an insight into certain personal experiences and the resulting conclusion.

2.1. Theorization
As explained in chapter 1, my central aim was to go beyond the limiting approaches of each of the dominant discourses concerning sex workers, and in particular the migrant ones, with the objective to portray the complexity between different structural and personal factors facilitating sex work and the concomitant migration. Given the emphasis on the interdependence between contexts and agency, I chose Giddens’ ‘theory of structuration’ (1984) as the overall framework of the thesis. As examined in greater detail in the next chapter, this sociological frame of reference thus served me to examine the degree of human agency in relation to factors at three structural levels (macro-, meso-
Moreover, it allowed me to incorporate various paradigms useful for the analysis of female migrant sex workers. That is to say, since the subjects have rarely been studied from labour-market, migration or cultural perspectives, I adopted relevant aspects of these, all of which linked by the processes of globalization. As suggested by Burgess (1991), when using multiple theories the initial step is to establish how they relate to the area of study. I do this by “constructing plausible interpretations” (ibid, p.159) about the subjects, based on existing observations within the specific field (ex. women in the labour market; migrants in the sex industry). All of the conceptual tools, along with the related propositions are then adjusted to the sociological frame of reference, and already in the theoretical chapter aspects of particular paradigms are emphasized over or compensated for by aspects of other ones, given the complexity of the subjects who are not simply female, or migrant, or sex workers, but are simultaneously all of these.

2.2. Information cross-referencing

Chapter 4 deals almost exclusively with secondary sources such as the latest available government reports and NGO publications, legislative texts, web information, and data from previous research concerning female workers, migrant (Bulgarian) workers, and sex workers. In accordance with the research question and the assumed interrelation between human agency and the circumstances in which it takes place, the chapter is intended to provide the contextualization necessary for the analysis of the subsequent field research data. For this reason it also features a literature review of historical and socio-cultural accounts in Bulgaria and Italy. Hence, the chapter is the means to narrow down the focus to Bulgarian migrant women involved in the sex industry of the respective country, thus mediating between the more general theories and the specific case studies. Accordingly, I test the established set of propositions from the theoretical chapter with the aim to determine which are more appropriate for explaining the dynamics among the subjects of interest. Moreover, while doing so I also verify the information from quantitative and qualitative reports (coming from different countries and institutions) with reference to the contexts of concern. Sanders and colleagues (2009) explain that this could be especially valuable for reaching a more objective analysis, since the former tend to undercount people in the sex industry, while the latter exaggerate certain experiences over others.
Thus in cross-referencing the various sources I try to establish the extent of validity of the data; in parallel, I filter the general set of propositions, which are consistent with the observations related to the more specific contexts, in order to further test them against the experiences of four migrant Bulgarian sex workers.

2.3. Field research

While I discuss propositions concerning human agency in chapters 3 and 4, this is done mostly with reference to macro- and meso-factors; on the other hand, in chapter 5 I engage predominantly in a micro-analysis by paying close attention to the personal characteristics, attitudes and goals of the four women whose narratives I present. This is done as a result of the research question and in consistence with the aims of the thesis, namely to portray the complexity of influential factors and to examine experiences that have often been overlooked, thus reinforcing the relevance of the research. Accordingly, my intention has always been to focus on establishing contacts with Bulgarian sex workers through acquaintances or other industry associates instead of relying on outreach organizations, although as briefly mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, I did try to get in contact with the subjects of interest through the latter (ex. Association Animus and HSED). It has been proposed that “there is a great value in small-scale ethnographic research” in the sex industry, especially when it comes to overlooked populations (Sanders, 2006, p.64); hence, my original data collection was in the form of participant observation and unstructured interviews.

As part of participant observation, I visited a number of sex trade venues (bars undercover and known strip clubs) in the capital city of Bulgaria, not only in an attempt to establish contacts (in which I did not succeed), but mostly to become better acquainted with the range of offered sex services, the visible characteristics of sellers and buyers, their public interactions, and the overall ambiance of the venues. Similarly to other sex work researchers (ex. Marttila, 2008) as a participant observer I was immersed in the natural settings characterized by certain gender and social norms, which in consequence meant that I had to engage in role-playing in accordance to the situation. For instance, as a young woman I was often approached as a potential sex worker and experienced some
embarrassing situations; in order to prevent or exit these, I had to act as someone who was interested in consuming sex services or as a passive companion of potential clients. I was also a participant observer in the settings in which I conducted the interviews pertaining to case studies 1 and 2. Given the “special interest in human meaning and interaction as viewed from the perspective of people who are insiders or members of particular situations […]” (Flick, 2006, p.220) associated with participant observation, the interviews were in a conversational format. This seems to be the most appropriate way to limit the power hierarchies between the subjects and the researcher, especially when studying sensitive issues such as those of sex workers (Marttila, 2008; Sanders et al., 2009), and when it is rarely possible to “[ask] direct questions like ‘Why do you do this?’” (Augustin, 2005, p.626). Although the other two interviews (case studies 3 & 4) did not take place as part of participant observation, they were also unstructured and governed by open questions rather than descriptive or confrontational ones, consistent with the aim to obtain non-influenced narratives of biographical events and personal experiences (Burgess, 1991; Flick, 2006). Given the conversational format of the interviews (and in cases 1 & 2 the naturalness of the settings), it is more probable that the provided information was truthful, although it remains unknown how much and what details were omitted from the narratives. Indeed, the major limitation of the ethnographic methods that I employed was in terms of the limited opportunities to seek clarifications (as specified in the appropriate case studies) due to my undermined status as a researcher.

2.4. Important remarks

Given the sensitivity of the topic of interest, and the explicit request of two of the interviewed women, for the purposes of confidentiality I have referred to all of the case studies’ subjects with pseudonyms; conversely, other sources with whom I interacted as part of the field research are either appropriately named in my later references (ex. the director of an Italian organization) or not named at all (ex. a phone interviewee). Additionally, there is data which I do not present due to the specific focus of the thesis (ex. interaction with a sex worker based in the Netherlands; narratives explained in personal communications with a journalist and another researcher; participant observation not related to any of the case studies), yet has probably influenced my
propositions and rationalizations. Undoubtedly, there are various limitations to the field research given the purposeful exclusions of certain potential subjects (as explained in chapter 1), along with the omission of data that had been obtained. Moreover, ethical issues, doubts about the truthfulness of the narratives, and the undermined objectivity during the interactions (due to the blurred boundaries in relation to the subjects) and in terms of the data recordings seem to be concerns for many other researchers who have employed participant observation and unstructured interviews; yet the latter two methods have been endorsed in numerous qualitative studies of the sex industry due to their established usefulness. Furthermore, by engaging in literature review and by referencing various secondary sources, I have attempted to verify the reported data, and most importantly to gain a better understanding of a wide range of influential factors. Accordingly, Sanders and colleagues (2009) confirm the significance of triangulation of data by using multiple methods for collection and analysis.
3. Studying complicated subjects: different issues—different paradigms

Introduction

The dichotomy between voluntary and forced prostitution appears rather limited within a context of globalization, marked by a continuously deepening interconnectedness between international political institutions, labour markets, social organizations and networks, and channels of transport and technological communications. The answers to the questions whether women are voluntary migrants or trafficked victims, willing workers or exploited subjects, more often tend to fall into a gray zone, given the variety of factors, which influence women’s involvement in the sex industry and the concomitant migration. At the macro-structural level it is important to understand that the global distribution of resources has a differential impact on the flows of capital and goods, and consequently on labour and migration. Even within the European Union there are significant disparities between the economies and the socio-political structures of the twenty-seven member states, which affect not only the supply and demand of labour force, but also the segmentation of the corresponding labour market according to ethnicity, class, gender, educational and other personal characteristics. For instance, the developed informal sector in Italy is highly concentrated with third-country nationals (divided according to the corresponding ethnic niches), many of whom are illegal migrants, fulfilling jobs that are less desirable for the Italians themselves. At the same time, there are also numerous European citizens coming from the newly joined member states, who end up working at the lower strata of the market, regardless of their qualifications. Analogically, people from the small and medium-sized cities in Bulgaria are drawn towards the bigger cities, characterized by more employment opportunities, yet higher demand for jobs requiring lower-skilled workers. Hence, mobility, labour and social networking among the sex workers must be examined from a sociological perspective, which is sensitive to the global processes shaping their respective experiences. Additionally, given that the (global) mass media contributes to growing
consumerist attitudes and to the liberalization of norms regarding sex, sexuality and leisure activities, a cultural studies approach becomes useful in shedding light on other dynamics within the commercial sex zone. At the individual level of analysis, the corresponding tools could enhance our understanding of the extent to which commodification and pleasure-seeking contribute to certain decisions and activities within the sex industry. Together with the effects of the ‘prostitute stigma’, these have diverse implications for the sex workers’ experiences of migration, adaptation, employment and socialization. As viewed in chapter 2, a way to grasp the mentioned complexity of the subjects of interest would be to employ Giddens’ ‘theory of structuration’ as a point of reference for the various factors (pertaining to three structural levels) analyzed by the different paradigms. This would allow placing them all into the bigger picture in the attempt to see their interconnectedness. Consequently, throughout the later analysis of the contexts and case studies, I seek to investigate the extent to which the social (macro-) structures both constrain and enable certain actions, the ways that the meso- and micro-factors mediate the processes of decision-making, and the corresponding degree of agency among the female migrants involved in the sex industry.

3.1. Sociological frame of reference

Anthony Giddens (1984) claims that in order to fully understand a given social phenomenon, one should not focus only on those aspects of it, which pertain to the researcher’s field of competences. Since “time-space relations cannot be ‘pulled out’ of social analysis without undermining the whole enterprise” (p.283), I undertake an interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of the dynamics among different sex workers. In order to demonstrate how various factors interplay with each other to reproduce and transform the activities pertaining to the sex industry, I draw extensively on Giddens’ theory of structuration (1984), with the aim of incorporating into the sociological frame the various perspectives developed within the fields of globalization, migration and cultural studies.

The core of the theory of structuration seems to be the notion of ‘duality of structure’, according to which power lies both with the actor and with the context within
which the actions unfold. Agency is said to refer not to the intentions that people have in doing things, but to the *capability* of performing these, which is why agency implies power (p.9). That is to say, the consequences of the agents’ conduct would not have occurred if they had acted differently, although the behaviour might produce unintended consequences. Imbedded in such a proposition we find traces of functionalist thought as is the idea of a spill-over effect. For instance, migrating not only does not always correspond to the (unrealistic) expectations that people have, but might in fact lead migrants to start earning their living by doing something that they had never considered an option (having sex for money), or to experience some degree of an identity transformation in response to the situation (confirmed in case study 4). Nevertheless, the agents continue to be such until they possess the capability to make a difference (if determined to do so) unless they are physically constrained or (threatened) subjects of force or violence. Since, Giddens maintains that ‘structural constraints’ in a Durkheimian sense do not really exist, but could instead be reduced to negative sanctions (ex. violence), he deduces that the inability to take a certain action does not necessarily imply powerlessness; rather, it might be interpreted as the only rational choice “given the motives or goals of the agent” (p.178, my emphasis). Accordingly, a migrant woman whose *goal* is to earn as much money in the least possible time (for example if she has to return to her child in the place of origin) might have no other *choice* but to work in the sex industry, even if she is not physically compelled. Moreover, Giddens’ emphasis on ‘reflexivity’ (i.e. self-consciousness) would imply that all sex workers, being ‘purposive agents’, should be able to ‘elaborate discursively’ (even if this means lying) upon the reasons behind their actions (p.3), in this case the (unintended) involvement in the sex industry.

Agreed that power lies both with the agents and the structures within which they act, it is important to acknowledge its constraining properties. Giddens proposes that “power is generated through the reproduction of structures of domination” (p.258). He defines structures as “sets of rules and resources” (p.25), which are nevertheless *not only constraining, but also enabling*. In a sense, they are the properties of the social systems, the latter being comprised of the activities of human agents, who sustain certain social
relations by drawing on the available rules and resources. ‘Structuration’ then stands for the conditions, which govern the “continuity or transmutation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of social systems” (ibid). It must be noted that Giddens explains these concepts with reference to the developments of three forms of societal organization (tribal, class-divided and capitalist). However, he adds that there are different degrees of systemness, and consequently I turn instead to an analysis of social units other than societies. I operationalize structures as the gender, sexual and economic norms that govern social relations within the public sphere in Bulgaria, Italy and the European Union at large. All of these norms become visible (especially in the media), elaborated and reproduced within the sex industry and the other related social systems, including family, criminal organizations and labour market. It follows that sellers and buyers of sex who comply with the ‘rules’ of the sex industry make these even stronger, while those who challenge them (ex. women who enter the industry with sexual pleasure and experimentation in mind) contribute to the broadening of the set of norms, and the subsequent redefinition of the structures. According to Giddens, “time-space distanciation closes off some possibilities of human experience at the same time as it opens others.” (p.171). Consequently, the long-lasting gender, ethnic and economic inequalities could be said to have shaped the sex industry in Europe into one where it is usually men who buy sex from women, most of the latter being migrants coming from economically disadvantaged regions; meanwhile, the durability of the norms pertaining to the sex industry and the other systems of interest, would have contributed to their respective resilience. Nevertheless, the established norms are not the causes of human activities; as previously emphasized, structures are influential, but all of them are both constraining and enabling. Moreover, the nature of structures changes across time and space due to the variability of the conditions (ex. prevalent discourses) which contribute to their continuity or transmutation. Accordingly, the processes of globalization and migration might not only reproduce the social systems, but also transform them.

As part of the definition of structures, Giddens mentions rules as well as resources. He categorizes these into ‘allocative resources’ and ‘authoritative resources’: the former stand for material features, means of production and produced goods, while
the latter are conceptualized as having command over persons through the organization of
time-space, (re)production activities, and life chances (p.258). Significantly, he adds that
“allocative resources cannot be developed without the transmutation of authoritative
resources” (*ibid*). Drawing upon these concepts, I understand economic capital obtained
through work in the sex industry as belonging to the first category, while to the second
category I assign the management of one’s physical, human and social capitals. My
interpretation of physical capital is limited to the body (ex. the appearance of a sex
worker), while under human capital I include the “knowledge, attitudes, and skills that
are developed and valued primarily for their economically productive potential”
(Baptiste, 2001, p.185). On the other hand, social capital could be said to stand for all the
resources available to people by virtue of membership in a particular network or through
a purposive construction of beneficial sociability (Portes, 1998). Indeed, in his definition
of authoritative resources, Giddens also includes Mayhew’s interpretation, namely that
structures could refer to networks. Portes (1998) suggests that the value of the concept of
social capital lies in the fact that it “reduces the distance between the sociological and
economic perspectives” as it refers to non-monetary forms of resources, which could be
useful for generating power (p.2). Social capital could thus accrue within the family and
as a result of participation in extra-familial networks. In fact, it has been proposed that
the latter might be more significant in the field of stratification, as they have higher
potential for explaining “access to employment, mobility through occupational ladders,
and entrepreneurial success” (Loury, 1977 cited in Portes, 1998, p.11). Moreover, in his
criticism of the neoclassical theory of income inequality, Loury (*ibid*) maintains that the
social context strongly conditions the achievement of people, who might otherwise be
considered equally competent. This supports the claim that human capital becomes
profitable through the management of social capital, and more broadly speaking it is also
consistent with one of the foundations of the theory of structuration—that structures (i.e.
the context seen from a time-space perspective) is both constraining and enabling.
Similarly, Coleman (2000) observes that profiting from human capital (to which I would
also add physical capital) is only possible if there is social capital; that is to say, women
with certain physical features, (economic) goals and (sexual) attitudes might not become
sex workers (i.e. gaining economic capital) unless they could rely on the appropriate networks and social ties.

Although some believe that social capital is an ambiguous concept due to the influence of class, gender and ethnicity (Hellermann, 2006; Anthias, 2007), this does not necessarily undermine its value; on the contrary, since there is an implied interdependence between the capitals, it is rather logical not only that people are allowed to utilize their physical and human capitals through their social affiliations, but also that access to the networks is determined by social and personal characteristics. Yet what Anthias (2007) points out correctly is that membership per se does not always transfer into benefits; instead, social capital should be conceptualized as the “function of utility of [the] resources” that become available through the networks (p.789, my emphasis). Therefore, she questions whether certain networks could account for social capital if the former are poorly valued in society (p.792). In the words of Portes (1998), “sociability cuts both ways [and hence] it can also [apart from benefits through instrumental connections] lead to public ‘bads’. Mafia families, prostitution and gambling rings, and youth gangs offer so many examples of how embeddedness in social structures can be turned to less than socially desirable ends” (p.16). Regardless of whether the sex industry is considered to be intrinsically bad (given the liberalization of Western sexual norms), it is a system founded on various sets of rules and resources, based on which the power hierarchies get reproduced. Hellermann (2006) explains that all networks are characterized by dependencies, especially those involving new migrants (p.1144), and moreover belonging to a network could lead to negative media constructions, reliant on generalizations about the collectives (p.1136), as is usually the case of Bulgarian migrants in Italy. Hence, in accordance with the above-mentioned concepts and propositions, it appears plausible to suggest that the most self-fulfilled people in the sex industry are those who possess and manage in the best way their body, skills and social relations depending on the cultural-historical context within which they act.
3.2. ‘Global’ perspectives

Globalization has been referred to in terms of trade, production and finance internationalization. These processes are being fed by the liberalization of the market (i.e. decrease in government interference), the emphasis on export-oriented economies, and the rise and growing importance of the multinational corporations [MNCs] and the structural adjustment policies [SAPs] (Pyle & Ward, 2003). From a ‘duality of structure’ perspective, the rules that govern the processes of globalization are both enabling and constraining. On the one hand we have witnessed the entrance of women in the workforce, but on the other—there is a gendered segmentation of the labour market (Castells, 1997 cited in Munck, 2005). Presently, there is more equality between educated women and men in the West, yet the gap among women worldwide has deepened. For instance, Anthias and Lazaridis (2000) observe that in Italy it is now common for women from the developing countries and the Eastern European states to fill in the voids left by their successful professional counterparts—domestic and sex work. Nevertheless, the World Bank (1995) states that at large “women are disproportionately segregated” in the informal and lower-wage sectors of the industry. Pyle and Ward (2003) analyze the gendered effects of globalization of trade, production and finance, and the ways these are perpetrated by the SAPs, the MNCs and other market-oriented (instead of those sensitive to human rights and development) structures. As a result, they deduce that the gendered segmentation of the market is particularly visible in four gendered production networks, namely export production, sex work, domestic service, and microfinance income generation. For the most part, these are comprised of women, many of whom “must migrate domestically or internationally to obtain this work”, while leaving behind their ‘transnational families’ (p.470). Whether or not this is a survival strategy, as the authors claim, it seems plausible that once in the sex industry, women often find it hard to move to other sectors of the economy (p.472) due to issues such as stigmatization and debts—idea consistent with the observation that social networks create dependencies.

Munck (2005) suggests that the social counterpart of globalization is ‘social exclusion’. He believes that this paradigm is better than the poverty theories, since it accounts for the dynamic processes and the role of power structures sustaining
globalization. Anthias (2001) mentions a number of exclusion methods, yet adds that exclusion from one network usually implies inclusion in another; therefore, the author maintains that neither is inclusion intrinsically good (p.839), as it might for instance undermine social capital (ex. criminal organizations). For this reason, the author prefers the concept of ‘social division’, which she defines as “a classification of a population (i.e. a taxonomy of persons) and a range of systematic social processes which relate to that taxonomy, and which then serve to produce socially meaningful and systematic (although not unitary) practices and outcomes of inequality” (p.837). Hence, social divisions are sustained by social markers such as gender, ethnicity, class and age, based on which certain boundaries of membership are constructed. Consistent with the notion of time-space variability of constrains, Anthias (2001) highlights the fact that the social divisions intersect both with the context and one’s agency. Consequently, the ‘outcomes of inequality’ could be relevant only for a particular moment in the person’s life-span.

Certainly, the outcomes of inequality could also be general patterns; in terms of the sex industry, we notice that it is gendered (i.e. mostly women who sell sex), often racialized (ex. exotic ‘Oriental’ or Eastern European women), expanding at a global scale, and strongly intertwined with the entertainment and tourism industries, and with specific migration flows. Levitt and Dubner (2009) claim that despite the fact that throughout history women have been economically disadvantaged and under-represented in the labour market, they have always dominated one sector—prostitution. They maintain that until there is demand for sex services, there will be willing suppliers; in cases when the latter are criminalized, this would only translate into higher prices for the remaining sex workers, which would eventually entice more women to enter the sex industry. However, as influencing the supply and demand forces are, this approach implies that if there is no (explicit) demand, there will be no supply of services. Yet, this relationship is not obvious when analyzing the internet, where supply seems to precede demand in the form of available advertisements; neither is it necessarily true in countries such as Italy, Sweden and the UK where the buyers are criminalized. The sex workers in the latter contexts tend to go underground and thus continue to be available (i.e. persistence of supply) for those (secretly) seeking their services. Moreover, it has been
suggested that presently (even if the supply is less than the demand), the prices in the sex industry are kept relatively low due to the constant flows of illegal migrant workers in addition to sex tourism (Della Giusta, Di Tommaso & Strøm, 2009)—trends consistent with an open (global) economy. Consequently, instead of focusing on the supply and demand forces, some scholars adopt a cost-benefit approach in relation to income inequality. Accordingly, it is maintained that because of the unequal distribution of resources, it is usually men who buy sex and women who sell it; within the industry itself, people are said to be more willing to become sex workers if they have fewer income-generation alternatives, and if the possible income from the sex industry is perceived as higher than that from other jobs (ibid).

Nevertheless, such economic perspectives on globalization tend to ignore the significance of social networks for the issues of ex/inclusion and social capital. As Munck (2005) explains, the effects of globalization include not only inequality (due to social exclusion and uneven distribution of resources), but also commodification (examined later in this chapter) and interconnectedness. We are witnessing a significant decrease in barriers counterbalanced by an increase in global networks (ibid.). Certainly, the latter affect the European Union structures (Psimmenos, 2000), national institutions and smaller-scale social organizations, supporting the idea that the ‘global’ is expressed and sustained through the ‘local’ (Munck, 2005). On the other hand, the ‘global cities’ are signs of the concentration of global networks and capital in certain locations. Cities like London, Milan, Rotterdam and Frankfurt become major destinations of domestic and international migrants seeking work (ibid., p.62), thereby sustaining the available networks and increasing the concentrated capital. This also leads to an expansion of the informal sector in the global cities, thus restructuring the labour market in the capitalist economies, and on the other hand stimulating the flexibility of the workers involved in it—patterns, which are highly visible in the sex industry. The issue of interconnectedness is also noticeable in terms of the flows of migration, and the development of technology. For example, Munck (2005) observes that the global sex trade is largely dependent on the advanced means of transportation (translating into cheaper travel) and the power of the internet, allowing for faster communication and easier access to information, and most
importantly the proliferation of services being offered. There is a growing amount of research concerning the increasing number of telephone and cyber-sex workers (Attwood, 2007; Bernstein, 2007b), many of whom are active on a part-time basis in order to supplement other jobs or to support their studies. Bernstein (2007a) explains that within a context of globalization characterized by costly life in urban centers, poorly paid part-time jobs and decreasing utility of degrees and diplomas (i.e. human capital) given the high competitiveness, women could benefit from the highly-paid services, which they can advertise on the internet from the comforts of their homes. In fact, they could apply their technological and accounting skills when managing their own web pages and incomes; additionally, working through the internet allows (most of) the women not to depend on third parties, and most importantly to choose their potential clients, thereby providing the workers with more control over the transactions (Bernstein, 2007a). Hence, despite the dominating consensus that globalization has led to an increase in inequality (Munck, 2005), it is important to acknowledge that the underlying processes are too complex to be limited only to constraints. The liberalization of the market and the technological improvements have allowed more women to become financially independent, while global networks have influenced different localities by furthering democratization, and by promoting human rights. Moreover, diverse globalization forces are behind the increased flows of migrations, which could in themselves translate both into opportunities and into obstacles for self-fulfillment.

3.3. Migration paradigms
The last two decades have been marked by the so called ‘feminization of migration’, referring to the growing number of women migrants. In Italy for instance, as of 2007 almost half of the migrant population was made up of women, who had moved independently (Campani, 2007). Hence, while up to the 1980’s women moved together or in order to reconcile with their spouses (Freedman, 2003), thereby depending on their incomes and social ties, nowadays this pattern does not represent the entire picture. Women seem to have become more autonomous, relying on their own social networks (one of the reasons could be that in general they get married at a later age), migrating as students and refugees, and actively contributing to the ‘feminization of labour’.
Meanwhile, the realm of the sex industry has greatly expanded on a global scale (Munck, 2005; Sanghera, 1997), signifying the simultaneous supply of women from different backgrounds moving across borders, and the demand for co-national and foreign sex workers.

As migrant (sex) workers tend to move from East to West and from South to North, it is not hard to imagine how the processes of globalization are major forces behind the intensity for such migration flows. Some of the widely accredited factors contributing to these include the economic disparities between the developing and the developed countries, the market requirement for a more mobile and flexible labour force, and the communication networks linking all parts of the world (International Organization for Migration [IOM] web page). Accordingly, migration paradigms highlighting the relationships between costs and benefits, and supply and demand still provide us with valuable understandings within the context of globalization, even though they are criticized by many contemporary scholars. It has been noted that the earlier migration theories, which emphasized economic factors (1, 2 & 3 in this section), were developed to explain and predict men’s movements and consequently the “add women and stir” approach is not very useful for the purposes of studying female migrants (Kofman, 2000, p.22). Other criticisms coming from diverse academic fields point to the fact that those theories might be less appropriate also due to the growing importance of the social networks and the telecommunications (Brettell & Hollifield, 2000; Truong & Gasper, 2008). As a result, the later migration theories (particularly 3.3.5 & 3.3.6) not only reflect the intensified complexity of the present-day socialization and mobility, but also offer analytical tools, which might be considered more gender-neutral. Presently, even scholars who continue to focus on the economic causes of migration acknowledge the fact that there are also social, political, and cultural implications for the migrant workers (Munck, 2005). However, others are more reluctant to pay extensive attention to the economic factors. For instance, Mai and King (2009) suggest that the field of migration studies has recently taken a ‘sexual turn’ since research about the mobile workers in the global capitalist economy should not be limited only to economic and political considerations, or victimhood; rather, all people ‘on the move’ are sexual beings,
whom we could only understand “by bringing into the analytical equation the affective, sexual and emotional dimensions” (p.295). Accordingly, it has been acknowledged that “social scientists do not approach the study of [migration] from a shared paradigm, but from a variety of competing theoretical viewpoints fragmented across disciplines, regions, and ideologies” (Massey et. al, 1994 cited in Brettell & Hollifield, 2000, p.2). Therefore, the purpose of the following subsections is to examine six of the most important migration paradigms, which highlight various factors and degrees of agency or structural constraints, and to determine the corresponding tools that might be appropriate for the later analysis of the Bulgarian migrant sex workers.

3.3.1. Neoclassical theory

The neoclassical theory remains the dominant paradigm in economics, yet in the last two decades it has been criticized on two main accounts. The first one is that people are assumed to move from densely to sparsely populated areas; however, if this were the case, then we would not witness high immigration rates in the Netherlands and Germany, which are among the world’s most densely populated areas. Secondly, it has been claimed that wage differentials are not as influential; rather, these are poor predictors of migration, although they do determine its potentiality (Portes & Back, 1985). Often, specific migration patterns emerge between a number of sending and receiving areas, while numerous other states remain a lot more disadvantaged, yet do not sustain considerable out-migration. For instance, the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Union did not produce the expected massive emigrations, which leads one to focus on the force of labour demand (Straubhaar, 1986 cited in Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino & Taylor, 1998). To some extent, the neoclassical theory takes the latter into consideration: the ‘push’ factors (ex. lack of economic opportunities; political repression) are said to impel people to leave the place of origin, while the ‘pull’ factors (ex. labour demand; political freedoms)—to attract them to move to the receiving area (Castles & Miller, 2009). A valuable aspect of the theory is that it acknowledges the influences of the systems within which the actors are placed, yet does not underestimate their agency. This is compatible with the duality of structure emphasized by Giddens (1984), especially since the neoclassical theory incorporates a substantial consideration of
the role of human capital. Conversely, additional criticisms of the theory derive from research highlighting the significance of the system’s constraints. Accordingly, Portes and Bach (1985) deduce that “the central difficulty with push-pull and labour recruitment theories is not that they fail to identify important forces, but that they do not take into account the changing historical contexts of migration” (p. 6).

3.3.2. Historical-institutional approach

Conversely, the historical-institutional approach pays close attention to the historical conditions that frame the big picture. According to the related world systems theory, the mobility of people is the result of ‘export-processing zones’, produced by the “penetration of economic relations into peripheral countries” (Massey et al., 1998, p.128). Similarly, Castles and Miller (2009) observe that “in the context of an unequal distribution of economic and political power in the world economy, migration [is] seen mainly as a way of mobilizing cheap labour for capital” (p.26)—an idea consistent with the overall socio-economic understanding of the processes of globalization. The central foundation of this proposition is Marxist political economy, which is probably the reason for the theory’s major shortcoming—the overall neglecting of human agency. Hence, although the historical background is important for an enhanced understanding, in the research of the diverse factors influencing the migration routes to prostitution, the recognition of the structural forces should not be at the compensation of the analysis of the individual decision-making.

3.3.3. Dual labour market theory

The dual labour market theory highlights the importance of structural demand in advanced capitalist economies for variously-skilled workers, yet acknowledges some degree of human agency. People in the primary labour market are said to be selected on the basis of human capital, while in the secondary labour market there tends to be a concentration of lower-skilled workers with a minority or illegal status (Castles & Miller, 2009). A related concept is that of ‘enclave economies’. It highlights the significance of ethnicity (of the workers and the entrepreneurs) for the segmentation of the labour market—a pattern that is very much visible within the sex industry. Psimmenos (2000)
adds that gender is another category which contributes to the development of the workers’ niches. Accordingly, in Italy “the feminization of migration corresponds precisely to the growing of the demand in ‘female’ jobs” (Campani 1997 cited in ibid, p.85), linked to the large informal sector in the country, and the extensive demand of services. Although it is possible for migrants to spread to other market sectors (Massey et al., 1998), Augustin (2003) maintains that when it comes to the sex industry, it remains highly concentrated with third-country nationals and women from Central and Eastern Europe. Despite the fact that the dual labour market theory pays more attention to the individual than the historical-institutional approach does, this is largely in terms of physical rather than human capital. Certainly, social markers such as gender, ethnicity and class are significant for the analysis of the sex industry, yet the main issue is once again that the structures should not be emphasized at the expense of human agency.

3.3.4. New economics labour migration

The central unit of analysis of the new economics labour migration approach is not an isolated individual—here the focus is on the social group. It is assumed that decisions to migrate are often taken by the entire household and these are concerned not only with a possible rise of the income, but also with investments at a lower risk (Massey et al., 1998). The major critique is that the theory focuses on the supply side of migration, thereby downplaying the importance of the demand for labour in the modern capitalist economies. Kofman (2000) further criticizes the theory for the neglect of gender, as power and resources are unequally distributed within the household itself, implying that the decision taken by the social unit might in fact be reducible to that of a single individual. Even though the scholar correctly points out that the household unit is “not a satisfactory bridge” between the micro- and macro-structures (p.27), it might still be valuable to consider the notion of the ‘social unit’ (not necessarily a household) as a tool of analysis. Just as people’s decision to migrate could be influenced by their families, analogically one could suggest that when applying this approach to those already involved in the sex industry, the prostitution ‘organizers’ take on the role of the social group. As such, the latter could invest their employees’ labour in other places (if there is an expectation for a higher return rate or a lower risk) even if this is not in accordance
with their preferences; the organizers might also provide the workers with a more profitable set of options (in other locations or sectors of the industry) depending on the existing connections within the (criminal) group.

### 3.3.5. Systems and networks approach

Related to the criminal associations are the migration links between sending and receiving countries due to prior colonization, trade and cultural ties; having its roots in geography, the migration systems theory focuses precisely on these (Castles & Miller, 2009). Probably the most valuable aspect of the systems and networks paradigm is the sensitivity towards the interaction between factors pertaining to different structural levels. The macro-structures comprise aspects of the political economy of the world market, while meso- and micro-structures include informal social networks and personal characteristics that facilitate the migrants’ decision-making and later adjustment. Hence, both social and human capitals become highlighted through the focus on human agency as a result of the various social relations. According to Kofman (2000), social networks are key links between the individual and the context, and are thus very influential in sustaining the migration flows. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that individuals and groups mediating between the migrants, and the sending and receiving countries, not only assist, but also exploit migrants or even do both simultaneously. Scholars from different fields of research confirm the significance and the dangers of affiliations with certain social networks (Portes, 1998; Truong & Gasper, 2008). Nawyn, Reosti and Gjokaj (2009) suggest that the social networks not only exert power over its members, but also, due to diverse power hierarchies, men and women do not necessarily have access to the same networks and resources, which translates into different risks, costs, benefits and paths of migration (p.187). Moreover, Psimmenos (2000) explains that once involved in the sex industry (in accordance with gender, ethnic and class divides), it is the network members themselves who “reproduce and culturally maintain the exclusionary spatial settings within which they are placed” (p.81), thereby further diversifying the migration experiences. Nevertheless, this paradigm remains a highly valuable one, as it illuminates the migration processes that facilitate the development of ethnic, criminal and professional networks, along with the wide range of implications that they could have for
the respective members. In fact, a critique of the systems and networks approach might be that there is not enough attention to the extent of the existing social linkages, in that these play a role not only at the micro- and meso-levels, but reach the macro-level as well.

3.3.6. Transnationalism

As one of the most recently developed paradigms in migration studies, transnationalism pays close attention to the significance of the globalization forces. The improvement of transportation and communication technologies greatly facilitates the movement of migrants and the maintenance of close links with their places of origin. Consequently, there is also a growth in circular and temporary mobility, meaning that “people migrate repeatedly between two or more places where they have economic, social or cultural linkages” (Castles & Miller, 2009, p.30). Thus transnationalism points to the agency of the migrants, and by replacing the concept of ‘diaspora’ (previously dominant in the discourse) it takes off the burden of the emotional connotation associated with immigrant communities. Furthermore, as proposed by Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999), the theory takes into consideration the effects of economic, political and socio-cultural activities, sustained both by top-down (ex. state initiatives) and bottom-up (ex. immigrants’ activities) processes of transnationalism. That is to say, the unit of analysis is the individual taken together with his/her support networks (ibid.), which is highly consistent with Giddens’ theory of structuration. Additionally, given the prior criticism of the systems and networks approach for the insufficient attention to the extent of the influence of networks, the prevailing reference to the transnationalism paradigm in this thesis becomes rather logical. Migrant sex workers might rely not only on the organizers and on other sex workers in their immediate surroundings, but indeed appear to be affected by transnational networks active in both the sending and receiving countries. The modeling, entertainment and tourism industries, in addition to the intensifying cyber world activities are some examples testifying for the transnationalization of the sex industry. Moreover, Augustin (2006) argues that because of the flexibility, willingness to move across borders and to adapt to different labour markets, the transnationalism paradigm facilitates the grasping of the diversity among the sex workers who are not
simply victims of trafficking. As mentioned in chapter 1, they could be referred to as labour migrants and ‘transnationals’ who have diverse strategies and mobility styles depending on their physical, human and social capitals.

3.4. Cultural approach to (commercial) sex

Despite the parallels between migration and the involvement in the sex industry, migrant sex workers have rarely been examined in terms of cultural or psychological factors, unless the concern is the degree of adaptation. For instance, it seems plausible that women from the smaller cities who decide to sell sex for money might feel the need to migrate (either nationally or abroad) in order to avoid negative experiences with people whom they know (confirmed in case study 2), given the widely dispersed negative connotations associated with prostitution. Since reputation, defined as a positive social image, could allow access to social networks and employment opportunities it thus becomes a valuable source for human capital. On the other hand, stigmatization could be conceptualized as a deterioration of the authoritative resources, including the loss of reputation. Instead, if a woman is one of many migrants (i.e. she does not have an established social image, which she has to maintain within her social circles), stigmatization might have a lesser impact on the utility of human capital, although it could continue to cause significant psychological concerns. Consistent with such a hypothesis about migrant sex workers, Della Giusta and colleagues (2009) confirm that the more it takes to ruin one’s reputation, and the fewer working possibilities one has, the more likely it is for the subject to sell sex. Moreover, the scholars explain that prostitution is stigmatized to a different extent depending on the societies, and that one’s reputation would be less vulnerable in places where the sex industry is big (as in the case of Bulgaria and Italy), meaning where the consumption of sexual services is more evident or even acceptable. Apart from avoiding the loss of reputation, migration also seems to be a way of distinguishing the private from the professional sphere in the corresponding locations. Indeed, certain studies (Chimenti, 2010; Morokvasic et al., 2009) point to the fact that many sex workers maintain different identities, depending on the context within which they act.
Another factor that might facilitate a decision to work in a foreign sex industry is the issue of commodification, which Munck (2005) includes in his analysis of the effects of globalization. The scholar proposes that the liberalization of the market stimulates the international (global) competitiveness, which is sustained by commodification in every state (i.e. the local level), that is to say “everything can be bought or sold, including life itself” (p.9). Munck (2005) then observes that this tendency is an important aspect of the sex industry. One interpretation of this idea could be to say that it is gradually becoming more normal to buy and sell sex because of the intensified (general) consumerism on a daily basis. On the other hand, Levitt and Dubner (2009) suggest that men tend to view women as commodities, defined as “perfect substitutes [...] that are easily interchanged” (p.24). In either case, this would imply that a ‘foreign commodity’ might be more desirable due to its distinctiveness from the ‘domestic production’; consequently, we would thus expect demand for import, although the supply and services of the foreign women are not necessarily at a higher price (given the international competitiveness within the sex industry). Indeed, Anthias and Lazaridis (2000) observe that in Italy there is an explicit demand for Nigerian and Eastern European sex workers, which appears to be stimulated by an exoticization of the ‘other’ (i.e. non-Western women). It has also been proposed that a de-sexualization of the ‘own women’ could be used as a justification for the demand of the sexual services of foreign workers, on whom the clients could count for distinct sexual experiences and acts that are considered deviant (Marttila, 2008).

Certainly, however, as part of the globalization processes we have witnessed not only a tendency of commodification, but also one of sexualization, defined here as a liberalization of the sexual norms. Consequently, the meaning of ‘deviant’ acts is being re-constructed in such a way that nowadays we might interpret these as ‘fun’ or even necessary sexual experiences, at least in the developed world. Until a couple of decades ago, the Chicago prostitutes were given substantially bigger amounts of money for performing the ‘morally-wrong’ fellatio on the client, while now it is considered a regular sexual service (Levitt & Dubner, 2009). Levitt and Dubner (2009) explain that the greatest competition to sex workers is posed by women who are willing to have similar sexual experiences with men for free. Although ‘competition’ seems a rather strong term
(especially given the expansion of the sex industry), the authors must be given credit for their realization that the construction of what is ‘normal’ in private life has an effect on the expectations from and performances by the sex workers. The fact that in the contemporary Western societies premarital sex is almost a requirement, while extramarital sex is less severely punished (and sometimes even expected), testifies for a modification (i.e. liberalization) of the sexual norms. Drawing upon Bourdieu, Bernstein (2007a) says that in contrast to the old petite bourgeoisie, whose values were concerned with mobile asceticism and restraint, the members of the new middle class regard “fun, pleasure and freedom as ethical ideals worthy of strenuous pursuit” (p.477). Accordingly, the same scholar observes that there is a transition from relational to recreational sexual behaviour; that is to say, if in the past the demand for the services of sex workers was mostly due to dissatisfaction with the private relationship, currently a lot of the services are bought as part of adventure-seeking, business meetings, and sex tourism (2007b).

These behaviours are taking place in a post-industrial era, which has witnessed intense restructuring of the meanings of (commercial) sex, sexuality, romantic love, pleasure and intimacy (Hawkes, 2004; Illouz, 1997; Oppermann, 1998; Roberts, Sanders, Myers & Smith, 2010), largely influenced by the media. McNair (2002) examines how TV shows, films and magazines contribute to the construction of the prevalent discourses, and become especially powerful due to their reliance on various celebrity icons such as Madonna. Consequently, he maintains that ‘porno-chic’ representations available to everyone on a daily basis are a driving force behind the sexualization of contemporary culture, or what he defines as ‘striptease culture’ (p.88). Attwood (2007) confirms the ‘aestheticization of sex’ through the media, and she even states that due to the change of sexual tastes, the porn audiences are not only not considered immoral, but are even thought of as sophisticated and liberated consumers. Accordingly, we observe that sex is persistently the center of attention (ex. sex scandals of celebrities), it is increasingly linked to consumerism, and the public shift to permissive sexual attitudes has intensified to such a degree that even sexual transgression has become mainstream (Attwood, 2006).

Given the interdependence between structures and human agency, it is important to see how the post-industrial sex discourses are simultaneously the expression of
peoples’ re-structuring and the vehicles for further liberalization of the sexual norms. Since the aesthetic value of sex stimulates a liberated sexuality for women, whereby “sex is stylish, a source of physical pleasure, a means of creating identity, a form of body work, self-expression, a quest for individual fulfillment” (Attwood, 2006, p.86), one might hypothesize that it could even be perceived as prestigious or at least a source of self-confidence for a woman to work as a lap dancer or stripper in a luxurious club (noticeable in case study 1), or as a model, providing occasional sexual services. Confirming Giddens’ (1993) conceptualization of ‘plastic sexuality’ (i.e. sexuality as a property of the self rather than in relation to reproduction) we observe that the persistent sexual discourses are centered on individual desires, pleasure and eroticism. Yet despite the acceptability of ‘casual sex’ (as in *Sex and the city*), the belief that sex work alienates women from their sexuality and ability to enjoy sex in private remains dominant (Kontula, 2008). Interestingly, however, data concerning twenty-five sex workers in Finland, demonstrates that pleasure is possible without emotional attachment ‘even’ when it comes to commercial sex, and that it could be understood as a means to more satisfying private sexual relationships; more strikingly, experiencing pleasure in sex work could be a prior motivation for some women (*ibid*). Based on her interviews, Kontula (2008) deduces that pleasure is often possible and desired, as long as it does not undermine the professionalism underlining the commercial aspect of sex work. Therefore, the contemporary sexual discourses exert influence on all the structures, including those belonging to the system called sex industry. Accordingly, Bernstein (2007b) points out that “many sex workers [like their clients] embrace a recreational sexual ethic that enables them to participate in sexual labour while maintaining undivided, authentic-feeling of self” (p.181) (confirmed by case study 3). Since pleasure is now being perceived as one of the building blocks of one’s sexual identity, it thus becomes more related to intimacy, the meaning of which has also been ‘democratized’ (Giddens, 1993). The transforming relationship between pleasure, intimacy and commodification is being strengthened and is meanwhile contributive to the private-public divide through the sexual representations of celebrities in the media, the proliferation of professional and amateur ‘web cam’ practices, and as part of the
‘traditional’ commercial sex transactions. While decades ago women were paid more for performing deviant acts, now there is a higher pay for those who produce an emotional connection with the client, even if it is artificial and temporary. Lever and Dolnick (2000) demonstrate that clients expect to get intimacy with call girls, while Bernstein (2007a) coins the term ‘bounded authenticity’ in an attempt to show how sex workers are increasingly engaged in ‘emotional labour’ (ex. conversing, caressing, and even mouth-kissing), which could produce a sincere feeling of intimacy on the part of the workers themselves, although the emotional authenticity remains incorporated within the commercial contract. Consequently, the author claims that this pattern challenges the divide between commodification and intimacy. Certainly, such an observation is only possible in a context where the processes of globalization (ex. liberalization of the sexual norms) are transforming the boundaries between the private and public spheres (Munck, 2005; Attwood, 2006). In a post-industrial era, characterized by a consumption-based economy featuring services even of emotional value, we are witnessing other contradictory forces such as the simultaneous normalization and problematization of commercial sex (Bernstein, 2007b), depending on the prevailing cultural norms, which accordingly have a constraining or enabling implications for the (migrant) sex workers.

Conclusion

Similar to Massey and his colleague’s (1994) observation that social scientists approach migration from competing theoretical paradigms, the sex industry has also been examined from a variety of perspectives, all of which contributing to a particular understanding, yet lacking other important considerations. The purpose of this chapter has been to examine some of the tools associated with different paradigms, which I consider to be useful for the analysis of the contexts of interest and the case studies concerning Bulgarian migrant sex workers. Since the researched subjects are not simply sex workers, females or migrants, neither exclusively Bulgarian, the analysis would be rather limited if I were to approach it only from a feminist, sociological or historical perspective. Instead my

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5 The term was originally coined by Hochschild, 2003 (cited in Bernstein, 2007).
original contribution is the demonstration of the diversity and interrelation between and among some factors that influence these women to get involved and to continue working in the sex industry via migratory routes. This is done by utilizing tools, which have been employed within the fields of globalization, migration and cultural studies. Accordingly, I refer to the concepts of physical, human, social and economic capitals, in addition to market segregation, commodification and sexualization. Explaining either migration or the entrance in the sex industry only in terms cost-benefit or supply-demand relationships, or as a result of social affiliations would be valuable, yet insufficient for grasping the current complexity. Hence, in the following chapter I also attempt to take into consideration the post-communist developments in Bulgaria, along with the cultural norms prevailing there and in Italy. In a context of globalization, the complexity of influential structures is largely due to their interconnectedness, often contradictory and testified by the simultaneous normalization and problematization of the expanding and diversifying array of sexual services that are being offered and consumed. For this reason, the use of the theory of structuration as a point of reference has the function of incorporating the diverse factors, which have often been explored only from a single (corresponding) field of study. Thus, agreed upon the parallel between constraining and enabling structures, I investigate how social divisions based on class and gender, migrant and criminal networks, the liberalization of the market and the sexual norms, and personal goals and attitudes towards pleasure and desire all influence the agency of the researched subjects. Finally, in the words of Kofman (2000), “It is important to recognize that notions of structural context and agency are heavily interrelated. Unless we do this, migrant women will continue to be viewed as passive victims.” (p.25).
4. Understanding the big picture

Introduction

I have assumed that human agency is only explicable with reference to the context within which it takes place. Any form of decision-making is rarely made simply in accordance with a rational weighing of the costs and benefits involved. In fact, when it comes to the sex industry, the role of human agency has often been undermined at the expense of the analysis of the structural constraints. Yet, as I have previously emphasized, the rules and resources pertaining to the structures of interest have both constraining and enabling implications for the sex workers. Hence, this chapter is meant to provide the background necessary for an enhanced comprehension of the individual case studies. For this reason, here I examine the historical developments in Bulgaria after the fall of communism, the dynamics of the sex trade in Bulgaria, the general migratory flows of Bulgarians and the particularities of the Italian context, where numerous Bulgarian migrant women are sex workers, and finally the various links existing between Bulgaria and Italy. Throughout the overviews and especially in the analyses of the presented data I attempt to point out the wide range of factors which contribute either to the entrance in the sex industry or the decision to migrate, and often to both simultaneously, given the relation between the place of interest and the range of employment opportunities.

4.1. Bulgaria: post-communist implications

With the collapse of the communist regime, a wide range of ‘opportunities’ were made possible for the Bulgarian women. The process of transition, which started in the end of 1989, in a sense stimulated an exaggeration of everything that was repressed during the 45 years of dictatorship. Some suggest that Bulgaria, like other Eastern European countries, had “a tradition of strong conservative patriarchal structures”, which were suppressed during communism, yet resurfaced immediately after the collapse of the regime (Van der Lippe & Fodor, 1998, p.132). Others point out that the taboo on the discussion of sexuality transformed into a sexual revolution, which included new forms
of eroticization and an explosion of pornography (Funk, 1993). The long-lasting pseudo equality for women, being highly employed and politically represented during communism, gradually led to a reversed (from a Western point of view) understanding of women’s rights and issues. That is to say, instead of being double- or triple-burdened workers, the process of democratization allowed women to return to their ‘authentic nature’ (Petrova, 1993), namely being feminine. Alongside this pattern, the ‘emancipated woman’ was being represented in the media as one that was extravagantly dressed, promiscuous, and abusing cosmetics (ibid), which could instead be called a ‘patriarchal emancipation’ (Funk, 1993). In fact, by the early 1990’s there was a significantly lesser number of employed women, and only a very small minority of those were involved in the governmental or managerial positions (Corrin, 2005; Heyns, 2005; Panova, Gavrilova & Merdzanska, 1993); additionally, the overall education level in Bulgaria decreased as a side effect of the transition period (‘Center for the Study of Democracy’ [CSD], 2007). Hence, we could say that the post-communist implications comprised a form of a ‘structuration’ process, leading to the (re)establishment of structures, which were favourable for the development of the sex industry. The Bulgarian sexual revolution and the media-sustained exoticization of the female body were important in producing more liberal discourses about sexuality and expectations from sex. These were most certainly aided by the global sexualization, witnessed in Western advertisements, magazines (ex. Playboy) and shows, which had finally reached ‘democratic’ Bulgaria. On the other hand, women’s human capital (in the sense of utility of resources) was not only undermined by the patriarchal system, but was further exacerbated by the decreasing educational level. It has been suggested that in the presence of such a ‘shadow globalization’ women from the former socialist countries resorted to prostitution as a necessary way of survival (Penttinen, 2004 cited in Marttila, 2008). It could be debated to what extent the involvement in the sex industry in the early 90’s signified an intensified discrimination against Bulgarian women (i.e. constraining structures) or a post-modern approach to self-confidence and independence (i.e. enabling structures). This is beyond the scope of the present chapter, but the mapping of the historical context remains valuable as it contributes to an enhanced understanding of the big picture, within which lie the
foundations of the Bulgarian sex industry, which nevertheless has undergone various transformations ever since.

Interestingly, given the scarcity of employment opportunities for the Bulgarian women during the beginning of the transition period, the sex industry was in a rather idle state until the mid-late 90’s when it became a major income-generating sector in the Bulgarian economy (CSD, 2007). Although there are no explanations concerning the delayed and sudden expansion of the sex industry, it seems plausible that the development of the Bulgarian criminal organizations might have been quite influential. They started forming immediately after the fall of the regime, given the instability of the law enforcement and justice institutions, and the socio-economic crisis. By 1997 (when the exponential growth of the sex trade was witnessed) the structure of the organized crime had reached its last state of development, being largely oligarchic in nature, undisturbed by the corrupt police and justice officials, and largely intertwined with legal businesses (CSD, 2010b). The bosses, disguised as elite entrepreneurs, remained uninvolved in the gray and black markets, which depended on the work of the newest and least important members of the criminal organizations; they were the ones responsible for the illegal insurances of automobiles and people, and the smuggling and trafficking of both (CSD, 2010b; CSD, 2007). Although it seems plausible to suggest that in the late 90’s there was a significant number of women who were forced into prostitution by the criminal organizations, a lot of the data remains exaggerated or unconfirmed; as reported by CSD (2007), according to Association Animus there were approximately 10 000 victims of trafficking between 1998 and 1999, while the European institute for crime prevention and control had calculated up to 4000 for the same period. Certainly, even if it were only one person, when it comes to human trafficking the number is significant. Yet my aim here, is to demonstrate, on the one hand, that there were social, political and economic factors which enabled the expansion of the sex industry after the fall of

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6 The overall shortage of locally produced goods in Bulgaria was compensated by illegal imports. On the other hand, during the Yugoslav embargo (1992-1995) the same, already established criminals were behind the massive illegal exporting, which allowed them to gain further capital and to form into powerful, hierarchical organizations (CSD, 2010b).
communism, and on the other hand, that even if there were more victims during the initial years of the Bulgarian sex trade, the context has changed in such a way, that we are now witnessing much more variety among the present-day Bulgarian sex workers, both at home and abroad.

4.2. Bulgarian sex workers at home
4.2.1. Overview

My interest in migrant female sex workers is to a large extent due to the fact that in Bulgaria the majority of the participants in the industry are very mobile, and that female workers are significantly predominant comprising 82% of the sample, as reported by TAMPEP (2009a). In terms of the intra-national mobility, most women from the rural areas and smaller cities migrate to the four biggest cities\(^7\) in Bulgaria, namely the capital Sofia, in addition to Plovdiv, Varna and Bourgas. The number of sex workers in the latter two cities and their vicinities, being situated at the Black Sea, becomes more than double in the summer months (ibid). According to CSD (2007), another tourist-oriented migration takes place in the winter months when sex workers from around the country seek jobs in the mountain resorts. Both seasonal migrations appear to represent the few instances when women from Sofia migrate to other parts of Bulgaria, given the prospect of getting a higher turnover due to tourism. It has been observed that women from the ‘provincial’ areas\(^8\) tend to have limited educational and professional opportunities in their place of origin, and are therefore open to offers pertaining to the sex industry in one of the four big cities, while women from the cities, who are usually well-educated, might consider sex work when faced with economic shortages obstructing their studies or the raising of their children (TAMPEP, 2007). Meanwhile, a tendency characteristic of cities

\(^7\) In addition to the resorts and some border cities, these are the places where the sex industry is most developed, especially in the case of Sofia: out of 300 known prostitution venues (brothels, clubs and bars) on the territory of the country, 100 are in the capital (CSD, 2007). Hence, women migrate either in search of employment in general, or with the intention to work in the sex industry.

\(^8\) In this category I include not only the countryside, but also mid-sized cities, where unemployment and abandoned stores from the communist period are evident markers of underdevelopment, especially in comparison to the capital and the 4-5 biggest cities.
and villages of various sizes throughout the country is for Roma women to be overrepresented in street prostitution, followed by women from Turkish minorities. On the other hand, indoor prostitution is often ‘reserved’ for the ethnic Bulgarians who comprise approximately 84% of the sample (ibid). Consistent with Augustin’s (2005) acknowledgement, the indoor venues in Bulgaria also vary greatly, from more visible bars and striptease clubs, to underground brothels, apartments and offices, along with concealed and prestigious escort services. According to a CSD report (2007), the major sector of the Bulgarian sex industry is the so called ‘club prostitution’, which includes brothels, clubs and bars pertaining to the nightlife entertainment industry, in addition to call girls who can be delivered to any private or public venue (often by a commission-based taxi driver). Although it has been suggested that even the much riskier street prostitution might be entered out of an economic need (CSD, 2007; TAMPEP, 2007), sex workers comprising the club prostitution are said to be substantially driven by economic objectives; for this reason, they are usually the ones seeking the organizers, responsible for providing the clients, venues, health checks and protection (CSD, 2007). While some women are visible sex workers (in strip clubs and apartment brothels), others are disguised as waitresses, dancers, and masseuses depending on the formal function of the venue. The least visible sex workers are those who belong to the ‘elite prostitution’ centered on model agencies. There seems to be a lack of a borderline between the women’s duties as models and as escorts, providing companionship to rich entrepreneurs. Based on the CSD report (2007), there are many women (especially those from the provincial areas) who are attracted to this industry sector as a result of the high social status and the luxurious goods paid for by the modeling agencies (cars, apartments, plastic surgeries). Such sponsorship becomes available not simply through the profits from runaway shows or the pockets of the rich clients, but is to a large extent supplied by the agency managers and owners who belong to the highest strata of the criminal organizations. Certainly, however, the latter are vastly present in (if not responsible for) all the other sectors of the Bulgarian sex industry, including the seasonal prostitution, dependent on the criminal hotel owners across the summer and winter resorts (CSD, 2007). Undoubtedly, one should not underestimate the role of the current law either; that
is to say, due to its ambiguity (sex work is neither legal nor criminal) the only associates who could be penalized are those who solicit or organize paid sexual services\(^9\) (TAMPEP, 2007). Therefore, the majority of the organizers are either members of a criminal group or depend on one for protection, given the latter’s power over many corrupt government officials. It is important, however, to point out that since 2002 there have been reported growing numbers of self-employed sex workers. These are usually escorts, some of whom might work in groups of two or three, paying a monthly fee to someone (i.e. modern pimp) who finds clients for them (CSD, 2007). Additionally, there is an increase in amateur prostitution, characterized by an irregularity of frequency; it appears to be comprised of sex workers who get their clients through personal networks, and most importantly through the internet (ibid).

4.2.2. Analysis

Only through an examination of the historical developments it is possible to map the big picture, which framed the evolution of the sex industry in Bulgaria. As demonstrated, the transition period led to major transformations of the social, political and economic systems. The return to patriarchal values, in addition to the openness towards the global media representations reflecting the sexual liberalization, contributed to changes in the sexual and gender norms. The resulting post-communist social structures exerted constraints on women’s employment opportunities, yet at the same time enabled them to demonstrate (through discourses, clothing, and explicit statements) their sexual liberalism, which was a sufficient (although not required) precondition for entrance in the embryonic sex industry of the 1990’s. In the meantime, the political instability allowed for the growth of the criminal organizations, which by the end of the century were infiltrated in the legal and illegal markets. Not only did they have control over the international transportation of sex workers, but their hegemony of the Bulgarian sex and entertainment industries allowed them to distribute women within the country itself.

\(^9\) Examples of organizational activities include direct management of the sex workers, provision of venues and clients, etc.
The cost-benefit approach to migration has been criticized due to the acknowledgement of contradictory initial information, yet when it comes to intra-national movements, this is not necessarily the case. Due to the fact that there is no language barrier in Bulgaria, and especially as a result of the highly developed criminal networks, there is more access to and better information concerning the possible employment opportunities in the receiving area. The neoclassical push-pull factors paradigm appears to be quite compatible with the Bulgarian context, as migration usually occurs from the weakly industrialized, provincial areas to the four big cities where the majority of the foreign investments are concentrated, and consequently where we find substantial demand for work in the service sector (‘National Statististical Institute’ [NSI], 2009), in particular in the sex, entertainment and food industries. Moreover, based on my limited personal interactions with Bulgarian sex workers, it seems plausible that the intra-national movement from villages and towns to the capital is carried out by poorer individuals (confirmed by case study 2) when compared to those who migrate abroad (as the latter would need more economic and social resources to take such a step). Conversely, the neoclassical theory fails to explain the majority of the national migratory flows, which are rarely from densely to sparsely populated areas. The few exceptions are in terms of movements to the summer and winter resorts, and to the border areas, which could instead be explained by the tourists’ demand for sexual services. Although the dual labour market perspective presupposes some degree of human agency on the basis of human capital, this does not seem to be the case for the Bulgarian sex workers in the early stages of development of the sex industry. On the other hand, in the Bulgarian context we do find evidences of ‘enclave economies’, given the predominance of women from Roma, Turkish and provincial origin in street prostitution. Additionally, we see that the provincial women are also overrepresented in the lower-strata of the indoor venues (ex. hidden brothels), while women from Sofia and the other big cities (usually Plovdiv, which is the closest) tend to occupy the more prestigious positions (ex. in expensive bars or working as escorts). Hence, while ethnic niches in the Bulgarian sex industry are relatively minor, there is significant segmentation according to social status (i.e. place of origin), consistent with Anthias’ (2007) emphasis on the role of gender, ethnicity and
*class* for membership and employment opportunities. Conversely, physical appearance might be more influential for entering the elite prostitution, which is why there is no noticeable overrepresentation of women from the four biggest cities.

Certainly, however, the existing social ties are always influential. Drawing upon Coleman’s (2000) suggestion that profiting from personal resources is mediated by social capital, it is doubtful whether the sex workers’ physical capital would be useful unless they are introduced to the appropriate organizers. Even social resources pertaining to the household dynamics could sometimes be crucial for a woman’s decision to get involved in the sex industry. For instance, in a phone conversation with the mother of a sex worker, I learned that the former had taken over the role of the primary caretaker for her grandson, and had later assisted her daughter financially to move to the Netherlands (Miteva, field notes, July 3, 2010). Nevertheless, social ties do not necessarily translate into social benefits. Once involved in the sex industry, the independence of many women could be constrained by the schemes of the criminal organizations; hence, from a systems and networks perspective we see that the internal mobility of the sex workers is not only triggered by the search for higher economic profits. The sex workers were often rotated between cities in Bulgaria to avoid being recognized if they remained for a longer period of time, and to keep the supply diverse enough in order to generate stable income; moreover, until 2001-2002 the sex-exchange cycle incorporated numerous foreign-based sex workers, through the existing links among the Bulgarian criminal organizations within the country and abroad (CSD, 2007). On the other hand, the more recent dynamics within the Bulgarian sex industry testify for the utility of social ties for those involved (or interested) in it. Given the reports on the increased number of self-employed sex workers (ex. groups of independent escorts), we could assume that these are more influenced by their immediate social networks (ex. for finding clients). Also, in accordance with the global trends, we see that at the latest stage of development of the Bulgarian sex industry, women there are starting to rely more often on networking through the advanced telecommunications, enabling them to have more control over their work, and consequently to accrue higher economic capital.
4.3. Bulgarian sex workers abroad

4.3.1. Overview

Most often, the Bulgarian sex workers abroad have been categorized as victims of trafficking reaching the latest peak number in 2006 (just before the accession of Bulgaria to the EU). The ‘United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’ [UNODC] (2007) reports that only in Germany, Greece and the Netherlands, between 2005 and 2006, there were approximately 300 victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Accordingly, it is maintained that, “in recent years, the majority of human trafficking victims detected in Europe have come from the Balkans and the former Soviet Union, in particular Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova” (ibid, p.2). Nevertheless, it must be restated that the trafficking statistics are often based on information provided by NGOs dealing exclusively with the experiences of victims (ex. Association Animus), thereby downplaying any other factors, which might have contributed to the mobility and employment results. Indeed, UNODC (2007) acknowledges that some of the ‘victims of trafficking’ are aware of the fact that they would work in the sex industry upon arrival in the destination country, yet they are often ill-informed regarding the working conditions. Similarly, CSD (2007) informs that since the year 2005 many of the Bulgarian victims have been defined as such due to false promises concerning the nature of sexual services that the women would have to offer in the foreign industry. On the other hand, based on interviews it has been estimated that involuntary migration for the purpose of subsequent involvement in the sex industry is approximately 5% to a maximum of 10%. While forced prostitution was typical in the 90’s, presently sex work appears to be understood as a “very well-paid job in the West, while pimping—as a necessary infrastructural process” (CSD, 2007, p.132)\(^\text{10}\), thus confirming the (Bulgarian and global) liberalization of sexual norms, and testifying for the changing socio-political situation.

\(^{10}\) My translation from Bulgarian (Prostituiraneto zapochva da se razbira kato ‘mnogo dobre platena rabota na Zapad’, a svodnicheskata profesia-kato neobhodima infrastrukturna rolia).
An influential factor for the transnationalization of the Bulgarian sex industry must have been the expansion of social networks through migratory flows across Europe after the fall of communism. The first major migration wave was between the end of 1989 and 1991. Since then until 2002 there has been a steady increase in the number of Bulgarian immigrants, with a preference for Germany and the Mediterranean countries\textsuperscript{11}, which continues to prevail (IOM, 2008). In 2001 the Schengen visa requirements were lifted, although the Bulgarians could stay only for 90 consecutive days without a visa, and thus the years 2001 and 2002 mark the highest number of non-returned Bulgarians (\textit{ibid}). On the one hand, since that period it has become more common for Bulgarians, like other Eastern Europeans, to move to a Western European country such as Italy, and work (regularly or not) for a short period of time, followed by a brief return home, and a repetition of the cycle (Reyneri, 2004a). On the other hand, the already existent Bulgarian migrant communities have increased the potentiality of the social capital of those planning on working in another country. Certainly, one of the most significant transformations has to do with the entrance of Bulgaria in the European Union as of 2007, which allows for the freedom of movement, without restrictions on the period of stay in another EU country. In the face of such developments, it has been observed that in the most recent years, women who get involved in the sex industry come from various social backgrounds (i.e. not necessarily poorly educated and from abusive families, and often without prior experience); approximately 12-13\% are said to hold a graduate degree, and there is also a growing number of students (CSD, 2007). Given that through sex work in Western Europe women could obtain 15-20 000 Euro annual incomes, while the average Bulgarian annual salary is equivalent to 2000 Euro (\textit{ibid}), the temptations for sex work abroad become rather understandable. In such a context, an estimated 50\% of the Bulgarian sex workers have worked in another EU country, and often in more than two (TAMPEP, 2009a). Since 2007 there has been an increase in the movement of Bulgarian and Romanian sex workers; yet, a parallel trend is that of returning to Bulgaria

\textsuperscript{11} The latter refer to Spain, Italy and Greece. According to an Italian report (Caritas, 2009), by the end of 2008 there were 40 880 \textit{declared} (i.e. registered by the \textit{Questura}) Bulgarian citizens, of whom over 60\% were women.
after having worked in a foreign sex industry, given the temporary aspect of sex work (i.e. making a lot of money in a short period of time), the more restrictive measures in many Western European countries (ex. UK and Italy), and the flourishing of the indoor sector in Bulgaria. According to another TAMPEP (2009b) report the top five destination states for the Bulgarian sex workers are France, Greece, Italy, Belgium and Spain. The preference for Greece, Italy and Spain mirrors the overall Bulgarian emigration flows, and also justifies the decision of TAMPEP to place Bulgaria in the same group with them (i.e. the ‘South region’) due to the suggested geographical vicinity, existing cross border migratory flows, and most importantly the significance of the informal sector, which is most developed in precisely these countries. The same report points out that the proportion of the Bulgarian sex workers is one of the highest in Italy: together with Romanian sex workers, the Bulgarian women there comprise 24% of the total population of migrant sex workers (which as of 2008 was approximately 90% of the entire Italian sex industry); moreover, out of twenty-eight nationalities represented in the Italian sex industry, the sex workers coming from Bulgaria hold the fourth place, after women from Romania, Nigeria and Albania. This means that even in absolute terms, the number of the Bulgarian sex workers in Italy is very significant, especially when keeping into consideration the fact that the population of Bulgaria is more than three times smaller than that of Romania for instance. Inspired by the examined statistics, my research concerning the Bulgarian sex workers abroad is focused primarily on those who have worked or still do so in Italy.

4.3.2. Particularities of the Italian context

Contrary to the general perceptions, Reyneri (2004b) explains that in the last decade or so many of the immigrants in Italy are educated and have an urban origin. As of 2001, almost 14% of the Eastern European immigrants had graduate degrees (Blangiardo, 2002 cited in Reyneri, 2004b). Nevertheless, even if well-educated, most of the immigrants tend to work in construction, manufacturing, agriculture, domestic work and in other service sectors (Reyneri, 2004a). They are said to regard work (regular or not) as instrumental, that is to say as a means for earning as much as possible in the least possible time, regardless of the downgrading degree (ex. social status in Italy is often
much lower than that in the country of origin). As previously mentioned, almost 90% of the Italian sex industry is comprised of migrant workers, the majority of whom are women. This not only confirms the importance of ethnic networks and established migratory links, but also leads one to propose that domestic and sex work could be attractive to migrant women as they are easily obtainable jobs even without permits (Ayres & Barber, 2006), in addition to being relatively well-paid compared to the corresponding salaries in many countries of origin. Interestingly, it has also been observed that there is a growing number of women entering Italy as students, and later remaining in the country as workers (ibid).

Within the Italian political system, the main reference to prostitution is in terms of the so called Merlin law (n.75 of 1958), which proclaims the “abolition of the regulation of prostitution and the fight against exploitation of the prostitution of others” (Campani, Chiappelli, Cabral, & Manetti, 2006). As such, the law criminalizes the solicitors and those who practice prostitution in brothels, while it allows for prostitution in private places (Danna, 2004). In a Skype interview with Pia Covre, director of the Comitato per i diritti civili delle prostitute12, I was told that the extent to which the law (which has not been amended for over 50 years) is taken into consideration varies greatly (even with phases of public toleration) depending on the political party in power (Miteva, field notes, July 8, 2010a). Since 2008 the CDCP has observed an intensification of the repressive measures against those involved in the sex industry. The current ‘reduction phase’ takes the form of constant street patrolling and arrests in public places (ibid). Accordingly, it has been noted that explicit intolerance simply leads to a dislocation of the sex workers into apartments, hotels and night clubs (Chiappelli & Ilundi, 2006). Since more than 70% of the repressive actions are conducted at the municipal level (TAMPEP, 2009b), the most negative effects are for migrant sex workers on the streets and in the brothels; the third-country nationals are often imprisoned and could be deported, while

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12 The CDCP (Committee for the civil rights of the prostitutes) has its headquarters in the Northern region of Friuli, yet it is one of the most influential NGOs concerned with the sex worker’s rights, and consequently has contact and exchange of information with numerous NGOs active in other regions, including Magliana 80, Tampep Onlus and, Progetto Artemide.
the EU citizens are given fines, which they tend to disregard, yet are driven more underground because of them (Miteva, field notes, July 8, 2010a). In the interview with Pia Covre I was also informed that many Bulgarian and Romanian sex workers have moved to private venues (where they tend to stay on a temporary basis) or have returned to their home countries; in fact, it was suggested to me that it would be easier to contact Bulgarian sex workers with an Italian experience back in Bulgaria (after having returned) rather than in Italy. Based on the CDCP’s information database, most of the presently active Bulgarian sex workers across Italy are to be found in Naples, Rome and Bologna \textit{(ibid)}. The CDCP’s observations regarding the reduction phase are consistent with the data reported by TAMPEP (2009a), namely that there has been a significant increase in Italian indoor prostitution, escort agencies and internet advertisements, and that there are now rarely Bulgarian sex workers on the streets across Italy.

\subsection*{4.3.3. Analysis}

The substantial presence of Bulgarian sex workers in Italy could be seen in parallel to the general migratory flows to the Mediterranean country. From a systems perspective, migration from Bulgaria to Italy could be attributed to the geographic vicinity (through Greece), the significance of the informal sector in both countries, and an arguable low ‘cultural distance’ (explained later in this chapter). The focus on networks illuminates the existence of a process whereby established migration flows influence the development of criminal links. The initial Bulgarian criminal networks must have been rendered possible through the Bulgarian ‘recidivists’ who comprised the majority of the first-wave emigrants from Bulgaria immediately after the fall of the regime (CSD, 2007). With the steady flows of numerous other Bulgarians, these seem to have been strengthened, and enriched as a result of the interconnection between the Bulgarian and the Italian criminal organizations (CSD, 2010a). In turn, the influence of the criminal organizations could have enabled the illegal transportation (until 2001) of willing or forced sex workers, and more importantly for the recent years—the placement in the industry along with the provision of clients whose desires match the characteristics of the available women. Indeed, as predicted by the dual labour market paradigm, the demand for labour exerts significant power: despite the ongoing reduction phase, women are continually being
(self) supplied (even if on a short-term basis followed by a return), which translates into
the proliferation of the indoor prostitution, instead of the elimination of the industry as a
whole. Moreover, there is confirmation for the explicit demand for foreign sex workers
(Nigerian and Eastern European women) in Italy (Orsini-Jones & Gattullo, 2000).
Additionally, in accordance with the overall ethnic segregation of the Italian labour
market, the sex industry is also segmented into ethnic niches, each managed by the
respective entrepreneur, although sometimes women from different Eastern European
countries could be under the exclusive administration of only one ethnic organization,
depending on the destination city (TAMPEP, 2009b). Hence, an association with an
ethnic (criminal) network might constrain the independence of the affiliated sex workers,
but it could also translate into benefits such as work in the more elite places, as in the
case of Bulgarians, most of who are to be found in the Italian clubs instead of on the
streets. Meanwhile, the ethnic distributions are undoubtedly influenced by the cultural
understandings of the relations between the places of origin and social status.

The global pattern of engaging in sex work as a form of part-time or
supplementary job or during studies (CSD, 2007; Roberts, Bergström & LaRooy, 2007)
is also representative of some Bulgarian sex workers in Italy (confirmed by case study 3).
Given the reported increase in the number of sex workers with completed post-secondary
education, it is possible to challenge the validity of the dual labour market hypothesis that
the informal sector (in this case the sex industry) attracts only people who lack sufficient
skills or knowledge to get a ‘better’ job. As in the case of sex workers participating in the
Bulgarian sex trade, those involved in the Italian market are becoming increasingly
enabled by means of the global telecommunication technologies to make use of their
human capital, and to accrue other forms of social capital; thus, without the membership
to an ethnic (criminal) network, the women could gain more social and economic control
over their work. The transnationalization of the sex industry enables the sex workers to
enrich their social ties and to seek potential clients not only via the internet, but also as a
result of sex tourism and through the intensifying connectedness between the sex and
entertainment industries; the resulting higher utility of social capital might in turn
enhance the sex workers’ temporary mobilities and settlements. For instance, the
Bulgarian models-sex workers are often hired as escorts not only by powerful Bulgarian businessmen, but also by influential clients abroad (ex. on luxurious Mediterranean cruises); this entails their frequent mobility, and growth of the quality and the number of employment opportunities, translating into higher economic turnover. Transnationalism’s emphasis on temporary mobility is also witnessed by the increased number of independent Bulgarian sex workers who move to Western European countries like Italy to earn ‘good money’ in a short period of time. Approximately 30% of the Bulgarians working in foreign sex industries migrate on a temporary basis, and move back and forth between Bulgaria and the other countries (CSD, 2007). Additionally, students involved in the sex industry change the locations where they offer their services, depending on the program’s schedules and requirements (ex. holidays; internships). Hence, these more recent developments seem to be better grasped by the transnationalism paradigm, in addition to testifying for the growing role of human agency in terms of migrations and sexual services.

4.4. Links between Bulgaria and Italy

From the examined dynamics, we could deduce that the Italian sex industry attracts the Bulgarian women for a number of reasons. The more recent developments show that some migrate with the intention of settlement or in order to study, and only subsequently do they become sex workers. This route to prostitution is thus preceded by the choice of the destination area, which is the result of a decision-making process similar to that of other Bulgarians about to migrate, many of whom have had a preference for the Mediterranean countries like Italy since the 1990s (ex. due to the large informal sector). On the hand, the most common route to the Italian sex industry until 2001-2002 seems to have been through the Bulgarian and international criminal networks. That is to say, women who had already been part of the sex industry in Bulgaria were rotated, and given the strong criminal connections in Italy, the sex trade incorporated many Italian cities such as Bologna, Rome and Naples. With the lifting of the Schengen visa requirements, and most significantly after Bulgaria joined the EU, the duties of the criminal organizers have been limited to the placement in the sex industry sector (or the specific venue in mind), the provision of clients (ex. in the case of escorts), and often the granting of
accommodation. Yet, given the moulding of various social, political and economic structures by the processes of globalization, there is a growing number of women who become involved in the Italian sex industry drawing upon their own social capital. Certainly some Bulgarian sex workers could rely on friends or relatives in Italy, who could provide them with accommodation, information, and could even assist them in finding clients. Others might rely on relations with Italians whom they have met in Bulgaria (ex. models). The historical-institutional paradigm illuminates how the intensifying globalization, along with the significance of the accession to the EU have rendered Bulgaria more open to foreign investments, among which many come from Italy. Hence, Bulgarian sex workers are enabled to form contacts with the Bulgarian-based Italian entrepreneurs, and also with the numerous Italian (sex) tourists. In fact, in my observations of various strip clubs in Sofia there appears to be a significant Italian audience.

Certainly, the presence of Italian businessmen and tourists could be beneficial not only to practicing sex workers, but to other Bulgarian women as well. My field research has shown that there are women who decide to move to a Western European country with the intention of working in the sex industry for a short period of time, which could be sufficient for the procurement of a substantial sum of money (Miteva, field notes, July 3, 2010); similarly, there might be women without experience in sex work, whose choice for the Italian sex industry becomes facilitated via the established social ties with Italian entrepreneurs and tourists. Moreover, the media representations of Italy seem to stimulate the perception of the Bulgarian and Italian cultures being similar, based on reports about mafia gangs, instable governments or corrupt state officials, along with highlights from the fashion and modeling industries, whose members tend to be endowed with high social status in both countries. Additionally, the prevalence of scarcely dressed, model-looking women in a variety of Italian and Bulgarian TV shows (even those unrelated to sexual

13 The interviewee was the mother of a Bulgarian unmarried woman who had migrated to the Netherlands to work for a short period of time in order to make fast money necessary for the support of her child.
issues *per se*) testifies not simply for the global ‘striptease culture’, but also for a (patriarchal) overemphasis on, and eroticization of the female body. Campani (2007) explains that the Italian magazines and newspapers make use of every occasion to publish naked or half-naked women on their covers, and often these are images of foreign prostitutes. Understandably then, Trappolin (2005) observes that Italian men see migrant women as having a less civilized sexuality than the emancipated Italian women, which to a certain extent could serve as a trigger for further exoticization of the former, and thereby a justification of the demand for their sexual services. My aim here is not to discuss the implied moral issues, but rather to point out that the cultural norms in Italy could enable the Bulgarian women to find more easily a body-related work there, especially if they are perceived as beautiful or sexy. Hence, in addition to confirmed migrant and criminal links between Bulgaria and Italy, and the importance of the informal sector in both countries, I would like to highlight the suggested low ‘cultural distance’ based on the similarity of cultural norms and media-constructed perceptions; in any case, it must be combinations of these links that contribute to the high concentration of Bulgarian sex workers in Italy.

**Conclusion**

Despite the predominant emphasis on the structural constraints of women who enter the sex industry, it appears that these are by no means the only influential factors. However, it could be suggested that they were more powerful during the initial stages of development of the Bulgarian sex trade. Given the rise of unemployment in post-communist Bulgaria, women seem to have been disproportionally affected by the economic crisis, constraining their access to jobs other than the ones pertaining to the sex industry. Moreover, the gradual infiltration of the Bulgarian criminal organizations within diverse sectors of the economy (especially the sex and entertainment industries), and their proliferation across the country and internationally, must have played a significant role for the drastic growth of the number of Bulgarian sex workers at home and abroad. Many ___________

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14 Italian examples: *Striscia la notizia, Veline, Pupa e secchione*; Bulgarian examples: *Gozpodari na efira* (modeled according to the Italian *Striscia la notizia*), *Shouto na Slavi; Shouto na Azis*;
of them were rotated according to the criminal linkages, and in such a way they were often rendered (unwillingly) mobile, thereby limiting their agency. Even in the present, freer context self-employed sex workers might come to depend on organizers and on members of criminal organizations. Just as “established migrant movements create beaten paths” which are easier to follow (Stahl, 1993 cited in Castles & Miller, 2009, p. 29) similarly involvement in and functioning within the sex industry is easier when taking the existing prostitution routes, and interacting with the associated participants.

Indeed, this points to the dual nature of social networks: on one hand they create dependencies (which could be constraining), but on the other hand they could translate into social capital for the workers. For instance, by maintaining social ties with certain ethnic (migrant) or criminal networks, women could be enabled to become part of the invisible indoor prostitution scene, which could be seen as tempting due to the substantial economic resources associated with it. Not only models, but also regular escorts could be hired from their managers by different foreign entrepreneurs, thus resembling the numerous businessmen and officials moving between their international headquarters. Temporary mobility is becoming more common in a globalizing world, and is certainly rendered easier for Bulgarians since the accession to the European Union; this macro-factor in turn stimulates the emerging short-term aspect of sex work, practiced by an increasing number of students and (self-employed) escorts. The transnationalization of the sex industry is also evident in the intensification of sex tourism and the reliance on advanced telecommunication technologies; these not only contribute to a higher social capital, but also allow women to make more use of their human capital (ex. setting up their own web pages).

Finally, we should not underestimate the influence of the global sexualization process. If on the one hand women’s professional development in post-communist Bulgaria was constrained by unemployment and resurfacing patriarchal norms, their sexual self-expression was enabled as a result of the structuration forces during the transition period. In fact, the media-sustained cultural constructions in both Bulgaria and Italy seem to have evolved to such an extent, that the emphasis on the female (naked)
body and physical attractiveness (often achieved by means of plastic surgeries) contributes to the eroticization and even the high social status of women who might (and sometimes are known to) be involved in the sex industry.
5. Insights into a few personal goals and experiences

Introduction

This chapter offers an examination of four case studies, based on the experiences of Bulgarian sex workers in Bulgaria and in Italy. These are by no means representative of all the Bulgarian sex workers, given the diverse personal characteristics, movements, and sexual services. Moreover, none of the interviewees have worked outdoors, which could explain the higher level of implied independence among these women and the lower level of reported stigmatization. Nevertheless, the case studies offer valuable information regarding the various micro-factors, which seem to contribute to the initiation and continuation of sex work, and to the preceding or subsequent decision to migrate. These are, of course, affected by the general socio-economic context; yet, after having analyzed some of the enabling and constraining factors at the macro- and meso-levels, my focus here is on the individual level. That is to say, the aim is to put into the equation certain personal characteristics such as the women’s goals and attitudes in order to examine the extent to which these have influenced their agency within the Bulgarian or Italian systems.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, two of the interviews were incorporated into a participant observation. My initial interaction with Anna (case study 1) took place in a bar owned by an acquaintance who presented me as someone interested in her work and life story; the mediator was present during most of the time, which translated into a friendly conversation, as part of which I not only posed questions, but participated in a “two-way exchange of intimate details” (Sanders, 2006, p.462) in order

15 This is the only interaction when my researcher status was not explicitly stated, which renders the case more susceptible to ethical concerns; nevertheless, the interviewee could have withdrawn from the conversation at any time, yet dominated it, was eager to disclose personal information, and without prompting invited me observe her at work.
to gain inside information. The subsequent interaction took place at the strip club where 
she worked, as I observed her performance\(^\text{16}\) and later had a brief dialogue commenting 
on the venue and the other workers. On the other hand, my conversation with Veronica 
(case study 2) took place inside a private room in the apartment-brothel where she sold 
sexual services. Once again I was introduced by my acquaintance, but in contrast to her 
co-workers\(^\text{17}\) she was aware of my researcher status. Nevertheless, given my age and 
gender, along with the surroundings, I was not in the power, neither did I want (given the 
hope for more truthful information as part of a friendly conversation, and a fear of 
withdrawal of the subject), to ask for clarifications or further details.

Conversely, the interviews with Elena (case study 3) and Nadya (case study 4) did 
not take place as part of participant observation, although these were also unstructured 
given the desire to obtain non-influenced narratives and to narrow down the power 
distance between subjects and researcher. I contacted Nadya through a journalist who had 
already interviewed her, but despite her willingness (if not desire) to share information 
with a researcher, she refused to be recorded out of fear for damaging her reputation. 
Additionally, she explained in advance that she preferred to disclose the information 
which she found relevant without being asked specific questions; thus the conversation 
(or rather monologue) took place in a remote café, where our interaction was not visibly 
distinguishable from other ones, as I could only listen attentively without reliance on 
recording materials. Similarly to the interactions with Anna and Veronica, the conditions 
characterizing the one with Nadya implied that I could record data only in the form of 
field notes immediately after the interviews, which means that some of the data might 
have been lost or unintentionally altered (ex. the exact wording of quotes, although the 
ones provided are the only ones I was rather certain about). On the other hand, the 
interview with Elena was conducted over the internet (Skype), in private, which allowed

\(^{16}\) My acquaintance and I were prompted to pay for a lap dance.

\(^{17}\) Consistent with the role-playing associated with participant observation, in front of the guard and the 
other sex workers (in the living room where they all gathered in between work) I had to act as if I were 
about to pay for a sexual service together with my acquaintance.
me to refer to an aide-mèmoire (i.e. featuring key issues to be covered), and to instantly write down important phrases and details. As the interviewee was someone who I knew personally, the conversation was indeed a friendly one, which on the one hand enabled me to ask for clarifications, but on the other hand might have led Elena to undermine certain aspects of her work out of fear that those would affect our relationship. As proposed by Flick (2006) in the analysis of the narrative interviews all of the non-narrative content must be eliminated in order to provide a purified sequence and description of events, necessary for understanding the subjects’ experiences. Accordingly, I have omitted non-relevant information from all four narratives (ex. Anna started the conversation by talking about her new haircut), yet have incorporated certain immediate observations (of the settings and the interactions) into the descriptions of the case studies, followed by the appropriate micro-analyses (i.e. testing of the prior propositions and resulting explanations).

5.1. The case of Anna

5.1.1. Description

Twenty-two year old Anna works in one of the most famous strip clubs in Sofia. She was born in a city in Eastern Bulgaria and was raised in a relatively poor neighbourhood. She claims that she has always been an independent and ambitious person. As she was determined to get a ‘better life’ for herself, already in 11th grade she started dating a successful businessman in her city of origin. The relationship however did not work out, but by the time of her graduation she had come across job offers in the sex industry. “I really enjoy getting men aroused, I love sex, I feel great in my body, so I thought—why not?” declared Anna during her initial interaction with me. Thus, she asked one of her high school friends who used to work on a commission for a brothel to introduce her to

18 Since some of the original narrative phrases were difficult to retrieve and were thus recorded in the field notes by using suggestive words (ex. apparently) triggered by the personal interactions with the women, there is a certain degree of interpretation in the descriptions.

19 My translation from Bulgarian: “Mnogo se kefia da vuzbujdam mujete, obicham sexa, chuvstvam se strahotno v tialoto si i si vikam mi shto pa ne?” (Miteva, field notes, July 8, 2010b).
the sex trade business. After a couple months of work there, she had managed to form her own clientele. Apparently, her regular customers were so happy with her services that one of them gave her as a present a ‘boob job’. This seems to have steered her career in another direction, namely stripping. After impatiently showing her breasts to me she exclaimed that her body was too sexy to be hidden from the public eyes. This is why she moved from the brothel to a strip club in the same city where she worked for another year. When she had enough economic resources and had met the right person (although she was quite ambiguous as to who that was and how he/she helped her) she moved to Sofia and started work right away. Anna has been working in the same strip club for the last two years (i.e. in total four years since she had entered the sex industry), and she maintains that she is satisfied with herself. Anna prefers working in a strip club than in a brothel, because she does not have to ‘sweat in bed’; she enjoys watching the customers getting aroused simply from the sight of her naked body and dance moves. She also added that even during her free time she enjoys dancing provocatively in night clubs, and has sometimes accepted certain sexual offers while off duty.

During our conversation I was invited to watch her at work in the strip club in Sofia. There were approximately 25 sex workers, of whom Anna was one of the most active dancers on stage, while many of her colleagues seemed in a hurry to switch with someone else. Although some women got tips while dancing on the poles, most of them appeared to aim for the big groups of customers sitting on the tables, where they could get much more money for a couple of private lap dances\(^ {20} \). After each performance they would go to another potential client with the exception of those surrounding a table of three men who were constantly tipping the women without even getting lap dances. In fact, Anna later confirmed that there were many clients who would simply pay for the beautiful company while carrying out their business meetings. She was quite excited to share with me that working in that club (as it is one of the most famous ones) had allowed her to meet many foreigners, and that the Italians tended to pick her as a companion over

\[^{20}\text{The duration of the lap dance was for a maximum of 2-3 minutes, for a minimum amount of 20 Lev (10 Euro).}\]
many of her colleagues. Apparently, she already had a regular Italian customer through whom she might be able to try her luck in Italy. If that case, she would start working in Calabria (Southern Italy), but as she had heard that it was a poor region, she would try to move to Rome.

5.1.2. Analysis

As proposed in the previous chapter, it might be the case that when it comes to intra-national movements, these are to a large extent carried out by individuals who are rather financially unstable. The case of Anna confirms such a hypothesis, given her upbringing in a poor household and neighbourhood. As a result, it is understandable that her primary goal was to get a better life, which implies upward economic and social mobility. It appears (or at least she was convinced) that she lacked sufficient skills and education, necessary for the enhancement of her lifestyle by means of a career, and therefore her initial bet was on a relationship with a successful businessman. Given the unequal distribution of resources, both nationally and globally, Anna might have been able to achieve her goal differently, but her set of options was constrained by the existing socio-political system. Nevertheless, since agency has been operationalized as the ‘capability’ of performing (Giddens, 1984), it is important to emphasize that Anna was not a passive agent. Not only did she see her relationship as instrumental for an eventual success, but after that attempt failed, she was the one to seek another type of a social relation, which proved to be beneficial for her inclusion in the sex industry. It is hard to tell whether Anna actually enjoys getting men aroused and having sex to the extent that she claimed. However, even if she were lying or exaggerating, by doing so she was able to ‘elaborate discursively’ about the reasons behind her actions, thus proving to be a ‘purposive’ agent as defined by Giddens (1984). Once she became a member of the brothel network her social capital increased, given the usefulness of the contacts that she formed at work. In fact, one of her social resources seems to have been materialized in the form of a breast augmentation (although she might have lied about it being a gift, meaning she could have been the one who paid for it). This, on the other hand, enhanced her appearance, enabling her to enter a more prestigious sector of the sex industry. Certainly, the physical adjustment might have been motivated primarily by a need for boosting her self-esteem.
For instance, showing her breasts to me in the middle of the conversation suggests a degree of insecurity. The fact that Anna emphasized a number of times how much she liked being watched, along with admitting that she always wore intense make-up, implies the need for a constant reassurance of her sexiness. That is to say, within a context where the beautiful (naked) feminine body is highly valued, she might have been motivated to obtain a higher social status in order to have the means to sustain a beautiful image and to be praised for it. Whether or not her central objective was the latter or simply a better life, it becomes visible that her actions and (social) benefits were steps towards success. Accordingly, after securing the necessary physical and social resources she was ready for the next step, namely migration to Sofia. Anna’s vagueness concerning the key link between her hometown and the capital city might have been due to the fear of exposing members of criminal organizations (quite prominent in both cities). In any case, it is evident that the opportunity to move to Sofia was facilitated by a social network; on the other hand, despite the stable demand for sexual services in the capital, it appears that in the case of Anna, human agency should be given emphasis over the contextual factors.

What I found interesting was that Anna did not talk much about money. When she explained to me that most of her colleagues strived to get to the big tables in the club in order to get more tips, her tone of voice and facial expressions suggested a degree of disapproval. This, along with the evidence that she enjoyed being the center of attention and being perceived as seductive (i.e. through provocative dancing and stripping) implies that economic resources might not have been as significant as the desire for a higher social status. Even if she had accepted sexual offers while off duty it is very likely that she had done so only with successful people, who might have been the means for achieving her goal. Certainly, the regular Italian customer at the strip club appears to be yet another case of Anna’s steps to success. Through him she would be able to migrate to Calabria, and most likely he would also facilitate (secure) her entrance in the sex industry there. However, she already admits that she would seek further development (moving to Rome), once she exhausts the usefulness of her Calabrian resources.
5.2. The case of Veronica

5.2.1. Description

It took a series of well-defined signs and behaviours in order to get inside the apartment-brothel where Veronica worked. It was in a building in the very center of Sofia that I had passed numerous times without the slightest clue that it was a sex trade venue. All the buzzers had labels with common family names; my acquaintance and I found the appropriate one and pressed it four times. Afterwards we were let in the lobby from where the ‘guard’ was called. By the time we had reached the apartment door, the latter was already outside. He checked us for weapons and drugs and then allowed us to get into the living room.

Veronica explained to me that she was working with two other women, and together they had decided to employ someone who would provide them with protection and additional clients. Accordingly, she referred to the guard not as a pimp, but as ‘the dude’. Veronica then said that he got approximately 40% commission for each client that he found, but for the nightly guarding he got a smaller percentage depending on the profits of all three women. Throughout the conversation she avoided any references to school or adolescence, but she did talk about her love life. Given that I accidentally witnessed a phone conversation with her current boyfriend, she got into details about that relationship in particular. She said that the thing she ‘hated’ most about the sex industry was that she constantly had to lie about her work and had to maintain a fake identity in front of the people that she most cared about. Years back, she had told the truth to her fiancé, which then led to a separation. For that reason, she had been lying to her current boyfriend, with whom she had been in a serious relationship for more than two years. Since he was a long-distance driver, she knew that he could not check up on her, so she had told him that she was a waitress in a night club. In fact, after moving to Sofia she had worked as a waitress (yet the income was not enough), so one of her previous colleagues was instructed to lie for her, in case someone were to check the nightclub. During the boyfriend’s few days off, she would also stay at home, since she considered herself to be self-employed and had no quota. Veronica said that the hardest part was in terms of the seasonal work, because her boyfriend would question the sources of income, which
allowed her to spend more than a month at the Black Sea. ‘Fortunately’ whenever she went to the Greek border to work for some extra money, she could say that she was visiting her family (as the city of origin is in that region).

At the time of the conversation Veronica was 25 years old and she had been a sex worker since the age of 17. She first started in her hometown and was providing occasional sexual services while working as a waitress. After moving to Sofia she worked in a nightclub only temporarily as her plan was to get into the sex industry. Initially she began as a stripper, but said that she disliked the idea of having to be a ‘brownnoser’ and always to smile. Later, she got into contact with a friend from her hometown and decided to set up a private brothel together. She explained that working in the brothel was easier for her, because she had more control (ex. in terms of availability), and since the majority of her clients were ‘high’ or drunk, they would come and leave quite quickly. The best customers were those who “paid 100lv\(^{21}\) without even getting it erect\(^{22}\); she also did not mind the ones who would ask for a quick fellatio and would not even touch her. Without me posing the question, Veronica claimed that the key factor for her was most certainly money; “You close your eyes and keep on going [because of it].”\(^{23}\) Veronica also shared with me that she had never reached orgasm with neither of her customers, but with her private partners, and especially the current boyfriend, she always had pleasurable experiences. Finally, she added that she would like to go abroad for a short period of time in order to make a lot of money, and thus to be able to quit before her boyfriend found out. Nevertheless, she felt that she did not have the courage, because she did not speak any foreign languages, had no acquaintances abroad, and most importantly could not leave her child behind.\(^{24}\)

\(^{21}\) This was the tariff for 1 hour of ‘traditional’ sexual services with condom (approx.50Euro).

\(^{22}\) My translation: “...tia deto si plashtat po 100lv bez dori da im stane” (Miteva, field notes, July13, 2010).

\(^{23}\) My translation: “Zatvariash si ochite i davash napravo” (ibid.)

\(^{24}\) That was the only time when she mentioned the child and gave no further explanations.
5.2.2. Analysis

Veronica’s case seems to be closer to the stereotypical image of the modern sex worker. Both her entrance in the sex industry, her settlement in Sofia and her temporary mobilities (to the resorts and the border area) appear to be induced by an economic necessity. When she first started selling sex for money, it seems to have been a strategy to supplement the income that she earned as a waitress. Given her emphasis on employment since adolescence, the avoidance of details pertaining to that period of time, and the mentioning of the child, along with the limited vocabulary used throughout the conversation it is probable that Veronica did not finish high school; even if this were not the case, it is quite evident how her poor background, lack of social support (she refused to talk about friends and relatives), and limited education must have constrained her development. Nevertheless, on a number of occasions she referred to her goals in terms of economic capital, and given such a ‘discursive elaboration’, we should see her as an agent who has made a series of rational choices in the presence of restricted opportunities. It remains unclear whether Veronica herself sought the appropriate connections or clients in her hometown, but it is rather reasonable to suggest that the high demand for sexual services in the border area (there is a stable flow of tourists and professional drivers between Bulgaria and Greece) must have been influential for her initial decision to offer such services. She explicitly stated that her migration to Sofia was with the intention to work in the sex industry (regardless of her temporary job as a waitress); this implies her awareness of the demand, and the perception (or knowledge) of a higher potential income in the capital’s sex industry. Another significant factor for the migration might have been the break up with the fiancé, and the fear of (or existent) stigmatization in her hometown. The case of Veronica could largely be interpreted from a cost and benefit perspective, highlighting the significant (claimed) degree of human agency involved in the resulting choices. This appears to be plausible not only for the settlement in Sofia, but also for her actions pertaining to the sex-work realm. Thus, although stripping might be perceived as easier work, the cost of pretending to smile and to enjoy the company of the clients was unbearable for Veronica. From our interaction I got the impression that having sexual intercourse without an existing emotional
connection was not at all something appealing to her; indeed, she admitted that the best customers were those who did not demand anything else except for getting an orgasm (i.e. no ‘emotional labour’ in the words of Hochschild, 2003). Yet despite the higher occurrences of sexual intercourse in the brothel in comparison to the strip club, the benefit of having a strictly commercial transaction, and having more control over her body, behaviour and availability must have been perceived as more valuable to Veronica. Consistent with the trend of an increasing number of self-employed workers, also Veronica thinks of herself as such, based on her claims concerning the management of the brothel and the function of the guard. Certainly, the extent to which she emphasized her independence might have been exaggerated. For instance, the only occasion when she mentioned a useful social relation was when she explained the establishment of the brothel together with a friend from her hometown. Yet, when it comes to her work in the border area and especially in the resorts where the members of the criminal organizations are highly active, it is dubious whether Veronica remains self-employed. Finally, Veronica’s wish to quit her work could also be seen in terms of costs and benefits. As explained, her main goal thus far had been to secure for herself substantial economic capital; nevertheless, her involvement in the sex industry has become more costly as a result of her serious relationship. That is to say, for the sake of preventing further emotional distress due to the incompatibility of her ‘two identities’, and most importantly in order to avoid another possible separation, she has started to think about quitting. The wish to make a lot of money in another country is quite consistent with the emerging understanding of sex work as a highly profitable job in the West, as suggested in the CSD report (2007). Nevertheless, it is evident how the lack of human and social capital (i.e. language skills and acquaintances), in addition to household factors (i.e. the boyfriend and the mentioned child) could constrain both migration and exiting from the sex industry. Although Veronica has not been able to become an international sex worker, she remains a ‘transnational’ one, in the sense that she does profit from temporary mobilities on a national scale, most likely facilitated by undeclared social networks.
5.3. The case of Elena

5.3.1. Description

Immediately after her high school graduation in Sofia, the presently 23 year old Elena moved to Padova in order to do her Bachelor degree there\(^{25}\). She chose that Italian city because of the university, regardless of the fact that she did not know anybody there. Nevertheless, she was quick to form friendships with international students and Italians. By the end of the first semester Elena moved from the student residence into an apartment with two of her new friends. She explains that like all other first-year international students they partied almost every night. Most of the time the three Eastern European women went to a relatively luxurious nightclub where the employees soon got to know them. The first time that she received a sexual offer was while dancing there; “He asked me how much I charged per hour”? Elena explains that at first she thought that it was a joke, but after a number of other similar offers she began to understand the situation: “They see three ‘women from the East’ [said in Italian in order to emphasize the pejorative connotation] dancing in sexy clothing and having fun, and they think right away that they could have them for a certain amount of money.”\(^{27}\) Although she kept on declining the sexual offers, she did accept to become a professional dancer at the venue. It was a part-time job that did not involve anything other than dancing in sexy clothing. Elena admits that she has always dressed extravagantly, but believes that probably in Sofia it was more normal, whereas in Padova she really grabbed the attention of people. She never felt offended by any sexual remarks, but rather found them entertaining. The first time that she had sex for money was at a party for the end of the second semester: “I really liked the guy. We had been flirting for over a week...I was quite drunk that night

\(^{25}\) She already knew Italian.

\(^{26}\) My translation: “Popita me kolko vzimam na chas” (Miteva, field notes, September 5, 2010).

\(^{27}\) My translation: “Vijdat tri ‘donne dell’Est’ da tancuvat v sexy drehi i da se zabavljat...i vednaga si misliat che mogat da gi imat za niakvasi suma pari.” (ibid.).
and I accepted his offer without hesitation. I just felt like experimenting!” Already after the first time, however, Elena realized that she did not like the idea of being paid for sex. Nevertheless, she arranged for herself to get what she calls ‘princess treatments’ for the sexual services that she provided; hence, she receives material goods such as fancy sun glasses, shoes, clothes and cosmetics, while one of her regulars pays her rent. From our conversation it did not seem that Elena defines herself as a sex worker; rather, she perceives herself to be a normal young woman, who enjoys having open and diverse sexual relationships. Indeed, she claims to be always herself, in the sense that she does not put on a fake identity in front of her clients. In reality, she does not refer to them as clients; thus, she concludes that “it’s like having a couple of boyfriends simultaneously.”

5.3.2. Analysis

Given the socio-political situation of Bulgaria in relation to the European Union, in the recent years it has become more common for Bulgarian citizens to travel and to study abroad. Elena is precisely one of those people who decided to profit from such an opportunity. Her migration to Padova was with the intention to study, and not necessarily to settle down or work in Italy. Since she goes back to Bulgaria during every university break and holiday, this further testifies for the temporary aspect of her mobilities, characteristic of the globalizing world. On the other hand, the decision to move to Padova seems to have produced ‘unintended consequences’, as defined by Giddens (1984). This is not however to say that she did not have the capability to act differently. Out of all the sex workers with whom I have had the opportunity to interact, Elena appears to be the one who most of all endorses the ‘recreational sexual ethic’ (Bernstein, 2007b). Hence, her involvement in the sex trade is not so much instrumental, as it is a means in itself, namely entertainment. Certainly, her work enables her to accrue economic resources,

28 My translation: “Mnogo mu se kefeh na picha. Biahme flirtuvali poveche ot sedmica...Az chestno kazano biah dosta piana taia vecher i prieh ofertata bez vuobshte da se zamislia. Be, prosto iskah da experimentiram!” (ibid.).

29 My translation: “Be, vse edno imash niakolko gadjeta po edno i sushto vreme” (ibid.).
which in turn must stimulate her to remain involved in the sex industry. Additionally, the fact that she does not receive a fixed amount of money for her services should not undermine the commercial aspect of the sexual activities. As mentioned in chapter 1, sex workers might also be paid with drugs or with material goods, the latter being the case of Elena. Her attitude towards sex, along with the method of payment could be interpreted as the intersection between the processes of cultural sexualization and of commodification, along with consumerism. The liberal sexual norms implied by the way Elena speaks, behaves and dresses have most likely been influenced by the former process, which in turn could have enabled the (or an easier) acceptance of the sexual offers; the latter process on the other hand, might have encouraged the blurring of the boundaries between the private and the commercial sphere, thereby making her feel like a girlfriend getting ‘princess treatments’ rather than like a worker who should be paid. Undoubtedly, one should not underestimate the sexual offers, testifying both for the demand of (foreign) sexual services, and for the cultural representations and perceptions of many Eastern European women as prostitutes. It is possible to argue that the latter could have functioned as a self-fulfilling prophecy, but the importance here is to emphasize that the characteristics of the structures (i.e. the understandings of normal behaviour in accordance with gender and ethnicity) surrounding Elena, have enabled her to become a dancer in the nightclub, and later to profit from the sexual offers. Although Elena’s social ties (i.e. the lack of such in Italy) have not facilitated her migration, her involvement in the sex trade has most certainly been encouraged by these. That is to say, her inclusion in the club’s network allowed her to accrue social capital, which proved to be useful for obtaining additional economic resources. Once again, however, it must be underlined that it does not appear that the latter have been a major incentive for either of the two jobs; to the contrary, the similarity between both is the recreational and entertaining nature. Moreover, if Elena had a personal goal related to economic capital, most likely she would have been able to choose another job, given that her education and skills (especially the knowledge of Italian) would have provided her with a relatively broad set of employment alternatives.
5.4. The case of Nadya

5.4.1. Description

Nadya was born and raised in Plovdiv. She had not thought about migrating to another place, but decided to follow her boyfriend to Rome. She loved him dearly, and it took her years to be able to come to terms with the fact that he had probably used her from the very beginning. Once in Rome, without enough financial means or sufficient language skills, her boyfriend convinced her to start working in a brothel, managed by a friend of his. Nadya is now quite aware of the criminal networks behind her migration and entrance in the sex industry, whether or not the boyfriend had feelings for her and was himself forced to become an accomplice. Soon after her entrance in the brothel her boyfriend disappeared, and she came to realize that she could not depend on anybody but herself. In a couple of months she managed to establish a relationship with a Greek businessman who transported her to Greece. Nadya explains that he was the way out of the brothel; yet, as she did not want to keep the promises with which she had paid, after getting off the ferry (from Italy to Greece) she escaped from him.

The turbulent 2002 seems a long time ago for Nadya. She is now 30 years old and her appearance implies a relaxed lifestyle. She says that she has agreed to talk to me because she feels that there is a need to break off the various stereotypes concerned with prostitution. She herself had suffered from a moral dilemma. Nadya was raised by well-educated, Christian-Orthodox parents, who had always emphasized the importance of having a good family, and were rather intolerant of the rising divorce rates and extramarital relationships in Bulgaria in the 90’s. Given these circumstances, she was brought up to view prostitution as something immoral. Yet, once she found herself selling sex for money, she felt that she had to rethink her own perceptions. She cannot imagine what her life would have been if she had not become a sex worker. She feels that she was deceived by the boyfriend with whom she migrated to Rome, which in turn made her feel desperate. However, what motivated her to get back on her feet were her parents’ expectations for success. Thus, after escaping from the Greek shore, she did not go back to Bulgaria, but worked (she did not specify the details) until she had enough money to travel to Italy again. Once back there, she settled for about a year in Bari (across the
Ionian Sea). She admits that despite the fact that she could not speak Italian well enough her physical appearance had been quite beneficial to her; consequently, she opted out for a strip club. When she looks back, she believes that probably one of the key moments in her life was when one of the regular customers asked her to accompany him to Milan. This is when the idea of working as an escort first occurred to her.

Nadya went back and forth between the two cities before she had established sufficient connections in Milan in order to permanently settle there five years ago. For some time she managed her own web page featuring photos and details of the services that she offered, but once she enrolled in a university program, she decided to close it down to avoid any possible awkward situations. Nevertheless, by that time she had enough regular clients and contacts who demanded her as an escort. Initially she was more willing to do anything, but with time, depending on the client, she became the one who drew the boundaries. She says that “the more independent you become, the less willing you are to accept certain offers or even to make compromises.” In fact, Nadya maintains that in the last year or so her work has evolved into being a nice and beautiful companion for rich people, rather than providing sexual pleasure. Although she does not mind this particular aspect of her work as an escort (she has even met some ‘nice guys’), she is planning on dedicating herself to her dream job as an interior designer, once she obtains her diploma.

5.4.2. Analysis

It appears that Nadya had very different goals for the initial and for the second set of migration to Italy and subsequent entrance in the sex industry. As she was not planning on migrating, the former could be explained in terms of household dynamics, along with a personal desire to continue her romantic relationship. Instead, after the negative experiences associated with the boyfriend who led her to Rome, we could assume that love was not as significant, thus changing her goal into one inspired by the expectations

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30 My translation: “Kolkoto po-nezavisim stavash, tolkova po-ne ti puka da okazvash razni oferti ili puk da pravish kompromisi.” (Miteva, field notes, October 25, 2010).
for success, probably translating into pursuit of self-fulfillment and economic development. Although the degree of human agency seems to be more evident in the latter case, Nadya should not be defined simply as a victim of trafficking, because despite being deceived, she implied having had the *capability* (i.e. was a rational agent, as defined by Giddens, 1984) to act differently, namely not to follow her boyfriend. Certainly, however, she herself is now able to imagine the power of the criminal networks behind the first migration. Thus from a systems perspective, we notice the value of the existing migration flows and the resulting criminal links, which had facilitated this type of route to Italy and to prostitution. Most likely, the boyfriend had been in contact with his friend in Italy, meaning that Nadya had been unknowingly selected for the fulfillment of the available position in the Roman brothel. This is consistent not only with the mentioned Italian demand for sexual services by Eastern European women, but also with the data that the Plovdiv criminals often export to Italy (CSD, 2007). Physical coercion could be less powerful than persuasion by the object of love, and therefore it becomes evident how the latter had constrained the way that Nadya felt she *should act*.

One of the similarities between Nadya’s various mobilities is the reliance on social ties. After the initial migration, this is also evident in the escape to Greece and in the traveling between Bari and Milan. The return to Italy seems to be an exception; therefore, the decision to do so must have been largely due to a cost-benefit analysis, and with reference to the revised personal goal. Certainly, the significance of the latter and the implications of her ‘reflexivity’ (as defined by Giddens, 1984) must have been influential for all the second stage mobilities (i.e. starting with the escape) and for the corresponding sexual services, yet the usefulness of her physical and social capitals should be underlined. Nadya herself admitted that her physical appearance had facilitated her development: she probably would have found it more difficult to enter the strip club in Bari, and especially to become an escort if she had not had an attractive face and perfect body (according to the media-sustained cultural representations). Yet, as proposed in chapter 2 physical and human resources are hardly useful unless there are social ties, which allow for the profiting from the former. Indeed, this must be the reason why Nadya acknowledges the role of her regular customer as a key one for her entrance in the escort
business, thereby increasing her potential economic capital and the set of opportunities for self-fulfillment. One of the subsequent developments was her enrolment in university, while the setting up of a work-related web page could be said to be another. The latter is not only an evidence of how human capital could enrich one’s social relations and available employment opportunities, but also testifies for the value of the telecommunication technologies. Consistent with the post-industrial tendencies toward ‘liquid love’ (concept borrowed from Bauman, 2003) and commodification of services that used to be obtainable within the household, is not only the reliance on internet and advanced means of transportation for Nadya’s temporary mobilities, but also the nature of her evolved work as an escort. That is to say, her current services to the rich Italian businessmen could be interpreted as examples of the suggested emerging ‘bounded authenticity’ (Bernstein, 2007a) within the sex industry. This in turn, probably allows Nadya to experience more intimacy than expected (with some of the ‘nice guys’), thereby lifting the likely negative effects from the sexual labour on her authentic self, while also enabling further self-development (by having more time and economic resources), and thus sustaining her motivation for continuing her work as an escort. Finally, it is important to highlight that in the case of Nadya we witness various ‘unintended consequences’ (Giddens, 1984), from downgrading (working in the brothel after the initial migration), to upgrading ones (becoming an escort after working in the strip club). Despite the inaccuracy between intention and result, Nadya’s agency becomes apparent in the actions corresponding to the goals, be they limiting or not. But while one’s personal characteristics could be influential, simultaneously behaviour could have a restructuring function. Accordingly, Nadya explained that based on her experiences in the sex industry, she had to revisit her own perceptions about it.

Conclusion

The various macro- and meso-factors exert significant influence on human agency and attitudes. As seen through the examined case studies, the unequal distribution of resources (especially evident in the smaller towns in Bulgaria), household dynamics, romantic relationships, and cultural perceptions (i.e. Eastern European women in Italy) could constrain the employment options and personal development of women. On the
other hand, for good or for bad, the global processes of sexualization and commodification, the advanced communication and transportation technologies, and the intensifying mobility within the European Union could enable women to enter the sex industry. Moreover, sex work has often been preceded or followed by migration, largely facilitated by certain social (criminal) networks. Yet, given the agreed interaction between structures and human agency, the central aim of this chapter has been the investigation of the personal characteristics and experiences aimed at an enhanced understanding of the diversifying dynamics among the migrant sex workers. While it has been observed that supporting a drug addiction could be a significant incentive for becoming a sex worker (especially in the case of streetwalkers), the examined case studies point to a wide range of other motivations, largely dependent on the personal goals. One of these is in terms of an economic necessity, which tends to be more prevalent within the lower strata of the sex industry (ex. brothels) and in the cases of lower social support (Veronica & Nadya). On the other hand, we have witnessed some rather invisibilized motivations such as the pursuit of an entertaining and exciting lifestyle along with the desire for material goods (Elena), and the search for physical appraisal and (or) higher social status (Anna). Once within the sex industry, different factors contribute to the continuation of the sexual services, among which the lack of human and social capital required for a professional change (Veronica & Anna), the appreciation of the enhanced economic resources (Elena & Nadya), and a probable preference for sex work over other part-time jobs (Nadya). It remains unclear whether the expressed personal goals, characteristics and experiences are entirely true. The women might have convinced themselves in the authenticity of their ideas in order to avoid moral dilemmas (i.e. cognitive dissonance) or they might have lied about or modified certain details; nevertheless, all forms of discursive elaboration highlight the agents’ reflexivity and agency. Finally, given the ‘duality of structure’, it is valuable to see not only the influence of the context, the social relations and the personal goals, but also how the latter restructure the former and could thus enable or constrain subsequent action.
Conclusion

Drawing upon Giddens (1984) I have assumed that in order to understand a given social phenomenon it is important to examine factors pertaining to the parallel socio-historical context and the related human agency, agreed upon the duality of structure. Both the conceptual tools of analysis, and the verified data and corresponding propositions have been placed within the encompassing sociological framework, while organizing the factors affecting the initiation and continuation of sex work, along with the concomitant decision to migrate, in terms of their enabling or constraining functions. Although the central aim of the thesis has been to portray the diversity of influential factors and their interrelation (i.e. the complexity of dynamics), my emphasis in all of the chapters has been on the degrees of human agency, in order to reveal some of the invisibilized experiences within the sex industry. Certainly, this has been rendered more possible due to the focus on women involved in the indoor sector, where independence, self-employment and self-fulfillment seem to characterize a significant number of sex workers, especially in comparison to streetwalkers. In an attempt to transcend the forced labour and trafficking discourses, I have not however wanted to advocate for the contrasting idea that sex work could be empowering; rather, I have tried to provide a more objective discussion regarding the complexity of dynamics among the Bulgarian migrant sex workers by offering falsifiable propositions, some of which have been rejected in the process of investigation. This has been achieved through the application of different paradigms, each one compensating for another’s shortcomings with reference to the discussed secondary sources and field research. Throughout the thesis I have been verifying the appropriateness of the conceptual tools and the data itself by filtering certain inconsistencies. Yet in order to avoid such repetition, as promised in the introduction this final conclusion (in contrast to the individual conclusions of the preceding chapters) is intended to synthesize all of the examined issues from a different angle, namely by organizing the influential factors of question according to the level of
analysis (i.e. macro-, meso- and micro-). Nevertheless, it must be kept into consideration that the diverse factors which I have examined are strongly dependent on each other, and further interrelated through the globalization forces. As demonstrated thus far, it has been difficult to isolate them from one another, especially since certain human characteristics and actions render the context further enabling or constraining; consequently, the following separation is rather artificial, but useful for the purposes of simplifying the answer to the research question.

1. Macro-factors

In a world of intensifying globalization we are being faced with powerful and often controversial processes, among which the increasing overall consumerism, the commodification of pleasure and intimacy, and the sexualization of the Western culture, thereby blurring the boundaries between the public and private spheres, while contributing to the dichotomous debate whether prostitution should be criminalized or regularized. In both Bulgaria and Italy, drawing upon outdated and ambiguous law concerning prostitution, there is also evidence for a low cultural distance, especially in terms of the gender and sex norms, largely sustained by similarly liberal media constructions. In the Eastern European country this has been mostly the result of the delayed sexual revolution after the fall of communism, consequently allowing for an easier access to the suddenly expanding sex industry. On the other hand, the global aestheticization of sex, accompanied by adventure- or intimacy-seeking attitudes (i.e. recreational sexual ethic and bounded authenticity) among clients and workers could be said to limit the negative effects of the sexual labour, thus contributing to the continuing provision of sexual services.

In any case, what is evident is a transnationalizing and enlarging sex industry, involving numerous (legal or not) migrant sex workers. The global patterns of inequality such as the disproportionate representation of women in the lower-paid strata of the labour market, along with the segregation of migrants in the informal sectors appear to result in the concentration of migrant women (from developing countries and Eastern Europe in the West, and from poorer to richer national regions) in the sex industry. The
global cities (across and within European national borders) where we find most of the economic capital exert a demand for migrant and often less-skilled labour, including the provision of sexual services. In fact, in Italy there appears to be a specific preference for Nigerian and Eastern European sex workers, which stimulates the corresponding supply. Meanwhile, in an open-market global economy, characterized by a high degree of competitiveness among states and individuals we witness a certain devaluation of human capital, as testified by the diversification of social and educational backgrounds of Bulgarian women who work abroad. The wage differentials along with the established gendered patterns of employment are significant pull factors for the initiation of sex work through migration to a Western European country such as Italy. In the presence of various post-communist developments (ex. decreased level of education; restricted employment opportunities for women; increased foreign investments in certain Bulgarian cities) this appears to be valid also for Bulgarian women who move on the territory of Bulgaria, usually from the underdeveloped regions to the four biggest cities, along with the tourist resorts and the border areas. Both in Bulgaria and in Italy the initiation of sex work (in the specific industry sector) is influenced by social divisions in terms of gender, physical capital, and the place of origin (i.e. translating into social status or ethnicity), while the role of age remains less significant, in accordance with the diversifying characteristics of the Bulgarian sex workers. Additionally, the advanced transportation and telecommunication technologies have simultaneously facilitated the provision (ex. internet escort advertisements) and the consumption (ex. sex tourism) of sexual services. The overall increased mobility (be it for settlement, labour or studying) of the Bulgarians abroad has also been enabled by the recent socio-political transformations in terms of the limited Schengen requirements and the entrance in the European Union. Moreover, the interconnectedness between transnational networks involving the sex, the tourism and the entertainment industries has further allowed for an easier (and sometimes less-stigmatized) involvement of the Bulgarian migrant women in prostitution.
2. Meso-factors

Underlying the transnational networks and the existing migratory flows within Bulgaria and to Italy (i.e. since the first major emigration wave between 1989 and 1991) are the criminal (ethnic) organizations, along with other types of social linkages. In the Western European country the former have been particularly relevant for the Bulgarian prostitution during the 1990’s, given their embeddedness in the large informal sector (i.e. corresponding segregation of migrants) and the reliance on fraudulent documents and means of transportation. The role of the Bulgarian criminal organizations has been significant not only for the supply of sex workers, but also for the continuation of sex work and the concomitant (temporary) mobility resulting from the rotation schemes, which incorporated various cities in the two countries of interest and across Europe. The associated dependencies of the sex workers seem to be less prevalent in the presence of the socio-political transformations in Bulgaria. Nevertheless, the reliance on members of criminal organizations continues to provide access to sex work due to the former’s infiltration in other industries (ex. owning hotels in the resorts where sex tourism is widespread). Similarly, the established enclave economies in Italy, based on existing ethnic or criminal migrant groups, remain important sources of social capital in the form of income through prostitution. In parallel, however, the growing number of self-employed sex workers, testifies for the increasing significance of the immediate social networks. That is to say, Bulgarian women could migrate internally or externally by relying on the latter for information and labour opportunities, or could be influenced by them even if the resulting consequences (i.e. work in a sex trade venue) have been unintentional, yet in accordance with certain personal goals.

3. Micro-factors

Agreed that agency is not in terms of intentions, but in terms of capability to act differently, it appears that even in restrictive circumstances, most sex workers (in particular those in the indoor industry) are self-conscious (purposive) actors, who make rational choices in accordance with their goals. Often the decision to enter the sex industry is driven by financial rationalizations due to the related high potential of
economic capital, especially when intended as a means for supplementary income and in comparison to other part-time jobs (ex. in the cases of students and full-time mothers). Additionally, it might be justified by a weighing of the costs and benefits, the latter consisting of other types of compensation, such as drugs, material assistance (ex. rent) and various commodities. Surprisingly for some, however, the initiation of sex work might also be motivated by the desire for sexual experimentation and even pleasure, or by the seeking of physical appraisal or higher social status (image) associated with elite prostitution. The concomitant migration might be a means for a (further) increase of the economic capital (when moving to a more developed national area or abroad), for the sake of improvement of the working conditions (ex. higher independence), or to avoid stigmatization in the place of origin (i.e. preventing a loss of reputation). Additionally, the increasing temporary mobilities could serve as a way for separating one’s private from professional life, thus limiting the inconsistencies between the two lifestyles (i.e. cognitive dissonance), and consequently encouraging the continuation of sex work, or they might be rationalized in terms of sex tourism. It might happen that a woman migrates first (for settlement, education, labour, love, better life, etc.), and faced with restrictive circumstances or influenced by her immediate social networks becomes involved in the sex industry. Certainly, regardless of the sequence of decisions and actions, the initiation of sex work is facilitated when holding more liberal sexual attitudes, while physical characteristics could be useful for gaining access to a particular sex trade venue or sector. On the other hand, the continued provision of sexual services might be the result of social dependencies (related to criminal networks or household dynamics), or of the appreciation for an increased income, even if the initiation was not influenced by an economic motivation. As mentioned, other contributive factors include the increased opportunities for mobilities, given the potential for a lower emotional distress, while the commodification of intimacy might translate into a preferred emotional labour (although some perceive it as more negative than a strictly commercial sexual transaction). Related to the processes of globalization is also the advancement of the telecommunication technologies, which could allow for self-employment and even self-
fulfillment (by virtue of relying on useful skills or personal relations, while possibly having an entertaining lifestyle), thus rendering the sex industry more attractive.

4. Final remarks

In the presence of the examined data pointing to growing opportunities for self-employment and self-fulfillment (at least for EU citizens) by selling sexual services in the European Union, we should expect a further expansion of the sex industry. In any case, the fact that some Bulgarian sex workers perceive their employment as a means to an enhanced social status implies the transformation that the (Bulgarian) sex industry has undergone. Such a structuration seems to be indicated also by the diversifying characteristics among the sex workers (i.e. with various social backgrounds and education levels), although the interrelation (intensified via the globalization processes) among the diverse factors cannot be emphasized enough. Hence, it appears that in view of the present, complex dynamics it is more probable that criminalization policies lead to the development of novel routes to and tactics within the sex industry, rather than to abolition (or reduction) of prostitution, or to protection of the sex workers (as more recently it is rarely with the intention of punishment). The latter, or at least those pertaining to the studied group of interest (i.e. Bulgarian migrant women working in indoor prostitution), do not necessarily sell sexual services as a form of a survival strategy; moreover, they often appear capable of moving in between the different branches of the sex industry, and also to other industries. On the other hand, the examined data has not shown whether the loss of reputation, along with other psychological issues is less relevant for those working in places with intense consumption patterns of sexual services (as proposed in chapter 3). Hence, instead of focusing the public debate on the nature of prostitution (i.e. exploitation or work), it might be more valuable to develop strategies for minimizing the negative emotional distress often experienced by the subjects, be they considered victims or workers. Just as the construction of the (more liberal) sexual norms seems to be largely sustained by the media (including publications, news, and entertainment shows), the ‘prostitute stigma’ could be reduced in a similar way.
Despite the assumed restructuring role of human action within a given social system, I have not been able to answer whether women with publicly-visible ‘atypical’ (invisibilized) prostitute profiles, such as those displaying a recreational sexual ethic, contribute to the broadening of the existing set of sexual norms. Additionally, it is difficult to judge the extent of possible self-fulfillment through sex work (or through any form of labour for that matter), as a result of the influence of the diverse macro-, meso- and micro-factors. Moreover, due to the specific subject group of study and the limited field research, I do not possess sufficient information to state whether the noticeable increased degree of human agency of migrant sex workers in Europe is limited only to EU citizens like the Bulgarians, or if the pattern is also observable among third country nationals. Similarly, I have been unable to discuss the differences of agency between members of the outdoor and indoor prostitution, and among those in the proliferating sex trade venues associated with the latter. These topics, along with a possible historical comparison of the Bulgarian (migrant) sex workers before and after the accession to the European Union would be valuable considerations for further research.
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