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LEGITIMIZING SEX AND EMPOWERMENT

**An Interpretation of Narratives on Sex Trade
in Thailand**

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ABSTRACT

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This research investigates how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working against human trafficking in Thailand and male tourists travelling to Thailand for sex legitimize their actions and perspectives on their websites. The research material is constituted by two websites for each of both categories. Plot analysis was used as a main method, based on Northrop Frye's mythoi and Kenneth Burke's dramatisic hexad. Subsequently, plots were deconstructed by pointing out omissions, inconsistencies, and dualities. From the analysis, it derived that all parties produce a form of knowledge that legitimizes their power, which in turn is necessary in order to produce knowledge. They sample the population and represent it to their readers, creating an idea of an *exceptional* 'Thailand' on which they base their actions. NGOs aim to establish their own idea of normality, with their women beneficiaries doing a dignified job and being integrated in their communities. Organizations have a *nurturant* and allegedly empowering attitude, and take care of both their bodies and their minds. Sex tourists, on the contrary, escape their Western normality and are eager to adjust to Thai *abnormality*, where sensual women who naturally love to please men can be disposed with impunity. They have brought with them from the US their *strict father* values based on discipline and obedience. NGOs and sex tourists can exert their power because an important actor is either missing or playing a minor role in the picture they present to their readers, namely the idea of the 'state'. The Thai state is either benevolent guidance for sex tourists, or does not exist at all, or can be educated, supported and manipulated by NGOs. Both parties can in this sense play the role of the state themselves and set their own rules.

Keywords: Thailand, sex tourism, non-governmental organizations, legitimization, biopolitics, plot analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Question, Material, & Limitation of the Study

In my thesis, I investigate how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working against human trafficking in Thailand and male tourists travelling to Thailand for sex legitimize their actions and perspectives in their websites. The decision of comparing the world of NGOs and that of sex tourists in a Master's thesis might sound quite odd, as I am obviously supposed to support and trust the former and despise and mistrust the latter, especially as a student of Development and International Cooperation. These two groups have specific assumed roles that are socially constructed and perpetrated; finding evidence whether this picture of reality is true or not would be pointless, as it would merely reiterate the convictions that most of us already have in mind. Thence, the focus of my research is something different than that, as I do not aim to evaluate or judge what the two parties actually do. Instead, I aim at analyzing the strategies used by them in order to legitimize their interventions in the very specific domain of the internet discourse. The results could be surprising, as they might not mirror the idea we have about the two groups.

Strictly speaking, I did not carry out research in the field, but I *did* have some form of first-hand experience after I started working on this research. In the summer 2014, I took part in an internship in Northern Thailand at a Thai foundation working for women's empowerment, and even without systematically interviewing the workers, I put together my own picture of the situation. Moreover, I spent a few days in Patong for holiday, and saw with my own eyes some of what beforehand I only read in sex tourists' websites. This experience surely plays a role in my thesis, as I will discuss more in depth later, but I did not want to concentrate on it as my research object. I focused instead on the safer domain of the internet, from which I selected the totality of the research material.

My research material is constituted by two websites managed by sex tourists/promoters and two websites managed by NGOs working against human trafficking. I decided to indicate the websites that are the object of my analysis for two reasons. Firstly, having some background information regarding them can make it easier to understand their system of values and motives. Secondly, even their names can tell much about the way

they present/represent themselves. I will briefly present them here [all last consulted on the 23.03.2014]:

Sex tourists/promoters:

- www.dexterhorn.com: Dexter Horn is described on the homepage as “your information source on where to find sex - with consenting adults - across the globe”. There is a section reserved to members only, and in order to access it, it is necessary to pay around 60 dollars per year.¹
- www.godsofthailand.com: Gods of Thailand - The Real Man’s Guide to Thailand, helps the reader to “experience Thailand the smart way” with dozens of articles divided into categories mostly regarding the sex life in the country and Thai women, but also food, sightseeing, and so on. They also sell books about the same topics, and they have a VIP section.

NGOs:

- <https://adra.org/>: the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is an international organization initiated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to “address social injustice and deprivation in developing countries”. It has a section in Thailand.²
- <http://aatthai.org/>: the Alliance Anti-Traffic (AAT) defines itself as a “non-profit, non-partisan and non-religious organization that aims to protect women and children in South-East Asia from sexual exploitation and trafficking”. I only focused on the Thai website, but they also work in some other countries in the area and have offices in Bangkok and in Ho Chi Minh City.

Of course, providing an exhaustive and comprehensive picture is not conceivable, as the amount of websites dealing with the above-mentioned issues is overwhelming, and part of my work was operating a selection. The decision of analyzing these specific websites is due to different factors. In the case of sex tourism to Thailand, I found that the scene of the websites or website sections in English devoted to it was relatively homogeneous. I decided to pick these two websites as they are among the most popular, have quite a huge amount of material to work on, and their authors clearly state their country of origin, namely the US. I find that this last element is very significant, as throughout the text I

¹ Dexter Horn website does not exist anymore. [28.09.2015]

² ADRA’s website has been considerably restructured since I gathered my research material. [28.09.2015]

could perceive a very strong missionary zeal which is not so pervasive in European texts. I focused only on articles, and not on other platforms of information sharing.

As for NGOs, the selection process was harder, and I felt their panorama was much more diverse than that of sex tourists. After browsing many websites, my choice fell on two organizations having a very different approach but similar purposes. When it comes to the way they present themselves, at first glance they are antipodal. ADRA is overtly religious, and its website written in basic English, full of metaphors and somehow naïve; I could not help looking at it with some suspicion. AAT, on the contrary, is non-religious, and its website more informative, structured, complex, but almost ‘aseptic’; I personally found it more trustworthy and nearly academic. However, they both present quite rich narratives and give much space to their beneficiaries’ stories, as will be clearly shown in the analysis. There is a full spectrum of organizations that can be located somewhere in between, but I can assume also beyond both these poles. Besides, there are several local NGOs having their websites only in Thai, the content of which I could not read. I hope nonetheless that the strong difference between the websites I analyzed helped me to have a more extensive overview.

I am well aware of the importance of non-written elements in communication. However, I decided not to concentrate on any other media but the written texts as such; if my study would have focused also on pictures, graphics, choice of colors, fonts, and so on, it would have been either too broad for a Master’s thesis or extremely shallow. I took this lack into account throughout my whole analysis. Another limitation of my study is constituted by the language, as I decided to concentrate exclusively on websites written in English. This is very significant especially in the case of sex tourists, as the amount of websites devoted to sex tourism in the most various languages (from Italian to Japanese) is enormous, and I can imagine that each ‘country of origin’ has specific traits. Both Dexter Horn’s and Gods of Thailand’s authors are US-American, but that does not necessarily limit their targets to people coming from English-speaking countries; many citizens of the world use the global *lingua franca* to search information on the net.

When it comes to sex tourism, my analysis only focuses on Western male heterosexual individuals going to Thailand for sexual purposes; the websites I picked are not meant for women or the miscellaneous group of people going under the politically correct acronym LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning). However, I

kept in mind that in Thailand there are big industries for both of them, and references to them often came up in the texts. Besides, I also had to constantly remind myself that the great majority of prostitutes' customers are Thai. As for NGOs, my choice fell on organizations with an international character.

My research material has neither a plot nor coherence in a strict sense; as David M. Boje (2001, 1) argues, it is antenarrative, "the fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted and pre-narrative speculation". It comes from different websites and has various authors, most of whom cannot be traced. Some authors clearly state what their cultural background is; some do not. Part of the material was probably created by groups and keeps being modified by different subjects, making it a flowing, heterogeneous, incoherent and always-changing mass of texts.

The location where NGOs and sex tourists act is the same: Thailand. Nonetheless, the subjects on which they intervene may vary in some cases, and overlap in others; there is no way I can find out whether the girls and women NGOs are trying to empower or save are the same girls hooking in bars in Pattaya and Bangkok described by sex tourists. Therefore, I kept this in mind in my analysis, and I only tried to focus on the way they represent people and situations, not on the 'reality of facts'.

To conclude, I do not aim at accusing, justifying, flattering or judging the actions of the authors whose texts constitute my research material. I can only see and analyze what they want the world to see, i.e. their discourse on the internet. Through their texts, the authors transmit certain moralities; my task was unveiling them and understanding how they contribute to the legitimization of their actions. In both cases, their actions consist in interventions on the women: on the one hand, in order to have sex with them, on the other hand in order to 'rescue' them.

1.2 Locating Myself: My Emotions & 'Objectivity'

My topic is evidently controversial, and entering the world of the academia with its rules and never-ending debates with such a subject is at the same time frustrating and motivating. Natalie Hammond (Sanders *et al.* 2010, 59ff.) describes the extent to which she got involved when carrying out research interviewing men who pay for sex and, after locating herself as a person and as a researcher, she enumerates the emotions she went through. My case is obviously very different, as I was sitting behind a computer most of

the time and did not have any kind of interaction with whoever produced my research material, but I *do* sympathize with Hammond. When reading sex tourists' stories, I do feel *anxiety*, as my perspective is relatively new and maybe risky. I do feel *sad*, because I sometimes see the void behind specific choices or opinions. And, of course, I do feel *anger* to those people as a woman, and as a person with specific values.

Since the very beginning, I knew I would produce a strongly questionable, possibly bizarre Master's thesis, which would force me to tackle with a considerable amount of challenges involving bias, morality, religion, 'truth', culture, and some other buzz-concepts on which academics have discussed for ages. During this research process, I knew I would need to find my place in this huge picture, as my presence, *my bias*, *my morality*, *my religion*, *my 'truth'* and *my culture* would play a major role in it. In these months, I met, talked, argued and clashed with a massive amount of actors: from sex tourists to NGO workers; from scholars to my own family and friends. As Mark Neumann (Ellis & Bochner 1996, 193) wrote, I had to, "quite literally, *come to terms* with sustaining questions of self and culture"; that is, *myself*, *my culture* and everything that surrounds them. The ideas and thoughts I put down formed their existence on the basis of my perspective, which is based on the totality of who *I* am (Palonen 2009, 531).

Without making my thesis a mere work of autoethnography, I found it necessary to situate myself in this world, in order to be aware that everything of what I am doing is strongly linked to my "personal experiences, concerns and passions", as Wendy Larner points out when referring to the choice of the issues social scientists address (Pollard *et al.* 2011, 88). To use Max Weber's words (1949, 81), this goes from the material I "consciously or unconsciously" "selected, analyzed and organized" to the theories, methodologies and approaches I used. I am a well-rooted historical entity, give significance to the world as a specific and unique *cultural being*, and my whole interpretation of the cultural phenomena I decided to analyze is strongly connected to *me*. As I am now acting as a social expert being located in a specific academic context, having a specific personal and educational background, I produce a "situated knowledge" specific to this time and place. In my research, I analyze and deal with tons of abstractions and categories that "come to take particular shapes in particular places" (Pollard *et al.* 2011, 88-97); in the same way, this work is also located, and these same abstractions and categories somehow clash with my own. Before rushing into somebody else's world and mind and try to figure them out, I need to figure *myself* out.

The country where I spent most of my life, namely Italy, strongly shaped my mindset and set of values, as well as my way of seeing the world. Generally speaking, in Italy, whatever is transmitted through the media *must* be questioned, and since childhood we are faced with the fact that all “objective and valid truths”, in Weber’s terms (1949, 51), are constructed and completely dependent on the “special and one-sided perspective” of those presenting them. In addition to this, my formal education made me aware of the power of words and rhetoric, which we had to exercise daily in all our classes; form and beautiful structures often counted more than contents. Italy’s more or less recent history and politics, as well as daily social interactions and culture in general, educated me to the power of persuasion and charisma in the creation of an argument and its effectiveness. ‘Objectivity’ to me has always been an abstract concept to be put in quotation marks, even before I was aware of the existence of a passed-away overly smart German man called Max Weber.

My research is about legitimation, and behind legitimation there is always some kind of more or less willingly constructed morality. Necessarily, my morality and my values will also enter the picture, despite my best attempts not to let them interfere. I have a Catholic background, and even though now I do not really consider myself as religious in strict terms, I still see the world through some sort of Christian lenses; the ideas I have about ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are strongly connected to the education I received during my childhood and teenage years. In general, I tend to see the world in quite negative terms, and always in black and white, leaving aside all shades of grey in between. To me, there is some form of absolute ‘good’, which means respecting and valorizing human dignity and individuality. If I left my critical thinking aside and just followed my instinct, I would simply blame both the disgusting sex tourists for the way they commodify women, and the paternalistic NGOs for the way they pretend to know what is better for their targets. Even though during my analysis I tried to focus on all those greys that I usually tend to ignore, my black-and-white values, as well as the rhetoric to which I was educated, are doomed to come up, and I am aware that this is a never-ending struggle. As Kari Palonen (2009, 529) says, “Rhetorical practices of the transvaluation of values are part and parcel of the research process itself”.

The process through which I arrived at defining what I would write about in my thesis has not been obvious and straight, and I now realize how much my perspective and I have changed during these months of studies, work and struggles. On the one hand, my attitude towards development reshaped quite drastically, as I became more and more aware of the

presenting her own perspective is the very core of what Weber calls ‘objectivity’. I tried not to limit this fair play only to scholars, but to enlarge it to all actors I encountered during this journey. In the *fair play* of this research, I did not try to put ‘objectivity’ out of its quotation marks and claim the truth. All I did was just trying to persuade my readers (and, at times, myself) of the validity of my ‘special’, ‘one-sided’ (biased?) viewpoint, while letting myself be persuaded by all the actors I encountered during these months. All alternatives, all ‘truths’ are left open, and I *fairly* recognize that my perspective might be as valid as that of a sex tourist - I am just part of the game. However, before I start playing it, I deem it is necessary to provide a brief introduction to the country and the issues with which I dealt in this research.

1.3 Thailand, Prostitution, Trafficking, & Sex Tourism

With a population of more than 67 million people in 2014 (World Bank 2015), a surface of approximately 200.000 square miles (Mishra 2010, 5), and an estimated GDP of 987.5 billion USD (CIA 2015), Thailand is one of the most populous, largest and richest countries in Southeast Asia. It is one of the five founding countries of ASEAN, the Charter of which was signed in Bangkok in 1967 (Koh *et al.* 2009, XV).

The history of the Kingdom of Thailand/Siam dates back to 1238, when it declared independence from Khmer power. It has remained a Kingdom since then, and the current dynasty, the Chakri, was established in 1782. Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country that has never been colonized by a European state. This happened also thanks to the very cautious diplomacy carried out by kings such as Rama V and Chulalongkorn, who implemented modernization policies, gave territorial concessions to the British and the French, and contributed in making Thailand a ‘buffer zone’ between the two colonial powers. (Mishra 2010, 1-3) Nonetheless, as Jackson (Harrison & Jackson 2010, 38-39) points out, the influence of the West on the country has been very strong, to the point that it might be defined as a “semi-colony”. This means that, despite its political independence, Thailand had colony-like relations in other domains, and even the imagination of modernity and modern institutions was deeply affected by Western ideals.

After the First World War, the country joined the League of Nations. In 1932, a revolution was followed by the establishment of the constitutional monarchy, with the king being the head of state and the prime minister the head of government. Further reinforcing its

relations with the West, during the Cold War, Thailand joined alliance with the US (Mishra 2010, 1-3, 16), sending troops to Korea and fighting in Vietnam (CIA 2015). As Jeffrey (2010, vii) stresses, in the modern history of Thailand, a major role has been played by the royal family and the military elite, with the latter being engaged in a steady struggle against democratic forces (Mishra 2010, 3). Since 2005, the political turmoil in the country has been escalating, with numerous and bloody protests, violence, and two military coups d'état, one in 2006 and one in 2014. Currently, the country is run by the head of the Royal Thai Army, General Prayuth; democratic elections are envisaged for 2016. (CIA 2015)

Thailand has a great variety of ethnic groups. The Thai ethnic group is the largest (80%), followed by the Chinese (15%). Other groups are the Lao, Malays, Burmese, Indians, refugees from Indochinese countries, and poorer Hill-tribes from the North (Akha, Hmong, Karen etc.). (Mishra 2010, 3) The population is mostly concentrated in the rural rice-growing areas, but a fast process of urbanization is going on, due to the strong industrialization of the country (Zebioli 2009, 3).

Openness to foreign investments (Zebioli 2009, 7), good infrastructures, and an extremely high volume of exports constitute the main factors contributing to making Thailand's economy very robust. Despite a slowdown in GDP growth in 2014 (0.7%) due to the political turmoil within the country as well as to the global financial crisis, the economy has seen a strong expansion in the last few years. Agriculture still employs almost a third of the workforce, but industry and services are growing in importance (tourism, electronics, textiles, a great variety of food products, car and car parts etc.). Due to labor shortage, in 2014 there were around 4 million migrant workers. (CIA 2015) The major markets are ASEAN, Middle East, China, EU and US (Zebioli 2009, 2). The tourism sector is one of the largest industries of the country, and it is estimated that it has brought in more foreign currency than any other business (Wilson 2004, 78). It experienced a decrease by 6-7% due to the coup d'état in May 2014, but it has started to recover (CIA 2015).

World Bank's data from 2014 show how only 3.5% of Thailand's population live on less than 2.00 USD per day, and 0.3% on less than 1.25 USD, and there is a strong trend towards poverty decrease. Being defined as an "upper middle income country", Thailand has a much smaller poor population in comparison to neighboring countries such as China, Laos, Cambodia and the Philippines. Inequality is also decreasing. (World Bank 2015) In UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), in 2013 Thailand scored quite high, being 89th

in the world ranking and being classified as having a “high human development”. Among the ten ASEAN member states, it is only preceded by Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia. (UNDP 2015) Thailand is number 61 out of 142 in the Global Gender Gap Ranking developed by the World Economic Forum, being preceded by only three other Southeast Asian countries, namely the Philippines, Singapore and Laos. Women in Thailand are on average more educated than men, but have fewer opportunities on the job market, have lower salaries and have barely any representation in politics. However, they still are doing better than in some European countries, such as Italy, Greece, Slovakia, Cyprus or Malta. (World Economic Forum 2015)

Buddhism represents the major religion of Thailand, with 93.6% of the population following it. Almost 5% of the population is Muslim, and around 1.2% Christian. (CIA 2015) Leslie Ann Jeffrey (2010, xxiv) underlines how too often the power of Buddhism in explaining the Thai system has been exaggerated; however, it *does* constitute one of the key pillars of national identity (“Nation, Religion, and King”). Theravada Buddhism is based on the idea of continual human rebirth, according to one’s merits, until the Enlightenment. According to Kerry O’Sullivan and Songphorn Tajaroensuk (1997), these “good deeds” or values approximately are: “respect for all life, moderation, harmony, tolerance, forgiveness, kindness, compromise, acceptance, non-attachment”. Pursuing them is part of a sort of code of conduct, where being a ‘good Thai’ and being a ‘good Buddhist’ coincide. Merit is also related to what is good and bad, moral and immoral, also in terms of sexual behaviors. People who have power and money are thought to have reached that status because of their merit, and this shows the connection between the idea of religion to status and power. (Jeffrey 2010, xxiv)

In *Key Concepts in Tourist Studies* (Smith *et al.* 2010, 152-156) sex tourism is defined as a “travel with the sole or partial intention of pursuing sexual intercourse with ‘others’ usually from different social, racial and ethnic backgrounds”. The sexual intercourse can be voluntary or exploitative, non-commercial or commercial, in the latter case being related to sex trade and involving the economic power of the sex tourist over the local sex workers. The phenomenon has been treated like a taboo for many years, and this brings about, *inter alia*, two main issues: on the one hand, there is a lack of precise statistics regarding it, even though it can be estimated that the revenue is multi-billionaire; on the other hand, by remaining so covert, sex tourism can be subject to incontrollable growth, especially in the developing world. So far, the academia has been focusing mainly on

Western men going to “third world countries” to buy sex in exchange for cash, but there are other phenomena that started catching scholars’ attention, such as gay and women sex tourism, and “voyeuristic behaviors”. The latter seems to be typical for Western women, who often do not directly engage in sexual activities but want to “take a peek” at the sexualized Other; this can be still considered as a sexual activity, some sort of “visual consumption” part of the sex tourism industry. However, there also is a growing trend of women going to destinations such as Gambia, Caribbean or India for actual sexual intercourses with local men; so far, the academia has concentrated on the allegedly more ‘romantic’ aspects of female sex tourism. Another important aspect of the phenomenon of sex tourism in the last couple of decades is related to the marketing and information exchange on the internet, and the proliferation of blogs and websites devoted to it. (Smith *et al.* 2010, Sanders *et al.* 2010, Chow-White 2006)

Thailand is one of the main destinations for sex tourists, and the business around it is enormous. Prostitution is spread all over the country and, although most clients of prostitutes in Thailand are actually Thai themselves, the focus has been put on the international aspect of the trade, including sex tourism and human trafficking. Some form of prostitution was present even in the ancient Kingdoms before the Kingdom of Siam was born in 1238, and it could be seen as an endemic element of the country: in a survey carried out in the early 90s, it was assessed that around 90% of Thai men had visited a prostitute at least once. However, the phenomenon started developing to the current form, while raising the attention of the international community, only during the Vietnam War. In those years, American troops stationed in Thailand were taken to specific areas for R&R (“rest and recreation”) activities. Women and girls, coming especially from poor provinces in the North and Northeast of the country, migrated to those regions in order to work in the proliferating industry of bars, brothels, massage parlors, and discos. After US military left, the business related to prostitution continued to expand in the 1970s and 1980s. Because of Thailand’s successful industrial development, rural areas particularly in the North and Northeast are becoming relatively poorer compared with industrial and commercial centers, and this pushes girls to engage in the sex industry to sustain their families. It is estimated that prostitution generates an income 25 times greater than other occupations involving women migrants (i.e. factories, domestic work). (Jeffrey 2002, xi-xvi, 20ff.) The concerns related to prostitution are several, and these include the spread of HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, sex exploitation, and child prostitution.

In Thailand, HIV/AIDS has represented a major issue since the beginning of the outbreak, also because of the big volume of the sex industry. In the early 90s, statistics showed how about one prostitute out of four was HIV positive, which triggered a series of problems. In order not to get infected, men started looking for child prostitutes (younger than 18), who were seen as having less chances to have the virus. Besides, a trend began for trekkers and tourists of going to rural villages to engage in HIV-free sex. (Jeffrey, xi-xvi) Even though in the last few years, the number of new infections, HIV related deaths and people living with HIV have decreased constantly, there is still concern. According to the World Health Organization (2014), in 2012 HIV/AIDS was the sixth cause of death in Thailand, representing 4.1% of all deaths in the country. Currently, there is an estimated number of around half a million people living with AIDS, more than the half of whom is constituted by women. Partially due to the intensification of programs addressing male and female sex workers and their clients, and the high reported use of condom, the HIV infection rate in sex work has decreased, though not as much as expected. The percentage of female sex workers living with HIV in 2012 was much lower than in the 1990s, being at around 2.16%, and 93.6% reported using a condom with their latest client. (Thai National AIDS Committee 2014)

In the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, human trafficking is defined as follows:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2004)

According to HumanTrafficking.org (2015), the phenomenon is well spread in Thailand, for both labor and sex exploitation, being a source, transit and destination country. Especially at risk of trafficking are migrants, stateless people, and ethnic minorities; the lack of a legal status and poverty, such as in the case of the Hill Tribes in the North who do not have a citizenship, make people more vulnerable. The victims are “forced, coerced, or defrauded into labor or commercial sexual exploitation”, having their documents withdrawn and/or being subjected to debt bondage. Besides, it still happens in some poor families living in rural areas that children are forced by their own parents into prostitution.

Typically, human trafficking in Thailand has a rural-urban dimension. Besides being employed in the sex industry, child, women and men victims are exploited in domestic work, garment production, fishing and seafood processing, and agriculture. Starting from the 1980s, the international community, and especially human rights and women's organizations, began raising concerns about the issues of human trafficking and exploitation within Thailand, notably in relation to sex trade. In particular, brothels started being pictured as having slavery-like conditions. Also in response to this, Thai governments issued relevant legislation, such as the "Prevention and suppression of prostitution act" from 1996 and the "Anti-trafficking in persons act" from 2008. (Jeffrey 2002, xi-xvi) In 2010, the second six-year National Policy Strategy on human trafficking for 2011-2016 was launched, and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security runs several shelters providing minimum assistance to victims of human trafficking (HumanTrafficking.org 2015). Nonetheless, the real engagement of the government is still quite controversial for a number of reasons. On the one hand, it more or less covertly encouraged sex tourism with organized sex-tours coming from other countries (Jeffrey 2002). On the other hand, it never really tried to directly address the high level of corruption among its officials and local authorities, the biases against migrant workers and stateless persons, the lack of a decent monitoring system, or the disincentives for trafficking victims to be identified and helped, leaving the work to NGOs (HumanTrafficking.org 2015).

However, there is another side of the coin to the sex industry, besides the fight against it. As mentioned above, the amount of websites and books in various languages providing a completely different picture of the situation while *promoting* sex tourism is overwhelming. As Ara Wilson (2004, 73ff.) discusses, sex trade in Thailand is hyper- and overrepresented, and its "sensational and spectacular qualities" are fueled by all the texts that have been written. On the internet, it is very easy to find blogs, forums, and guides about the wonders and specificities of (mainly paid) sex in Thailand, and especially in Pattaya and a few streets in Bangkok.

2. METHODS & LITERATURE

2.1 Methods

As I previously mentioned, I got deeply involved in my topic for different reasons. At a first reading, it was relatively easy to sympathize with the ‘heroes’, namely NGOs, and feel disgust towards the ‘villains’, sex tourists. However, while browsing dozens of different websites, I started being bothered even by the way ‘heroes’ presented their work. Often, I had the feeling of reading a quasi-religious text, where the omniscient author presented an incontestable situation with some form of pastoral power; other times, the situation and modes of intervention appeared to be described so meticulously and precisely, to the point not to leave any room for comment or dispute. On the other hand, some of the arguments carried out by sex tourists, despite all my repulsion and nuisance, sounded at times fairly more convincing than those of NGOs. Furthermore, having had the chance to experience in person both sides of the coin, and to read a significant amount about the topic, I could not help drawing connections to what I saw and learnt.

All this made me realize the importance of finding a methodology that could help me be critical about myself, my research material and my previous readings while giving a voice to the Other; it was necessary to keep some sort of epistemic distance from the authors while putting myself in their shoes at the same time. Roderick P. Hart (1997, 30) writes, “The good critic cannot be timid” and must engage in the “political battle” of dismantling the rhetoric of power of those producing texts and using them to persuade others. In my analysis, I was in a situation of cross-fire, with the two parties more or less obviously mentioning and accusing each other. I could not support one side or the other, and I could not just stand in the middle and undergo fire from both sides; I myself had to engage in the battle against both of them, being able to *think* like them, that is, to think like my *enemies*. George Lakoff, in his book *Don’t Think of an Elephant!* (2004), virtually communicates with his own “enemies” (namely conservatives), by entering their minds and mindsets, unveiling the moralities on which they base their thinking, and following their process of truth construction. I had to do the same in my research, trying to become an NGO worker or a sex tourist, in order to be able to step back understanding their perspective.

In order to do so, I decided to combine two different methodologies, namely plot analysis and deconstruction analysis; I proceeded in the same way for each of the four websites. I

sketched the main plot, pointed out omissions and dualities, and then deconstructed it. I tried not to proceed in an excessively binary way, but to leave room for nuances. I kept the websites separated because I thought this would enhance my chances to be able to spot subtleties and links, without ignoring any elements just because they did not fit the ensemble. I also tried to spot differences and similarities within the two groups, and read them through their institutional background. I am well aware of the different nature and goals of these two types of actors, and my degree of approval of their actions is enormously different, but my analysis is limited to what they present to their potential readers on the internet, to that specific *truth* they try to represent.

To have a more comprehensive picture of the different plots present in the texts, I referred to Kenneth Burke's 'dramatistic hexad' (1969a, XV, 443), which is constituted by:

- The *Act*, which names "what took place, in thought or deed" and answers the question, "What was done?";
- The *Scene*, that is "the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred", and refers to the question, "When or where was it done?";
- The *Agent*, "the person or kind of person [who] performed the act", namely "Who did it?";
- The *Agency*, the "means or instrument [s]he used", or "How did [s]he do it?";
- The *Purpose* of the act, "Why did [s]he do it?";
- The *Attitude*, that is the manner in which the act was performed, "*quo modo?*".

Traditionally, Burke's scheme is a pentad, as it does not take directly into account the *attitude*, which is discussed only in the *addendum* for the 1969 edition. However, I decided to refer to it for both NGOs and sex tourists aim to affect their readers' attitude to the phenomena they discuss - and managed it quite well, at least in my case. These six elements are the necessary "form of *talk about* experience", not about experience itself; it is a matter of *language*, not reality (Burke 1969a, 317). When looking at *who* performed the act, it is also necessary to identify friends and foes of the main actor, or, in Burke's wording, "co-agents" and "counter-agents"; in my analysis, various typologies of agents from different websites were overlapping - and this was very significant in the 'battle' between them³. (Burke 1969, xv) When identifying agents, I also tried to spot the target

³ For example, sex tourists are counter-agents for NGOs and vice-versa.

audience, who played a role in the game too, as well as the attempt of the authors of making them *co-agents* by changing their *attitude*.

Burke also underlines that the distinction between these six elements, as well as with the *motivational origin* of specific actions, can be quite blurry (Burke 1969a, xxi), and this is very often the case in my analysis⁴. Also for this reason, Burke introduces the concept of *ratio*, which refers, very briefly, to the relationship between two elements of the hexad. For instance, it can be pointed out what the *scene-agent* ratio is, namely the correlation between time/place/context and who performed the act (*ibid*, 7). As quite clearly explained by Jouni Tilli (2012, 30), agents can dialectically act in “keeping his nature as an agent” and being intrinsic part of the scene, making agent, act and scene overlap and correspond; the dramatistic terms are therefore steadily “acting and reacting with each other”.

Moreover, Burke introduces the concept of *identification*.

Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for rhetorician to proclaim their unity.

In other words, humans are separated beings who try to overcome this separateness by pursuing identification, *consubstantiality* with others. In order for identification to happen, a group must share specific properties which go under a specific category which has a *name*. This identification process is crucial in persuasion and in rhetoric in general, which Burke defines as “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other human agents”. (Burke 1969b, 21-22, 41) It can be said that identification in this sense pushes the audience towards certain actions because of some form of belonging to a group; this identification process comes up clearly in my analysis.

Each “talk about experience” object of my analysis can be seen as a plot, which David M. Boje (2001, 108) defines as the element that “links events together into a narrative structure”. I looked not only at the main plots presented in the texts, but also at secondary, often more covert plots. I referred mainly to Northrop Frye’s essay “Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths” (1957) in order to identify the kind of plot and to spot recurring patterns,

⁴ See, for instance, how NGOs as *agents*, only exist because of human traffickers and sex exploiters, who are *counter-agents*. Therefore, it can be said that *motive* and *counter-agents* correspond in NGOs’ plots.

and to Boje's *Narrative Methods for Organizational & Communication Research* (2001) for the analytical tools as such.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle, who lived between 384 and 322 BC, already distinguished different typologies of 'plot' in his work *Poetics*, which several authors elaborated and enlarged throughout the centuries (Vella 2008, Baxter & Atherton 1997): comedy, romance, tragedy, and satire. If ADRA's plot is obviously a romance, the other three are comedies. Yet, elements from other types of plot will come up here and there, and this refers especially to the many satiric elements in sex tourists' websites. Here follows a very brief description of them based on Boje's and Frye's works; I will especially focus on the plots and elements which are more important for my analysis.

- *Comedy* (Frye 1957, 163ff) corresponds to Fryedan "mythos of spring", and always has a happy ending: *this is how it should be*. A new society is born "around the somewhat mysterious hero and his bride". There is a movement from a society controlled by habits, arbitrary law and ritual bondage (illusion) to a "society controlled by youth and pragmatic freedom" (reality), where illusions are dispelled. The blocking characters or counter-agents are humorous, whereas heroes and heroines are usually standardized and not so interesting.
- *Romance* is a "mythos of summer" based on *agos*, conflict. Individual romances are "dramas of self-identification, where the hero wins over darkness, and the heroine is liberated or redeemed" (Boje 2001). It is child-like, and focused on adventure. It is very Manichean, black and white, and everything revolves around the conflict between the hero and his enemy. Typically, in a sterile land ruled by an old helpless king, young people have to be offered to a dragon, until it is the king's daughter's turn, who is saved by the hero who kills the monster. Biblical references, as well as metaphors of light and darkness, are often present. (Frye 1957, 186ff)
- *Tragedy* is defined by Frye (*ibid*, 206ff) as the "mythos of autumn" and is built around *pathos*, catastrophe. The focus is put on a single individual, who somehow violates moral law. At the end, in a "demonic epiphany", the hero falls and must face humiliation.
- *Satire* and irony are in Frye's (*ibid*, 223ff.) words "mythoi of winter" and are based on *sparagmos*, namely confusion, anarchy, and absence of heroism of meaningful action; heroes are very human. Satire has a form of moral standard, and its humor is based on convention. Society is shown from a different perspective, in all its

absurdities, anomalies, crimes and injustices, and the inevitability of human misery is stressed, in an “unbroken turning of the wheel of fortune”. It has parodistic and often sadistic elements. Boje (2001) defines it as the “drama of apprehension” where the hero is incapable to overcome the darkness, and harmony is nothing but a fictive illusion; truth is either unrecognized or suppressed.

Partially reflecting Burke’s hexad, the first step of Boje’s method (‘prenarration’), consists in understanding the “network of actions”, that is spotting “agent, goal, means, circumstance, help, hostility, cooperation, conflict, success, failure”; in other words, what are the set goals? Who did what, why, with whom, against whom? In this framework, symbols related to the specific context must be identified, and occurring events put in the right order. Secondly, in the ‘emplotment’ phase, the singles stories and the different (often conflicting) elements present in each of them are re-conducted to the same theme or thought, in a “mediation [that] allows the synthesis of the heterogeneous”. This allows, finally, making text, reader, and ‘real’ action to come together. (Boje 2001, 113-114)

Each story is nothing but a representation of the situation in which agents act. As Hart (1997, 9) writes, the authors aim to convince the readers that their specific representation, their specific *abstraction*, corresponds to the *truth*. When identifying the plot of the main story, I tried to read the text as an ideal target, as the authors would want me to read it, believing that all they say is *true*; this made it easier for me to sketch the reader’s “potential” plot. Identifying other stories was harder and not so straightforward, as in many cases elements were well hidden throughout the text. I decided to base the first and main part of my analysis on Burke’s hexad and plot analysis for different reasons. Firstly, identifying the networks and interactions of each agent or group of agents with other agents or with other elements of the hexad contributes in unveiling power and control patterns. Secondly, when defining the plot, specific categories of characters come up (heroes, villains, misers and so on). Plots show who is active and who is passive, what kind of morality winners and losers have, besides allowing the identification of the attempts of making the reader sympathize with the author. Finally, extrapolating secondary stories out of the main one may disclose the other side of the coin, namely what the author does not want to say, but implies anyway.

My second analysis step is based on deconstruction analysis, which Boje describes as an “antenarrative in action”. According to him, it is analysis, as it aims at unveiling the

“ideological assumptions” hidden behind stories, but also phenomenon, as story-making is seen as a continuous process of constructing and deconstructing, where stories are non-isolated, situated in a web of other stories, and they legitimize a defined perspective. (Boje 2001, 18) Boje claims that in deconstruction analysis even the very “center”, what is stable and taken for granted in every story, should be disintegrated; no truth can be assumed. All narratives construct centers marginalizing something else; deconstructing the center is necessary. Deconstruction is done in a context of other texts, which all play a role in the story; these texts consist of the whole context in which the story is narrated. (*ibid*, 19, 22)

I firstly tracked down the dualities present in the texts, and then built a hierarchy of them, by isolating the most important and/or problematic; this enabled me to understand what the center around which the story is built is, and which peripheries are present. (Boje 2001, 18-34) I especially concentrated on what is mentioned, but not discussed in depth; this causes a sort of vacuum in the argumentation and leaves many questions open. Furthermore, I gave importance to negations and omissions. Negations because “when we negate a frame, we evoke the frame” (Lakoff 2004, 3), and omissions because omitting constitutes a propaganda strategy that must be unveiled (Boje 2001). In addition, omissions can be related to specific rhetorical constraints, that is to say the rules that one has to adopt in order not to sound inappropriate, or even stupid. Understanding what kind of constraints both parties have, and why they have them, helps in the definition of the rhetorical persona.

2.2 Previous Literature

Much has been written about prostitution in Thailand, but only in recent years has the approach been critical and not of mere condemnation; only in a few cases I was able to find research giving voice to prostitutes. In particular three books approaching the phenomenon from very different points of view were very helpful in my analysis. Firstly, a very interesting reading was the chapter *Prostitution and Foreign Bodies* in the book *Materializing Thailand*, by Penny Van Esterik (2000, 163-198). Her perspective on the issue, which will come up multiple times in the analysis, is based on reviews of literature, casual conversation with people (including prostitutes), and observation. Back in 1992, the scholar identified some of the voices at local, national and international level discussing Thai prostitution; they range from local women of different social layers accepting or even approving of prostitution, to legislators opposing or promoting it, to tourism authorities

keeping a foot in two camps and not having a clear position about it, to feminists condemning or eulogizing the phenomenon, to prostitutes themselves, to poor women in rural areas who see no other way to sustain themselves and their families, to economists, to human right activists, to local and international media coverage, to Western, Asian and local men, and many others. This fairly comprehensive sketch helped me keep in mind that the focus of my research is extremely restricted, and that I should not forget the whole picture when analyzing my few pages of research material written in English. Van Esterik also reminds us how “[t]he moralizing values of Western middle-class oppositional thinking about prostitution provide little guidance for interpreting the complexities of the situation in Thailand”.

Leslie Ann Jeffrey’s book *Sex and Borders* is described by the author as a “study of the political discussion of and response to prostitution as a window onto the link between gender and national identity”. It was very useful for my research especially because it deals with the representation and the conceptualization of the phenomenon also from a historical point of view, taking into account the international inputs. Jeffrey stresses how prostitutes have been treated more as *objects* of policy rather than *subjects*, and how the discourse around them has pushed towards a specific form of gender construction, central in creating national and imperialist identities. As will also come up in my analysis, the prostitute is “the dividing line between good [...] women and bad [...] women”. (Jeffrey 2002, x-xi)

Finally, Ara Wilson’s perspective is very different, and stresses the more economical aspects of the issue. *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok* (2004) investigates “the intimate qualities of increasing global capitalist economies in Bangkok by examining specific commercial sites”, such as, among others, floating markets, department stores and, in the chapter *The Economies or Intimacy in the Go-Go Bar*, the tourist sex trade. According to her, economic systems and intimate life are deeply intertwined, and this applies strongly to the case of sex tourism. Wilson describes the same realities portrayed by the authors of *Gods of Thailand* and *Dexter Horn*, but from a different point of view. If, as I will describe later, these two realities often overlap, finding out what there is behind the glittering façade of what sex tourists can see is eye-opening. Besides focusing on the functioning, rules and even technicalities of the specific trade, Wilson gives voice to current and former prostitutes, and spells out the cultural deeds and paradoxes of such a world. (Wilson 2004, 11, 68-101)

On the other hand, not much has been written regarding the specific case of websites devoted to sex tourism; after a long search only the two articles I will now briefly describe resulted in being very relevant to my thesis. Firstly, I will refer to *Race, Gender and Sex on the Net*, by Peter A. Chow-White (2006). The study “investigates how discourses of race, gender, sexuality and the market intersect online in the construction of identity through an examination of semantic networks on websites and discussion boards for sex tourism”. The focus is not specifically Thailand, but part of his research material overlaps with mine. He uses a much wider set of data (22 websites), and also includes forums and boards with information exchange, which I did not analyze in my research. According to the author, internet plays a significant role in the “global surveillance of bodies, race and desire”, where sex tourists are enabled to “build deeper connections between the racialization, sexualization and commodification of sex workers’ bodies and Western masculinity”. He also points out how sex tourists on the internet end up being both consumers and producers, and this might deepen “social inequality and structures of difference”; in my research, I reflected on how this kind of reasoning might apply to NGOs as well. Sex tourism websites have the features of “mainstream commercial sites”, while tourism companies are “product providers, experience oriented and user driven”, constituting some sort of store window with all necessary information a sex tourist might need. The predominant themes coming up in Chow-White’s research are: health and safety, ‘packed out’ versus greedy, marketplace for sexual tourists, re-masculinization, racialization and transgressive sexuality. Interestingly, I could relate to all of them despite the much smaller amount of data I analyzed.

For my research, I decided from the very beginning not to make use of or refer to feminist theories, and I know the basic ones fairly well, because I was afraid that if I had looked for issues related to gender roles, patriarchic structures, male-chauvinist assumptions, and so on, I would have found them all in the texts I selected. Or, well, in any texts - and not only when first reading them, but even when quickly browsing them through. To take an example, in their relatively recent article *Advertising Phuket's Nightlife on the Internet*, Jeffrey Dale Hobbs, Piengpen Na Pattalung, and Robert C. Chandler (2011) embarked in such an academic operation. Starting from the assumption that exploitation of women through sex tourism is “one significant human rights violation”, which happens because of the compliancy of both institutions and society, they yahooped “Phuket nightlife”, and ended up browsing the same type (and often the same) websites I did. Women, they claim,

are portrayed as “nymphomaniacs with no need to be understood”. Their research questions address the kind of gender roles communicated in the advertisement of nightlife in Phuket and the use of rhetoric to support or challenge patriarchy in these websites. The authors referred, of course, to issues related to masculinity, the corruption of the local authorities, Buddhism sort of allowing prostitution, and Thai culture being male-chauvinist. Their main findings predictably refer to women being other than men, Thai women being other than Western women, and so on, as well as to “hegemonic masculinity”, with an exaltation of a stressed heterosexual “hunter-like” representation of men in a patriarchal world. I *did* find all of this in Dexter Horn’s and Gods of Thailand’s websites, but tried to find also something else, not only these easy and obvious clichés.

Because, as I have stressed before, most of the prostitute supply in Thailand actually feeds local demand, it might be worth mentioning an interesting article by Kathleen M. MacQueen, Taweesak Nopkesorn, Michael D. Sweat, Yothin Sawaengdee, Timothy D. Mastro, and Bruce G. Weniger (1996), *Alcohol Consumption, Brothel Attendance, and Condom Use*. The authors research the relationship between alcohol consumption and condom use with sex workers in brothels among military conscripts in Northern Thailand through interviews. Some of the findings were quite remarkable for my thesis, especially in the comparison of the image Thai and Western men give of themselves; considering that Thai men even speak the language of the prostitutes they have sex with, one might expect the issue of ‘power’ coming up differently than it does. According to the researchers, military conscripts make use of alcohol before the sexual encounter in order to reduce inhibitions: social shyness with other men, sexual shyness with women, and concern about sexually transmitted diseases. Only when drunk, they lose their fears and can feel like “heroes”. For Thai men, “sex with commercial sex workers is culturally linked to alcohol consumption and male social interaction”; this picture is very different from what will come up in my analysis, where it will be their Western counterparts speaking.

As for NGOs specifically, one recent article resulted in being relevant for my research, namely Erin Michelle Kamler’s *Negotiating Narratives of Human Trafficking* from 2013. The researcher carries out interviews with anti-trafficking NGO employees in Thailand, stressing how they construct narratives (“stories”) about trafficking. The object of our researches is partially similar, as half of my research material is constituted by narratives written by NGO employees. The researcher identifies culture as a “space of safety” where employees can hide in their daily work; their own culture cannot help them steadily

judging the Thai Other and make a distinction us/them, reiterating hierarchical power. Kamler points out the brokerage role NGOs have in making the ‘Third World’ intelligible to the West, as well as the importance of these constructed narratives in terms of international policy-making. She distinguishes seven types of narrative, which will all come up in my analysis too, and part of which I will discuss more in depth later on: civilizing, moralizing, savior, othering, victim, orientalist, and modernization.

2.3 Theories

The concepts of power and discipline are central throughout my study, even though I do not always refer to them explicitly. My understanding of them has been inspired by Max Weber’s by now classical definitions:

Macht bedeutet jede Chance, innerhalb einer sozialen Beziehung den eigenen Willen auch gegen Widerstreben durchzusetzen, gleichviel worauf diese Chance beruht. [...]

Disziplin soll heißen die Chance, kraft eingeübter Einstellung für einen Befehl prompten, automatischen und schematischen Gehorsam bei einer angebbaren Vielheit von Menschen zu finden.⁵ (Weber 1972, 28)

The above mentioned concepts as defined by Weber are very significant for my analysis, and will often come up in the case of both sex tourists and NGOs. My whole analysis revolves around the idea of *power*, be it reality or illusion, over minds or bodies, deployed with selfish or allegedly altruistic intentions; *discipline* or the perception thereof is needed for power to be deployed or perceived. Yet, nothing is automatic in either power or discipline; their actualization is only a possibility, dependent on how the social situation between the actors actually develops. A rich, strong, or hierarchically high actor does not necessarily get her will through against a poorer, weaker or hierarchically lower actor, because also the latter actor has her power resources, and can refuse to place herself under discipline. All actors have an amount of power, and their chances to use it, as well as to oppose it. One reason that made me suspicious of both sex tourist and NGO narratives is that generally both parties concentrated on arguing about their own powerful position,

⁵ “Power” (*Macht*) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests. [...]

“Discipline” is the probability that by virtue of habituation a command will receive prompt and automatic obedience in stereotyped forms, on the part of a given group of persons. (Translation: Weber, Max (1978). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press.)

more than about the capabilities for power women might have. If eventually women get some sort of power (in the form of money or money making activities), it is just thanks to an external intervention. This of course is logical: power is a social play, where the actors exaggerate it, fake it, or hide it; in my research, I analyze how this power is represented (regardless of the reality) and *legitimized*.

Legitimization happens in different ways. The most apparent is probably intrinsic to the act of writing itself, and the consequent creation of information, of *knowledge*, which is made available to the public. In the analysis, I very often refer in this sense to the quite obscure work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Nelson & Grossberg 1988) with the help of her reader Ilan Kapoor (2004). Spivak's article *Can the subaltern speak?*, in Kapoor's words, stresses the "proclivity of dominant discourses and institutions to marginalize and disempower the Third world 'subaltern'"; the West steadily "speaks for" the developing world, in the sense that it politically represents it; it also "speaks about" it, *represents* it. These representations perpetrate and justify the hegemonic power of the North over the South, in an "us/them dichotomy in which we aid/develop/civilize/empower 'them'". In this process, the subaltern does not have a voice or she simply plays the role that she is expected to play, which further reinforces her silence. The Third World is therefore *produced* by us in "institutionally constricted" representations of it, which in turn become 'knowledge'. My whole research material fully constitutes representation of the Third World, and the above mentioned patterns will arise throughout the whole text.

This us/them dichotomy is based on the idea that the Other, or what Spivak calls 'subaltern', is somewhat different from us who are reading. Raewyn Connell, in her book *Southern Theory* (2007), addresses the issue, stressing how, in the field of social sciences, for decades there has been an idea of progress towards more and more advanced societies, the colonizing powers being the arriving point and the colonized running behind. More specifically, she underlines how sociologists during colonial times followed the notion that there is a "difference between the civilisation of the metropole and other cultures whose main features was their primitiveness" - what she calls "global difference". As will be shown in the analysis, this alleged difference also justifies the interventions that both object categories of my research deploy on women, giving their acts a hint of imperial features.

In my analysis, I will refer to the blurry concept of biopolitics. Michel Foucault defines it as the “entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques”; this power exerts a positive influence on life by having control over it (1976, 137, 141-142). In Thomas Lemke’s terms,

Foucault’s concept of biopolitics assumes the dissociation and abstraction of life from its concrete physical bearers. The objects of biopolitics are not singular human beings but their biological features aggregated on the level of populations. This procedure makes it possible to define norms, establish standards, and determine average values. As a result, “life” has become an independent, objective, and measurable factor, as well as a collective reality that can be epistemologically and practically separated from concrete living beings and the singularity of individual experience. (Lemke 2011, 5)

Specific fields of knowledge were born on this basis, such as statistics and demography; they make it possible to govern individuals and collectives “by practices of correction, exclusion, normalization, disciplining, therapeutics, and optimization”. Understanding and analyzing the ‘nature’ of a population makes it possible to know how to better influence it. As will come up in the analysis, this idea of ‘sampling’ the targets, i.e. women, understanding their ‘nature’ and the ‘nature’ of the Thai population in general is crucial for both sex tourists and NGOs when designing their behaviors/interventions: from a position of knowledge, they can decide what is better and/or *normal* for them. Again, power is based on the knowledge they themselves create.

As stated by Foucault, biopower is exerted both in the disciplining of individual bodies, making them more obedient and useful in/through prisons, the army, schools, and hospitals, and in the regulatory control of the population by the State itself. Moreover, the specific issue of sexuality plays a crucial role, as it lies somewhere between these two forms of exertion of biopower: it is connected to *bodies*, and therefore requires surveillance and discipline; it has reproductive purposes, and is therefore related to population control. (Lemke 2011, 37-38)

The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in his work *L’aperto. L’Uomo e l’Animale* (The Open: Man and Animal, 2002), stresses how in human history there has been a detachment between what he calls “animality” and “humanity”, animality being linked to the idea of body and more ‘terrain’ elements, and humanity being linked to the idea of a soul and more supernatural, divine, somewhat ‘sacred’ elements. According to Agamben, the use of language (and therefore communication) is intrinsic to the ‘human’ side (*ibid*, 35ff.). How

this relates to the Thai women described in my research material, I will discuss in the analysis.

Agamben seems to be quite fond of these black and white detachments, which also appear in his book *Homo Sacer* (1995). The philosopher analyzes the separation between the *nuda vita*, “bare life” (natural being) and the “political existence” (legal existence) within an individual. He also refers to the idea of *homines sacri*, namely those people who could be killed with impunity according to archaic Roman law; they had only physical existence with no political existence attached. Now, this applies to whoever is considered to be “out of the law” and therefore lives in a “state of exception”; prisoners in concentration camps were in this sense *homines sacri*, with the addition that in camps, “the state of exception begins to become the rule”. (Lemke 2011, 53ff, Agamben 1998) As we will see, the idea that the Other and the scene where the Other acts have *exceptional* features is present overtly in the case of Gods of Thailand and Dexter Horn and covertly in the case of ADRA and AAT; to which extent women are seen as *mulieres sacrae* or political beings will be also object of discussion. It is possible to draw a connection from the Agambenian *camp* to the idea of *field* developed by Pierre Bourdieu and elaborated by George Steinmetz (2008) in connection to the colonial state, as I will further discuss later; Thailand has never been a colony, but this does not mean that it has not been/is not being treated as such.

‘Thailand’ represents a camp/field because an important actor that should be there is supposedly missing or is not playing the role it should: the State with its laws and, above all, the enforcement thereof. This absence leaves other actors (in my specific case sex tourists and NGOs) with free hands; they can legitimately act like States themselves and their state-like features are often evident in their texts. Philip Abrams (1977) believes that the State as such does not exist, that it is just an idea embodied in a mystifying mask that prevents its subjects from seeing political practice as it actually is. It is a construct with a symbolic value that does nothing but concealing the reality of subjection behind its spurious legitimacy; in other words it simply legitimizes its own existence. Similarly, in the texts I analyze, the authors base their actions on a legitimacy they provide themselves with. And typical for ‘states’ is also the power NGOs and sex tourists deploy on their beneficiaries/prostitutes.

NGOs’ and sex tourists’ interventions are based on specific values, which transpire through their texts; framing these values constitutes a big part of my analysis. George

Lakoff's *Don't Think of an Elephant* (2004) has been essential in doing this. The purpose of his book is presenting how US conservatives think, and how progressives can constructively counter their arguments making use of and referring to traditional American values. He outlines two different models, which he calls 'strict father' (typical for the conservatives) and nurturant parent (typical for the progressives). I will present both models more in detail in the analysis, but for the moment it might be worth mentioning how, probably not so surprisingly, sex tourists tend to stick to more right wing and conservative values, whereas NGOs are more 'nurturant'.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 Dexter Horn

You can expect to easily get laid in Thailand seven nights a week, 365 days a year, with a girl in her early to mid twenties. The problem you will have is not finding girls to sleep with, but avoiding the thousands of willing women who will be begging you to take them home for an evening of pleasure, I kid you not. There are so many available women, it's staggering. Pattaya alone has over 250 active bars and a good 4,000 (four thousand) women to choose from. Most Thai girls are very passionate, extremely sensual and love to have sex. All bar girls will screw, about 50% will give head, and the occasional bar girl will spread open all three holes. Expect to have more sex with more women in a two week vacation than you've ever had in your entire life.

3.1.1 Plot

From the passage above, it can be easily understood how taking seriously sex tourists' texts is quite hard; their texts looked and still look to me more like parodies of themselves rather than genuine arguments where the authors speak their minds. It was hard to convince myself that Dexter Horn's and Gods of Thailand's plots are not satires making fun of some unwritten sex romance, but comedies describing the "recognition of a newborn society", to use Northrop Frye's words (1957, 192). However, many satiric aspects come up here and there, especially when it comes to the grotesque scene and its inhabitants. The actors in this comedy are sex tourists, Thai local authorities, locals in general, the girls, and those who lie on "mainstream media".

The *scene* in which the act takes place is crucial in understanding the plot. The author talks about 'Thailand' in general, but actually describes through his eyes a few streets in a few cities. The "third world country" 'Thailand' is for Dexter Horn the "sex capital of the world", "nothing less than sexual paradise" or, to choose a more exquisite wording, the "land of pussy". Exotic creatures with sometimes peculiar habits inhabit it: "girls sticking their bottles and dildo's (*sic!*) up every orifice", "exotic dancers performing topless and bottomless", girls giving "blow-jobs in stereo", women in "schoolgirl, dominatrix or nurse" outfits, gay boys, lady boys, or whatever might be needed to arouse you sexually. Many "falongs" (*sic!*), namely foreigners, also walk Thai streets, and they are assisted by anybody they meet on their way to make the best out of their time. In the "land of smile", all year round, thousands of "willing women" in their late teens or early twenties will beg you to take them home. Like at the supermarket, men can pick their girl based on the looks, price, and versatility; they are free to choose thanks to the tremendous availability of

products. Peter Chow-White (2006) points out how 'Thailand' is seen as a "marketplace for sex tourists" where the main concern is getting best quality for the lowest cost.

The rulers in this circus/store seem to be there only to make your stay even easier and more pleasant, by deploying their "tourist police" to "protect and watch out for the tourists"; standard police, on the other hand are "corrupt" and are bribed by "bars and brothels owners" for their silence and compliance. The State can in this sense be seen as a potential *counter-agent* deciding to be *co-agent* instead for the sake of money, treating you like a "king" together with the "public at large". The State willingly resolved to limit the power it is entitled to have and leave free hands to foreigners. Interestingly, this representation offered by Dexter Horn reflects quite well the actual attitude of the Thai government more or less subtly promoting prostitution and sex tourism starting from the late 1960s (Jeffrey 2002, 40).

The text has a time frame, but is timeless at the same time. Time only applies to Western men, who develop or decay as years go by, but does not apply to the *scene* of 'Thailand' and its native inhabitants. 'Thailand' is seen as an everlasting paradise, where girls change but are always the same: it looks as if they were doomed to disappear after their mid-twenties to be replaced by a new stock of younger and hungrier specimens. It is a place of peace and pleasure: peace of the mind in a safe, carefree world where everything is devoted to make you happy; pleasure of body thanks to compliant, erotic/exotic Others who cannot speak your language but know your body better than you do.

The description of this carnivalesque scene underlines the importance of the visual aspect in the representation of "paradise"; without direct references to the sexual intercourse itself, it is already made clear that the *abnormality* of this circus (or possibly even zoo) and its erotic/exotic Others are a big part of the experience. As Sanders points out when referring to female tourists "visually consuming" sex when having "voyeuristic behaviors" in ping-pong or erotic dance shows, gaze has a disciplining power. This is valid also for male tourists who, even when not directly engaged in sexual intercourses, still walk around this circus and enjoy its wonders. Being white (or Western in general, I assume) and staring, one is "materially, racially, politically and socially privileged", as s/he is put in the position of freely consuming the Other without being consumed her/himself. Commodification of bodies happens even out of the cash-for-sex logic, while taking a peek at the foreign, bizarre, *abnormal*, *uncivilized* Thai Other. (Sanders *et al.* 2010, 109ff)

The main agent acting in this scene is the sex tourist/hero. Like a romantic hero, he undergoes a process of personal growth and enlightenment, but with absurd elements. The only real *counter-agents* of his plot are American frigid female graduates, who follow foolish newborn conventions of emancipation, and do not sexually gratify males, still making little money if compared to Thai hookers; they are the ones making the US a world of darkness from which to escape. Men remaining in the States are doomed to be ‘Omphale archetypes’ (Frye 1957, 228), being ridiculously bullied and dominated by ridiculous women. Fleeing to Thailand, however, can turn males from naïve, scared children full of prejudices to mature and virile real men. Experience opens his eyes to *reality*, i.e. the truth and the fun of a life without limits.

The text pushes the reader to identify with the author and follow his path of enlightenment; as in the process of identification described by Burke (169b, 21-22), Dexter Horn is persuading his reader to join his group, sharing the common properties that make a man a real man. However, Dexter Horn, besides being sex tourist (or “resident”), is a writer, and as such he produces knowledge, which puts him in a higher position of power. In this sense, he is both a *consumer* of product-women as a customer, and a *producer* of knowledge about them as a writer; his rhetoric *does* “induce actions in other human agents”. Chow-White (2006) points out how information and communication technologies, in the case of sex tourism, deepen “social inequality and structures of difference”, by appropriating and perpetrating them. Stories about sex tourism are part of the discussion, while contributing to it.

It is assumed (or prescribed) that the final purpose of any Western, standard man is the achievement of a maximum degree of careless pleasure, and the procedure to follow is as easy as it can be: going to Thailand, finding a good bar or brothel, picking up the preferred girl/s, making sure she/they is/are old enough, take her home or to the hotel, having sex, paying if necessary, and moving on to next prey/s. There are tons of girls to choose from, craving for sex and money; one is just spoiled for choice. Succeeding is simple, and anybody can be a sex-hero, even *you*. Important is having the right *attitude*: self-confidence, carelessness, and positivity are key. If the achievement of pleasure is the purpose, girls are the agency. Or, in Dexter Horn’s impeccable portrayal, “the thousands of girls who will be begging you to take them home for a night of pleasure” are the agency.

However, girls are more than that. The girls' plot can be spotted in the text, and it explains much about the networks or *ratios*. In brief, according to Dexter Horn, girls used to live in "utter poverty", then they decided to enter the sex industry in order to "help support their families", and now they make more money (in relative terms) than their US graduate counter-parts. In this perspective, sex tourists with their monetary power become *agency*, "ticket[s] to a life of fame and fortune", as well as *heroes* saving them from the darkness of poverty. The girls are said to be driven by "greed" for money, but also by lust for sex. At first reading, the girls' and sex tourists' encounters culminate in a win-win situation.

Dexter Horn mentions "the virtues of Buddhism" as one of the reasons why Thai girls are so eager to have sex and satisfy *in toto* male foreigners' needs; however, there seems to be a *biological* component in it: "Bar girls simply love sex"! He seems to have quite a dated biopolitical perspective, in this sense. As described by Lemke (2012, 17), before Michel Foucault started having a voice in the issue in the 1970s, biopoliticians were of the idea that political behavior primarily has biological reasons, and that a study of this political behavior can be carried out only by an external observer. According to Dexter Horn, Thai girls naturally are "petite", naturally have "beautiful black, silk-like hair", naturally love sex and money, and most of them naturally are *not* motivated by "love and romance". As an external observer in/of the Thai circus/zoo, but involved in sexual intercourses with always different specimens he samples, our social scientist Dexter Horn arrives at the conclusion that this is the order of things, in 'Thailand'.

Despite all the fun, there is reminder of death, a *memento mori*. "Wheel chair Tom" and "Candy John" are there to recall us that the big joke of death is always behind the corner. If poor Tom is supposedly deceased, John had a case of tuberculosis and "may be HIV infected". However, death happens only if you really exaggerate, for instance by "inject[ing] [your] dick daily to get hard and [screw] with an open wound without a condom"; the necessity of not breaking these rules is seen as common sense. The sex tourist does not want to die or get sick because of his carelessness; he is a hero, but he needs to be judicious with his own body. AIDS is nothing to be worried about when normal precautions are taken care of, but going too far beyond the limit might be risky. One's own body and health constitute the only real limit, and the grotesque creatures Tom and John dancing their *danse macabre* are there to remind that to us. According to Frye (1957, 297-298), these *mementos* admonishing that we might well die tomorrow even though everything is now going great, are typically satiric elements. In the specific case of

Dexter Horn's narrative, these characters seem to be a recall for the sex tourist to keep his feet on the ground and not play around too much with his own body; he is giving his small contribution in the maintenance of the good health of his followers. This exaggerated 'freedom' in the Thai circus is indeed lacking some form of positive biopower taking good care of you with its "comprehensive regulations", as Foucault (1976, 137) describes it.

"Thailand is one of the safest countries to visit", but again, one has to follow specific, quite basic rules in order to safeguard his own "health and safety", as also Chow-White (2006) points out. For instance, even though there will be plenty of ladies on the market looking (or being) in their "mid to late teens", it is better to stay away from and not get any pictures of under-age girls printed in shops to avoid troubles with the police. It is easy to judge if it is advisable to proceed by simply taking a look at a woman's breasts or pubic hair. Moreover, one should compensate the girls for their services, not "force himself upon any girls", not import narcotics, and should better register his "firearms and ammunition". Wisely avoiding the word "death" when talking about sex-related issues (Wheel Chair Tom just "passed away"), the term comes up only when discussing the risks related to the import of narcotics, which is punishable by execution; when breaking these rules, the smiling, helpful and corrupt state might turn into a monster. Interestingly, one should try to be 'safe' from the same entity which is there to assist and protect him.

Another norm the sex tourist needs to follow is related to the choice of their guides, of those they should listen to and believe in. "Mainstream media" are not credible and only portray "myths", not "reality". According to them, bar girls are "prostituted children who are helpless victims of poverty", and AIDS is extremely "pervasive". NGO narratives obviously fit into this, and therefore *lie*. Dexter Horn with his first-hand experience and knowledge, however, is there to tell us that this is not the case: he is the good shepherd that the disciplined, pleasure-seeking masses of males have to follow, if they really want to reach paradise. In the Thai circus, life and rules are easy, and the abundance, *redundancy* of girls makes rivalry unnecessary; every sheep will have his reward.

3.1.2 Beyond the Plot

The scene portrayed by Dexter Horn is fabulous, surreal and *exceptional*. Coming to Dexter Horn's 'Thailand' means entering the field in a Bourdieuan sense: the country is seen as a place where "ethnographic stereotypes are perpetuated" (Steinmetz 2008), where both "colonizers", namely sex tourists, and "colonized", namely "Thai girls" or more

generally the society at large, police and State included, are supposed to play their specific role. Thailand was never formally colonized, but is part of the “third world” in Dexter Horn’s eyes, and this contributes to the legitimization of his interventions.

The author tries to persuade the reader that the roles he attributes to the different characters of his stories are actually set by Thai society, religion and, apparently, *genetics*. Nonetheless, having the power to establish knowledge by literally writing his own and other people’s stories, in addition to having the financial power Thai people seem to lack, a doubt might be cast whether it is really he who is actually deciding who should do what in his own plot. The Thailand wanted and portrayed by Dexter Horn has “its own specific symbolic capital, its own specific stakes of competition”, and sovereignty is in the hands of a foreign power imposing a rule of difference over its targets. (*ibid*, 591) Therefore, to use Ilan Kapoor’s words (2004), Thailand is a place of “cultural difference” where cultural (and sexual?) imperialism is legitimate.

In the Thailand wanted and portrayed by Dexter Horn, the role played by the State is dual and fuzzy. On the one hand, it is embodied in a corrupt, smiley cop happy to be bribed, and accompanying and supporting the sex tourist in his adventures. On the other hand, it has the power to punish, to execute, if the few rules it actually enforces are broken; the idea of *law* is somewhat present, but it is easy not to have trouble with it, as *law* and *law enforcement* do not go hand in hand. In general, the few *enforced rules* are not going to bother the sex tourist’s daily activities, but they might, for instance if he has sex with under-age girls. In this case, in order not to run the risk, a simple look a girl’s breast is enough to establish if it is safe to proceed with the operation. Like a Foucauldian biopolitician, even at this apparently very small scale, the foreigner coming to Thailand for sex finds himself in a position of “knowledge and power” allowing him to literally “measure” the biological features of his objects of biopolitical intervention. He sets the rules for his own population, most likely foreign sex tourists more than men in general, and for the population on which he intervenes, that is to say Thai girls. (Lemke 2012, 5) He knows; therefore, he has got the power. Or, is it vice versa?

Dexter Horn’s website does obviously not constitute an academic environment. However, the same process of knowledge production described by Kapoor (2004, 633) reading Spivak takes place also in this website, with similar patterns as in a university setting. He claims, “Subaltern/women tell stories, (male) researchers theorise for them”. On the one

hand, the Thai *field* represents a data storage where to gather information, where the sampling of girls and Thai people in general happens; on the other hand, Western men's world analysis is the center. This steady practice of narration cannot help being biased and silencing the subalterns. Dexter Horn's production mirrors the same old paradigms of Western imperialism.

According to Dexter Horn, 'Thailand' *scene* is "paradise"; in turn, the US must be a "hell" from which to escape. As Carr (2010, 4-5) emphasizes, there is a clear connection between tourism and leisure, being the latter conceptualized as a "time, activity, and state of mind that is differentiated from 'work' in that it entails an activity that is relatively freely undertaken primarily for purposes of pleasure that is internally rewarding to the individual". In the leisure, non-work environment, individuals feel unrestrained to carry out actions that would not be acceptable in their everyday settings, thanks to the grasp of freedom they perceive. These actions also and especially involve sex and sexually related behaviors. Both Smith (2010) and Carr (2010) refer to the idea of 'escape' from one's own home country, with its boundaries, constraints, norms, and gender relations; as a tourist, one can get rid of him- or herself, adopting a new, more exciting identity. In this context, the phenomenon of sex tourism is the embodiment of the pursuit of leisure in exotic environments.

The monetary power Dexter Horn has even allows him to make this 'escape' permanent, for ever getting rid of all American constraints. Taking a look at the abstraction given by him about his squalid North-American counter-reality, it can be said that through his eyes that represents the *rule*. In contrast to 'Thailand', in the States women have rules. Getting laid takes time and effort, because of some pointless norms imposed by a society that is not as compliant as the author would like it to be. If there are rules or, *de facto*, if rules cannot be set like in the 'colonial state', the sex tourist does not feel like a real man, and his life is nothing but a banal and frustrating search for a moment of pleasure he is not likely to find. Foucault points out how in the history of the West, the connection between power and sex has always been negative, with power excluding, refusing, and rejecting sex. Besides, power decides when and how sex is licit or illicit, allowed or forbidden, and when prohibiting or censoring it. (Foucault 1976, 83-85) In the USA described by Dexter Horn, this kind of sexually repressive and comprehensive power seems to be present behind the actions of the indigenous ladies, power that is supposedly lacking in 'Thailand'.

In other words, it can be said that the monetary power a man acquires in the States can be turned into “real power” in Thailand; it is a power that goes beyond the mere money-pleasure exchange, and the author needs to defend it and legitimize it. In other words, the sex tourist is portrayed as a real man willing to escape a world of boredom where rules are already set in favor of a world where rules are instead pared to the bone, where rules can actually be set. As Chow-White (2004) spells out, this is a process of “re-masculinization”: as men perceive a “crisis” in their home country due to women’s emancipation, they need to reclaim their lost position of power in a world where women are in their right, submitted place.

In his book *Don’t Think of an Elephant*, in one chapter, Lakoff (2004, 7ff), imagines and describes the world the US-American right wing is pursuing. Interestingly, this world is partially mirrored in the representation of the boring American life given by sex tourists, and partially in the Thai circus. Lakoff describes what he calls the “strict father” model, which corresponds to the conservative worldview. It is a model based on obedience, discipline, a punishment/reward system, and the pursuing of self-interest; all this can only work if one has a moral authority to follow, a “strict father” indeed. Clearly, Dexter Horn is taking with him to ‘Thailand’ his strongly North-American conservative mindset, while leaving behind the rules this same mindset imposes.

Lakoff (2004, 81ff) outlines how conservatives have a God to whom to refer, who is ‘powerful’ and who rewards virtue and a specific form of morality with power. The idea of God as the “original strict father” is good and necessary, as it perpetuates and legitimizes existing hierarchies, which in turn legitimize power. God sets the rules that the good Christian should follow with *discipline*, which is in turn deeply connected to the conservative idea of ‘morality’. For the sex tourist, on the other hand, religion in the States (i.e. Christianity), or some sort of religious culture, seems to constitute a problem, as it apparently prevents women from giving up to their sexual impulses as easily as they should; on the contrary, Buddhism in Thailand leaves (quite literally) free hands to girls, or even *pushes* them to gratify men. In such an environment, it is easy for sex tourists to become *gods* themselves, setting their own rules - in a cheap escape from discipline. Even the use of the term “sexual *paradise*” gains a new meaning in this perspective. This escape from discipline does not mean that Dexter Horn does not like the concept; on the contrary, he is now happy to be able to be the one disciplining forces. The kind of discipline he deploys is therefore created in the West and merely ‘exported’ to ‘Thailand’; there is a

strong resemblance to what happened during colonial times, when “the discipline was created [in] the urban and cultural centres of the major imperial powers” (Connell 2007, 9). The sex tourist becomes in this sense some sort of new colonizer applying Western concepts to (in his perspective) a less civilized, ‘different’ world’.

According to Lakoff (2004, 81-88), in the conservative perspective, Western culture is above non-Western culture, whites are above non-whites, and men are above women, among others. In Dexter Horn’s case, unfortunately for American men, it looks as if American women decided not to feel as subdued as they should. Therefore, sex tourists do nothing but moving to a world where their Western, white *male* natural superiority can be freely exercised. Thai (virtually inexistent) government is also going by conservative rules, being constrained to play a minimal role, and leaving as much room as possible to individual (Western) freedom. Lakoff also outlines how, in the conservative perspective, wealthy people are the good people; the poor are poor because they lack discipline, and therefore deserve to serve the wealthier. According to this same logic, Thai girls who do not enter the profitable sex industry deserve to stay poor, American graduates who prefer pursuing a career instead of providing their male counter-parts with sexual pleasure deserve not to make much money, and Thai hookers deserve to sexually serve American men because the latter have more monetary power. Rich US men are in this sense ‘investing’ in ‘Thailand’, giving jobs to poorer people and educating, ‘disciplining’ them at the same time.

Coming back to girls... The portrayal of sex workers given by Dexter Horn is rich in dualities, and this implies immanent contradictions. The most apparent duality refers to the double face of the girls, being extremely sweet, but also extremely cunning. This duality reflects *in toto* one of the predominant themes identified by Peter Chow-White (2006) in sex tourism-related websites, namely the “‘packed out’ and greedy” nature of sex workers. He points out that they are seen as both objects of admiration to admire and objects of suspicion not to be trusted; this picture corresponds to that of local women given by Westerners during colonial conquests, when women were fascinating, desirable, but also greedy, tricky and manipulative.

Secondly, it can be noticed how, even within the same paragraph, the author claims at times that hookers are merely driven by the desire of making money, at times by the desire of getting pleasure - always being “sweet”, but alienated from what Dexter Horn calls

“love”. On the one hand, Dexter Horn is probably trying to convince his readers (and himself?) that girls can be freely used for the Westerner’s own pleasure without regrets or second thoughts, as they are just pursuing money. On the other hand, he wants to stress his sexual skills and capabilities of providing pleasure. In this sense, he is legitimizing his behavior as a money provider, while re-affirming again his masculinity as a pleasure provider.

Thirdly, there is an obvious contradiction between “need” and “greed”. More precisely, Dexter Horn claims that “the vast majority [of the prostitutes] are mature adults who have willingly continued to work in the sex industry not out of need, but *out of greed*” (emphasis added), and that girls see men as a “ticket to fame and fortune”. Nonetheless, only a few lines above, he mentions that most women become prostitutes in order to feed their families and find a way out of poverty. Is this *greed* or *need*? Especially this last duality gives a glimpse of the hell behind Dexter Horn’s paradise, of the local sexual hell behind the foreign sexual paradise. The life of those US female graduates might not look so dull and futile anymore, if compared to this.

Dexter Horn also says, “Few of them [Thai hookers] speak English, but most of them mastered the line, [Lets] Go (*sic!*) [to your] hotel [to have sex]...How much you pay me?”” Simply said, the communication between sex tourists and Thai hookers cannot go much beyond the mere practicalities of the sex exchange - which is more than enough, apparently, as girls are already familiar with the “sexual needs of the foreigner” and do not need to be instructed. Agamben writes that without language “man is not man” (2004, 34ff.), and I can assume that he also means that without language “woman is not woman”. Girls are seen as almost “Sprachloser Urmenschen”, clearly human with their greedy desires, but apparently a step behind in evolution, in their incapability of speaking the language of the civilized people despite their capability to satisfy them sexually. Of course it is the uneducated sex tourist who is in a foreign land and not able to speak even one word of the local civilized language, but in his narrative it is the Other who is turned into the position of the uncivilized.

In the Thai circus portrayed by Dexter Horn (namely the few roads haunted by sex tourists), the great majority of women as well as the society at large seem to have *extraordinary* features, so much different than what the Western man is used to having. But it is not limited to this: in his ‘Thailand’, Dexter Horn can do what would not be socially,

culturally or even *legally* allowed in his own country, or anywhere else. The extraordinary is the standard; when walking in this wonderland, the sex tourist recognizes that everything is out of the ordinary, but eventually he will come to grips with the fact that this is the *rule*. This picture of 'Thailand' resembles very closely to the idea of 'camp' developed by Agamben, namely "*the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule*" [emphasis in the original] (Agamben 1998, 168ff). Although Agamben especially refers to the more extreme case of concentration camps, I think that Dexter Horn's Thailand has much in common with it. The sex tourist is free to set his own laws, being allowed to do (almost) anything; he lives in a 'state of impunity', in a "piece of land placed outside the normal juridical order", with 'normal' meaning US-like, civilized. In his 'Thailand', he might not kill or deal drugs, but can give vent to his wildest sexual perversions with as many women as he wants, without fear of consequences from any sides. Girls are disposable pieces of pleasure, and this is perfectly fine, as they live "out of the law". Like Agamben (*ibid*, 11), we can use Carl Schmitt's definition of sovereignty: "Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception". Deciding on the general state of exception of Thai girls is Dexter Horn himself (or possibly even of the society at large); by depicting this 'Thailand', he is living his illusion of power. A parallel can here be drawn with the picture American soldiers in the 1970s had of Thai women: they were seen as "amoral", because prostitution and cohabitation were perfectly acceptable for them (Jeffrey 2002, 38). Amoral is abnormal, exceptional, but for that reason perfectly fitting with the exceptional conditions of the 'camp'.

Dexter Horn creates an abstraction of two populations (US men and Thai girls), both of them with specific, standard features. Even though "real (US) men" and "sweet Thai women" are at the very center of the plot, they are parts of bigger collective groups, where individual features do not really matter. US Men are all the same, they have the same needs, and they obviously and necessarily fall in love with Thai women. Thai women even have specific standard *physical* features that make them exotic and racialized, as also Chow-White points out (2006). However, individuals might have some features making them different from the other members of their own population and putting them in some sort of sub-categories, but the substance is the same. The few distinguishing elements Dexter Horn enumerates refer for instance to how many "holes" Thai hookers will be eager to offer to the sex tourist, or the specific sexual perversions a Western man might have.

By *sampling* Thai sex workers, which in his words constitute 10% of the female population of the country, Dexter Horn strives to get some form of control over them. He produces his own sovereign power by creating the abstraction of a biopolitical body (Lemke 2012, 54), which embraces his whole ‘Thailand’ scene/circus. Thai girls might have some form of individuality, but at the end of the day, they are all the same; having one per night as a body-specimen means having all of them at the same time, the whole *species* of Thai girls satisfying him sexually. Foucault (1976, 155) writes, “Sex is the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations and pleasures”; having sex with one girl, therefore also somewhat means having the illusion of disciplining the *whole* Thai body, and possibly the *whole* world female population, which is again subdued as it should be.

Girls have plenty of space in the text, but the only voice they are given are a couple of sentences in broken English, and a few reported statements barely confirming what Dexter Horn says. Similarly, all other actors are described but promptly put to silence. Dexter Horn’s ‘Thailand’ is seen as part of the Third World, of that world about which and for which it is so easy to speak. In the same way the West in general steadily does with the ‘Third World’ as Spivak (Kapoor 2004, 628) describes, sex tourists *represent* Thailand, and in particular Thai women, in two different ways. On the one hand, they *speak for* them “in the sense of political representation”; in other words, by claiming that these ladies actually enjoy being prostitutes, they become representatives for the poor unheard voices of Thai girls against the nasty NGOs putting them to silence. On the other hand, they *speak about, re-present* them, by portraying them as they “really [are] or desire” to be; girls want to be seen as free creatures enjoying sex, as it apparently will only bring them more money. This way, they end up *silencing* this *subaltern* group, justifying the “power and domination” that Western men have over it. It cannot really be established whether the sex tourist actually *has* power over the girls with whom he has sex; what is clear is that he aims at representing that kind of relationship in his texts. Dexter Horn does have a form of power, which is the power of producing knowledge the way he prefers.

In his article *The Difficulty of Studying the State*, Abrams claims (1977, 77), “mystification is the central mode of subjection” and, “of course, what is legitimated, insofar as it is legitimated, real power”. In his opinion, “moral regulation[,] is [...] surely to participate in the mystification which is the vital point of the construction of the state”. Dexter Horn is

not a State, but acts in a scene where the State does not seem to exist; he sort of becomes a State himself, by *mystifying* reality and imposing his own moral standard.

3.2 Gods of Thailand

This question has been asked by many men who have visited the wonderful country of Thailand:

What makes it so easy to sleep with Thai girls on the first night?

In fact, during my first year in Thailand, I asked this question to an American expat that's been living in Thailand for over 15 years. And to this day I will never forget his answer:

“Sex to a Thai girl is like taking a shit. It's just something they do. There is rarely any emotional attachment involved.”

3.2.1 Plot

The above-quoted fine piece of literature is emblematic for Gods of Thailand's texts, and says much about the author's style and attitude. Despite the much higher amount of articles in his website, the narrative and patterns resemble very closely to those of Dexter Horn's. In my analysis, I focused on the differences and additional elements in order not to be repetitive. Again, the plot is a comedy hidden behind what looked to me and my biased disgust as satiric elements. The characters playing a role here are the author himself, his fellows, different categories of girls, Thai men, local authorities, and other annoying foreigners.

In this case, I find it more appropriate to start with a brief description of the way Seven, our hero as well as author of the articles, represents himself. He comes from the US, and has been living in Thailand for five years. He does not speak Thai, just the few words necessary to pick up “good girls” and take them to bed. Even though for research purposes he might have visited a couple of ladyboy clubs, “it's no secret” that he's not “a big fan of ladyboys”. He usually does not look for sex “gurus” to ask for advice, as he gets the information first-hand, by directly testing all services provided (and quite enjoying it). He does not directly refer to his lovemaking capabilities (or capacity), but when complaining about the small size of Thai condoms, he is obviously giving his reader a hint. He wants to “reach for the stars” when it comes to women hunting, and underlines how he only belongs to that 1% of the population who aims that high. In his presentation, Seven describes himself as “infamous”, giving himself villain-like features and underlining how he is nothing like a positive hero. He does not hide the fact that he is steadily lying to the girls he wants to get, and even gives hints on how to trick them (“No sex, just cuddle”).

Moreover, as I will describe more in depth later, he is very happy to be in a lawless world, where he can do whatever he wants without ever having consequences.

A couple of times some kind of regard for the girls' past and conditions comes up, but it tends to be short and in brackets (i.e. "For those of you who are curious on how much the girl actually makes off this") - he really wants to look as careless and carefree as possible. Seven has his own dignity as a "real man" and does not like it when other foreign men throw mud at the image people like him pursue; he deeply despises those "idiot English and Australians on their "gap year" who get loud, stupidly drunk, eventually throwing up in public, and making foreigners look bad". Here and there in his articles, Seven's own story comes up. He shares with his readers even the most "humiliating" and "embarrassing" moments, to make it easier for them to identify with him. When he first came to Thailand, he had no idea how sex trade worked over there, and the excessive attentions given by women would make him turn "bright red": he was a naïve, quite cute child still to be initiated to Thai wonders. His stories are colorful, and while making fun of his older self, he makes fun of the newcomers. He represents himself as a guide to follow, having gone through all the necessary steps to become a "God". These steps are made clear in the website: "Thailand Basics, Join The Elite, Hack Thailand, Become a God". Clearly, in order to "join the elite", one has to pay...

Seven's narrative is perfectly reflected in the (in my opinion) shallow analysis of Hobbs *et al.* in the article *Advertising Phuket's Nightlife on the Internet* (Hobbs *et al.* 2011). The authors describe the "patriarchal" and "exotic" Thailand sketched by sex tourists on the internet, where local authorities are corrupt, religion and institutions compliant, and local culture male-chauvinist. According to them, Western men can there re-find their masculinity, which went lost somewhere in the more emancipated US. Ladyboys are parodized for their lack of masculinity, girls do not need to talk and just have sex, and hyper heterosexual Western men are free to hunt their exotic and greedy preys having sex with no strings attached (such as emotions). Interestingly, Seven would most likely be happy to agree with all this, as this is exactly what he says, but there is so much more beyond it.

The website is "The Real Man Guide to Sex in Thailand" and is "dedicated to teaching men how to have the best time in Thailand without the bullshit" by offering "exclusive advice". The choice of the website name, "Gods of Thailand", is remarkably appropriate;

Seven provides plenty of step-by-step instructions in order for other Western men like him to become gods. The religious-like symbolism also comes up when, at the end of almost every article, Seven wishes his readers, “Enjoy Paradise!”. Taking a look at Lakoff’s description of God from the point of view of conservatives can be quite interesting, as it disturbingly resembles that of the foreign man in Thailand given by Seven, or, more specifically, the picture Seven gives of himself.

God is all good and powerful, at the top of the natural hierarchy in which morality is linked with power. God wants good people to be in charge. Virtue is to be rewarded with power. God therefore wants a hierarchical society in which there are moral authorities who should be obeyed. God makes laws-commandments-defining right and wrong. One must have discipline to follow God’s commandments. [...]. Christ, as savior, gives sinners a second chance - a chance to be born again and be obedient to God’s commandments this time around. (Lakoff 2004, 81-83)

Seven surely is good, in his being infamous, and he surely is powerful, in being able to do whatever comes to his capricious mind. Western men craving for fun are the good people he wants in power, as their own existence perpetrates the amazing ‘Thailand’ he lives in (not to talk about all the money these guys shell out to access the VIP section of his website). He sets the rules, and delegates his disciples to spread his Word and apply it in his Reign. He might not have the power to punish those who do not follow his rules, but sexual reward is guaranteed to those following the rules. Thailand’s ‘Paradise’ is the sinners’ second chance, making redemption from the boring US possible. The rise of the sex tourist to the status of (semi-)God is a process of step-by-step revelation of how to get rid of the “bullshit”, constituted by wasted time, prejudices, wrong assumptions, and failed negotiations.

However odd this might sound, his *heroines* are the sex-tourists-to-be (Gods of Thailand’s readers), and definitely not Thai girls, who represent the *agency* instead. The readers are present basically in all Seven’s articles, when he is talking to them with appealing expressions (such as “I kid you not”) or inviting them to trust him. Whoever is reading is a bit of a loser in comparison to Seven, and therefore needs his help. Western men are the ones needed to be saved from plenty of cruel *counter-agents*, such as horrible Western women not knowing where their place in society should be, tricky ladyboys, scams, “sucky” clubs, annoying-jealous-clingy-violent Thai “girlfriends”, jealous vindictive Thai men, and (in an extremely limited amount of situations) the Thai state. These actors, in Frye’s words, constitute the “humorous blocking characters” with their funny, exaggerated features, who are typical for comedies (1957, 172). Like a good shepherd, Seven guides

hand-in-hand his sex-tourist herd through Thai wonders, protecting it from the evil but ridiculous enemies all around. These weird-looking and quite awkward dragons are easy to be defeated; one just needs to know *how*.

As in Dexter Horn's case, the 'Thailand' described in Gods of Thailand is limited to what the average Westerner interested in sex will want to visit, which is for sure not a big percentage of the whole country. Like I said before, Seven ends each of his articles with a voluptuous "Enjoy paradise". And 'paradise' is probably the most appropriate word to describe Gods of Thailand's *scene*, at least from the point of view of a Western man interested in cheap sex overseas. The main factors turning Thailand into a heaven on Earth are the presence of "stunning women all over the place" and the easiness with which one can have sex with any of them; "beautiful women" and "easy" are the key-words. In other words, "Thailand is a paradise which has something for everyone".

Seven bluntly states, "The country of Thailand is prostitution driven"; and this seems to be quite obvious, given his personal picture of what *he* calls 'Thailand'. As in Dexter Horn, the sex tourist, immediately after landing, will be catapulted into a zoo full of wonders. There is a massive amount of hot women roaming around, and one will just feel like having all of them. Again, the visual component plays a major role, making the sexual intercourse itself only "part of the experience". In the many bars and "GoGo clubs" available, one can assist to erotic, spanking, pingpong, dance, and shower shows. To give an idea of what really arouses Seven, his colorful description of a "hot tube" with "one or two completely nude women soaping up and getting freaky" should suffice.

'Thailand' is a huge mall, with plenty of beautiful, disposable products from which to choose; one is free to decide what to do with them, according to the mood of the moment, as well as to the quality and features of the product itself. Just to give a couple of examples, in some clubs, "hot naked Thai women [are] packed on the two stages. You point at the one you like, she joins you for a drink, and *you can decide* if you want to fuck her or just enjoy having her on your lap" [emphasis added]. Also, if you want to "reserve" a girl from an escort agency, you have to remember that "You can order *whatever* you want"! This not so adorable picture of meat displayed on a supermarket's shelves makes it hard for the reader to see anything in these girls beside their bodies. Looking at a person as a disposable, brainless piece of pleasure-providing flesh and publicly discussing it would probably be socially not so acceptable in the States; however, this becomes possible in

'Thailand'. Ara Wilson (2004) describes the reality of GoGo bars in different, probably academically more acceptable terms, but giving a similar picture. She underlines the customer-oriented nature of such places, and the fact that they sell "spectacle and fantasy, affection and flattery, and access to an array of available women". However she also goes beyond the shallow surface of what *appears* to the sex tourist, and I will get back to this later in the analysis.

When it comes to health, unlike Dexter Horn, Seven seems to recognize that AIDS might be an issue, and points out that "wearing a Thai condom is much better than no condom". He recommends bringing your own from some more civilized country, as Thai condoms apparently are too tiny for Western standards, they are thick and they break; they might spoil your experience. Related to health is the issue of safety. Seven underlines multiple times the safety of the country: *inter alia*, "Thailand is one of the safest countries I've ever visited", "I feel safer walking down the streets of Bangkok at 3am than I ever would in any major American city", and "Never I have felt threatened in Thailand". As Chow-White (2006) points out, being safe and healthy is part of the tourist experience in general, and this obviously applies to sex tourists too; Seven also provides us with some useful piece of travel advice. And again, Seven stresses how Thailand is *different*.

Linked to safety is the rule of law, about which Seven is quite straightforward:

In this country you can do whatever the hell you want. You can get excessively drunk at inappropriate times, disregard social norms, indulge every whim, ignore the consequences of your actions and sleep with more women than is safe or even reasonable. It is truly the country of wonders.

And:

In this country you can get away with just about anything and face little consequences.

However, there are "2 unbreakable laws" one has to follow "at all costs". Firstly, a foreigner should better not get caught buying or transporting drugs, because the bribe to give to the police is not nuts, and the risk of going to jail still very high. Secondly, one should absolutely not "fuck" with the Thais, by stealing their girlfriends, getting into fights, or getting involved with a Thai dispute. For both cases, Seven provides concrete examples. It is probably worth pointing out how Seven *does* mention "social norms". In his perspective, social norms made by others can be *disregarded* as long as their infringement does not bring any bad consequences. However, in a very limited amount of cases,

disregarding social norms *does* affect one's carefree stay in Thailand; only then the sex tourist should *regard* them.

In the same way as Dexter Horn does, Seven draws a quite obvious comparison between the United States and Thailand, and shows off broad knowledge regarding the different values the two countries have, them being based on different religious beliefs. Christianity and the pretentious, boring and monogamous “codes of morality” it imposes is compared to Buddhism, where sex is not believed to be “such an awful sin”. Furthermore, the apparently distorted and limited American morality forces a man to go on at least three dates with a woman (“excluding religious fanatics”) before managing to get them laid. On the other hand, in Thailand this *rule* does not exist, and “the fact of the matter is, you can sleep with almost any Thai girl on the first date”. It is “so fucking easy”! Van Esterik (2000) refers to the role played by Buddhism in Thai sex trade. She states that, as such, prostitution has negative karmic consequences, but this is balanced out by the fact that prostitution is need-driven; money is necessary in order to achieve “food, clothing, lodging, and medicine”, the four basic supporting conditions of life. In other words, prostitution is seen as neutral for one's karma as it is poverty pushing to enter the sex trade. Having sex might not be such “an awful sin”, but doing it for money is not exactly desirable from a Buddhist point of view. This contradiction is also reflected on by Wilson (2004): women often enter the sex trade because they are expected to do their duty as good daughters in supporting their families, but they are stigmatized for being prostitutes.

What clearly comes up from the text is that lack of rules means “wonder”, because this way *you* can be the one setting them. Or, even more conveniently, you can simply follow the rules set by Seven! His whole website has a step-by-step approach, full of “guides” enumerating the moves one should make in order to achieve a specific goal. Gods of Thailand constitutes law; knowing Seven's commandments is more than enough to have a blast in ‘Thailand’.

Also in the case of Gods of Thailand the story seems to be timeless. Nothing changed during years: girls stay easy, and ‘Thailand’ stays paradise. There is some form of time when it comes to the stories of the girls. Once they grow up, they can decide whether to choose a normal, poor and squalid life, or enter the shiny sex industry. Furthermore, the issue of time comes up again when Seven compares the Christian and the Buddhist values

of one thousand years ago: Thai girls have been easy throughout centuries, unlike their Western counterparts.

A great deal of space in the website is dedicated to the *agency*. Seven distinguishes many different categories of Thai girls, with a larger classification of “good girls” versus “no-good girls”. Van Esterik (2000) underlines the fact that Thai culture also constructs two categories of women. For Thai men, “good” women are those meant for marriage and procreation, “bad” women for other, merely sexual purposes; the prostitute is therefore the embodiment of the “bad woman”. Interestingly, for our American Seven, all Thai women seem to be meant for sexual purposes; the difference between being good or bad is just related to the presence or absence of the price label attached to the sexual intercourse: good girls are for free, no-good girls require a payment.

Good girls are those girls who will not ask for money after having sex. They tend to be harder to get, especially the “youngest and cutest”, but they still are easy. “They go out to party because they want to have fun”, and if you give them fun, they will be happy. They are described as very naïve, and following some basic rules based on a bunch of lies, it is simple to take them home for some “cuddles”. Among “good girls”, Seven “loves” the sexy and young college girls, who are aged 18-23, because of their “very sexy school uniform which makes [his] heart melt and [his] dick hard”. “Pulling college pussy” is apparently easy by online dating, in a few Bangkok popular roads, and in shopping malls. Another category of good girls are the “giks”, namely “fuck buddies” who will entertain you for free and without commitment.

There are many categories of “no-good” girls, namely those girls who will ask for money after sex; as Seven highlights, “the art of “whoring” in Thailand is amazing”. Some of these categories are also described by Wilson (2004), which confirms how this setting is somewhat institutionalized in sex tourism destinations. *Freelancers* are not associated to any bars or clubs, and their prices vary greatly, also depending on how much they like you. *Bar girls* are affiliated to a bar, and you have to pay a fee in order to take them home; they get a percentage on this fee, on the drinks you buy for them, and the whole amount for the sexual service, because “first and foremost” they are prostitutes. If you want to “buy her out of the bar” because “she is different”, you just have to pay a larger amount to the bar, and she will not have to return working there. Seven underlines, “Note, she is not necessarily a slave to the bar”, she just made an agreement. *GoGo dancers* are “hardcore

professionals” usually asking for a “flat fee”. *Escort girls* are more costly, but will probably give you the best experience, as they are “trained to provide professional service” and to take “great care of their clients”. *Coyote girls* are not “technically hookers”, are (usually) not available for sex and “do not get completely nude” during shows.

Finally, Seven describes two more specific categories, namely *Thai models* and *hi-society women*. The former category is easy to get for free, as these girls tend to be very rich, and just “want to have a good time, feel loved, and not be lonely”. With hi-society women, it is a different story, as you need to have really good Thai connections to get “educated” and “wealthy” women, who might even be royals! However, there is another group of which Seven is not a big fan (and likes to underline it multiple times), namely *ladyboys*, who can be tricky and mischievous if you are a newcomer to Thailand. There is an interesting great variety of them: tall or short, with or without “dicks”, and with or without fake breasts.

However, some features are common to all Thai girls. For instance, “Just like everywhere else in the world, Thai girls like to meet up with their friends at Malls”. Thai girls “hate to be alone”, do not like facial hair, and are “trained from an early age that sex is just... sex”. Thai girls are said not to feel love or “emotional attachment” when they have sex, they just enjoy - but they (mysteriously) still get “clingy and VERY jealous”. They are not monogamous; they can fool up to 20 foreign men just to get money out of their pockets, even via Skype. Girls “are not slaves”; they are totally free to choose what to do with their money and with their bodies. According to the place, the performance, and the experience girls have different prices. Girls going with foreigners are rich and cunning, they know how to have fun and make money at the same time. On the other hand, the girls who decided not to enter this world live a horrible life. Some are beaten by their drunken husbands, some are working for peanuts in some factory in Bangkok, and some are green with envy when they see their older sisters making a lot of money out of prostitution.

When describing how to manage “juggling multiple Thai girlfriends at once”, some other features apparently common to the whole Thai female population come up. For instance, if your Thai girlfriend finds out that you sleep around, “she’ll just go and fuck other guys” because “Thai girls will ALWAYS try to get even one way or the other”. Besides, “Thai girls will ALWAYS look at your phone when you are sleeping or passed drunk”. However, the advantages of “dating” a Thai woman are several, especially when compared to the nightmare of dating a Western lady.

Having a GF here is not the same as having a GF back in America or Europe. Here girlfriends aren't someone that you see a couple of times a week then move-in with after a few months. In Thailand they are basically your wife. [...] It's a fact that Thai women know how to take care of their men on levels that western women are far too lazy for.

Besides, Thai girlfriends do the household without being asked, offer "unlimited sex, blowjobs, and massages" unlike their Western (lazy) counterparts. They know what their place in society as women should be.

Nonetheless, this cannot last forever, as in Thailand women are too hot and sex too easy, and resisting them for a Western man seems to be impossible. Seven admits, "I have never met one man in Thailand who has not cheated on his Thai girlfriend or wife". But if this Thai girlfriend or wife finds out that you are having sex with somebody else, she will become extremely dangerous, getting demon-like features: you might wake up one day with a "very angry girl standing barely 5 feet tall beating the shit out of you with high heels" "screaming like a mad woman", and you might end up with plenty of broken furniture in your apartment. Seven confesses being involved in "physical [violent] encounters due to crazy ex-girlfriends". But well, it is still easy to trick them and stay safe: Seven recommends not calling any Thai girls "girlfriend", but just "special friend". And, last but not least, one should never forget that "this is Thailand, if she doesn't like your style or if you fuck up...find a new one and try again!"

In general, "getting free pussy in Thailand is EASY", "no matter what you look like", because girls are very easy to trick. In order to get laid, one just needs to "let her do something for you first, then reward her with a drink [...] (Very similar model as if you were to pick up a woman in your home country)". Bribery also works, and one can buy a girl with drinks or with promises of fancy restaurants or good wine ("Thais love wine"!). Putting her in the right place, namely a few steps under the Western man, makes the game even more fun: "always act like you are a 9 and she is a 6". As I already mentioned, in Lakoff's perspective, this sort of reward/punishment mechanism is typical for the conservative/strict father model of education (Lakoff 2004, 83). Like a good student doing her assignment right and 'behaving' is rewarded by her teacher or father, the Thai girl pleasing the foreigner will be rewarded with (promises of) wine, good food, or money; however, she needs to recognize her obvious inferiority first.

Seven feels quite comfortable in describing the inhabitants of his 'Thailand'. He writes, "The people of Thailand are some of the nicest people in the world, however they do have

their limits”. Their “major weakness” is that “once they lose their face, they go crazy”. The image of Thai men having lost their face is that of violent (even with women!) and vindictive fellows moving in packs.

Even if I was punched by a Thai man, I would never punch back. Even if you win the fight, you don't really win. The Thai guy will have lost face and will strike back hard. He will call his friends, his cousins, and his brothers. They will find where you live and take their revenge...

Remarkably, in Seven's view, Thais are “limited” in the very few occasions when they in turn put limits to the Western man who cannot be completely unrestrained as he would like to be. This apparently happens because of some social norms related to the importance of having a specific public image that cannot be spoiled; Seven does not examine the issue any further because, after all, he does not care of anything which is even slightly beyond the surface of what he sees.

With such a colorful *scene* and interesting *agents*, it is easy for a Western man to follow Seven's footsteps and live his own comedy. Almost mocking Seven's story, any guy can leave the boring United States or Europe for 'Thailand' with the main *purpose* of having fun in the form of sexual gratification. Once he is there, all he has to do is having fun with as many girls as he wants, picking from the stunning stock of beautiful ladies available; if he wants to make his life absolutely perfect and care-free, he should better follow the “code of conduct” developed by Seven. Once one has set his own goal, be it having and handling multiple girlfriends, finding the best hookers in town, having free sex, and so on, he just needs to follow the instructions. This “code of conduct” is based on an obviously distorted (or at least non-conventional) morality, as even Seven at times points out (as mentioned before, he is “infamous”). The sex tourist is part of a community, of a group of like-minded people, who run for the same goal without ever being rivals; other sex tourists only represent a source of advice and further fun, and they cooperate in the achievement of maximum pleasure. A sort of *consubstantiality* in Burkean sense of the sex tourists' community is pursued; by creating identification, the readers are pushed towards certain actions (Burke 1969b).

3.2.2 Beyond the Plot

The representation of 'Thailand' that Seven provides us is probably more than exhaustive for the average sex tourist, *creating* a very vivid reality to his readers, like a 'god'. While

representing his 'Thailand', he also contributed to its creation. As Wilson (2004, 73) stresses, the "well-known sites" of Bangkok and Pattaya are often associated with sex trade because of the hyperrepresentations reinforcing their links with "racialized and gendered sexual services". Seven is fueling sex trade through his texts. Again like in the case of Dexter Horn, and again referring to Steinmetz (2008), it can be pointed out how stereotypes are perpetuated, getting to the point of putting into categories the whole Thai female population. The 'colonizer' Seven creates expectations for his followers - and the 'colonized' needs to adjust. There is nothing natural in this adjustment.

Not so natural might also be the love girls feel for sex and money (and especially for a combination of the two). Seven's 'Thailand' looks like a timeless brothel from which to pick all girls one needs, where things never changed, never change, and never will. However, even though prostitution in Thailand might be seen as endemic to the country as I mentioned in the first chapter, until the 1950s, 80% of the prostitutes in Thailand were Chinese and not Thai (Van Esterik 2000, 175). Apparently, the system might be based on *need* for money, more than *greed*...

The picture that Seven gives of himself is rich in dualities and omissions, which tell us much about his morality. Our hero spent five years in Thailand, but he did not even try to learn the local language; it is not even remotely necessary, as the Other needs to adapt or, in most cases, social intercourse is not needed. Again, there are no rules implying that one should speak the language of the country in which one lives. If we ask ourselves the Spivakian question "Can the subaltern speak?" (Nelson & Grossberg 1988, 66ff) in Gods of Thailand website, the answer seems to be a firm "no". The absence of the voice of the Other is also based on the ignorance of the Western "colonizer". However, Seven obviously does his best to convince his readers that he knows everything about Thailand; he wants to be seen as a reliable source of *real* information. He often insists on the fact that he has collected "years of experience", has slept with countless girls, has visited tons of bars, clubs, and brothels, and has talked to many other foreigners sharing the same lifestyle as he. He has tested and sampled, put everything (and everyone) into categories, and now he presents the results of his research in his websites. Seven is in this sense the god of the gods, as he literally creates his reality when producing knowledge about 'Thailand'. When putting girls into categories, he creates expectations in his readers, who will be disappointed if his descriptions do not fit reality; reality might therefore end up somewhat being adjusted to these images. Referring again to Spivak (Nelson & Grossberg, 1988), we

can say that Seven (even without being an “intellectual”) produces the Other forgetting or disrupting her history and not giving her voice. And, “if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow...”

Apparently, girls are completely free to decide what to do with their lives, but again they have no voice to tell us about it. There are some “quotes” here and there or references to some random conversations Seven had with some random, nameless Thai ex-girlfriends, but the girls not being really able to speak English makes the social intercourse even harder and even more superfluous. This leaves them voiceless, having only the sex tourist to talk for them; it seems as if the girls lacked *agency*. Seven is being their voice in telling the world that girls are happy to do what they are doing, that they are not being exploited, that organizations claiming the opposite are producing false knowledge. He is their representative; girls are *victims* of myths built around human trafficking and exploitation. Maybe not so surprisingly, this kind of narrative is not far from that of NGOs representing their poor voiceless victims (Kamler 2013).

Seven quite enjoys giving orders to his reader in his “guides”, making large use of verbs in the imperative form and referring directly to *you*; there is no way one can rebut. He presents all options, including the probability something will happen (if you do *x*, there is a very high chance that *y* will happen, but *z* or *w* might accidentally occur). He has a mentor-like attitude, which amusingly comes up in an article with a shabby reference to Star Wars: “but be careful, young Jedi”! Seven’s (Obi-Wan’s? Yoda’s?) step-by step approach puts a chaotic world in the right order, and he can do this because of the empirical studies he carried out in a five-year time frame, during which he could experience girls first-hand, (metaphorically speaking) interview them, talk to his fellows, read other websites, and so on. This full-time activity looks like the most legitimate piece of research, with the plus of even being self-financed. Connell (2007, 17) points out how sociologists during imperial times (including Mill and Comte) “insisted programmatically that sociology must promulgate ‘laws’”; and promulgating laws is exactly what Seven is doing.

Western men can freely escape their own country, enter a new one, observe it, and describe it through their own “magnifying glass”. Once they are there, they can produce information about this new country or, as Connell (2007, 12-13) describes it, a “one-way flow of information, a capacity to examine a range of societies from the outside, and an ability to

move freely from one society to the other--features which all map the relation of colonial domination". From the height of their whiteness filled with testosterone and money, both Seven and Dexter Horn look down with an "imperial gaze" on the societies they claim to know and compare, classify them, exactly as sociologists from colonial times used to do. However, if for them Western societies constituted positive examples of "end of progress" with other societies running behind, for sex tourists a step behind in civilization is not so bad...

As in Dexter Horn's case, there are many contradictory dualities in Gods of Thailand, especially when it comes to the girls' stories. Firstly, as I mentioned before, Thai girls in general theoretically do not feel any emotional attachment to sex, but at the same time they might in some cases get very jealous if cheated on. Besides, they possess an exceptional "sweetness" that can however turn into rage. Moreover, girls can choose between being mistreated by their Thai husbands or paid by a foreigner, between being mistreated and underpaid in a factory or enjoyed by a foreigner, as if there was not any third way. It seems to be either "utter poverty" and violence or free or paid sex with foreigners. Even being a graduate in the States is aberrant and meaningless, as it will not give a woman the glory and the economic power she can obtain if she gets laid for money. You can be either a prostitute, or an easy unfaithful Thai girlfriend, or a loser. Again, this might be need.

There are many hells inside and circling the Thai paradise and its Western gods. Some are more obvious and are fully displayed by Seven, some are more hidden. The most obvious and visible one is the US-American hell that real Western men should escape. The US is described as more dangerous, and so full of annoying rules that one necessarily has to obey. Besides, unlike Thailand, America is packed with "those stupid hippie organizations which go over the line trying to make everything fair for everyone". US women are "lazy" and do not take as good care of their boyfriends or husbands *as they should*, by offering sexual pleasure and housekeeping services. They stick to a ridiculous emancipated code of morality, and do not know what their place in society should be; again, as in Dexter Horn, they follow the sexually repressive rules imposed by power (Foucault 1976). Other visible hells where one can stumble involve foreigners not following the rules prescribed, or ridiculous jealous shouting girlfriends tearing apart one's furniture.

As Dexter Horn, Seven's *negations* regarding prostitutes not being exploited or slaves, or girls being different than their American counterparts, actually suggest that *this might be*

the case. Besides, the poverty and the violent (Thai) men beating their wives or girlfriends described by Seven show the other side of the Thai paradise, and might give hints on reasons pushing Thai ladies to enter the sex industry different from what the author describes. By promptly trying to silence all voices suggesting legal, moral or economic problems, he raises some doubts in his readers. In other words, what if these Thai girls could actually feel love? What if they were not so different from American ladies, and would rather study than become prostitutes, if they only had the chance? What if Thai girls were individuals with different personalities and desires?

Money has plenty of space in GT's text too. If free sex (ho well, "free pussy") is pursued, with those managing not ever to pay for it being almost worshipped, paying for it is also perfectly fine. The idea that only "celebrities and losers" can pay for sex is wrong; the sex tourist apparently belongs to a third category, presumably the one of those wanting to get the best out of life. Money is the key to pleasure, so why not take advantage of it? In any case, paying is not bad, because behind the sex industry there is no exploitation, no "Russian mafia kidnapping children for child labor". It is only about "paying for pussy on occasion", because the girls have "the right to choose", they are not forced to do what they are doing. Again, men freely decide to pay for sex, and women freely decide to sell their bodies and performances in exchange for money. Seven once even defines the cash being given to ladies after their performance as a "donation", this term being interestingly 'charity-like': prostitution gives the girls the monetary power they would not be able to have otherwise, somehow 'empowering' them, while also, especially in the US context, "donations" have a high moral value.

Even though this is not object of my analysis, it might be worth trying to let our subalterns speak through the work of the researcher Ara Wilson (2004, 80ff.). Unlike me, she had the chance to have informal chats with sex workers, and what came up gives quite a different picture of these "girls" than that provided by Seven and Dexter Horn. For instance, the largely praised sex shows that meet so well sex tourists' desires, are not so desirable for the performers, who usually face that mortification only for the desperation of getting some extra income. Besides, it is required for bar girls to be taken home by a customer at least a few times per month. Also, in some informal chats with Thai girls living with foreigners, they revealed that they actually disliked them, but still preferred this to the humiliation of sex trade, from which they escaped. Wilson (*ibid*, 90) claims that in sex trade "women learn how to embody in their appearance and manner the racial, gender, and sexual

ideologies held by customers”, and often pretend to speak less English than they actually can, and pretend to be “less intelligent, resourceful, or moral than the men”.

Another interesting element comes up here and there in Seven’s narration, although it is quite well hidden: a Thai cultural standard, which appears quite clearly in a couple of occasions. Firstly, when the author mentions that he does not want foreigners to look bad to Thai eyes, he implies that these apparently lawless and easy people who will accept (almost) anything, *do* care. Secondly, the necessity of lying when hitting on girls, as well as the ostensibly exaggerate reactions Thai girls have when they are cheated on, also show that they might have emotions, that they might even *suffer* and be disappointed like a ‘standard’ Western human being. The Western man, by cheating on them, actually does harm, and reduces them to inferior creatures whom can be legitimately disposed.

To conclude, for both Dexter Horn and Seven the simple fact of leaving the States for Thailand transforms a man from a powerless creature having to deal daily with pre-set pointless instructions into a powerful hero with an illusion of (almost) unlimited potential. Like a colonizer setting off to a new, blurry and different world, the sex tourist acquires his own place in the sun still maintaining his Western, or rather Northern-American identity, but not having to deal with those norms imposed in his country of origin. There is an apparent detachment between the two settings: by pointing out the allegedly different nature of the two, the sex tourist legitimizes his behavior in Thailand, which would not be accepted in the US. Like in the happy ending of a comedy, Dexter Horn integrates in his newborn (and somehow *self-made*) society; to use Frye’s terms, eventually his “social and erotic affinities are combined and unified” (1957, 218). By stressing how happy he is in Thailand and how bored he is in the States, he seems to say, “*This is how it should be*”.

Both authors create an exceptional timeless and lawless colony ready to be taken advantage of. Its centuries of history and its culture are misrepresented, ignored, simply hidden somewhere in the closet, and always looked on with some form of distant mockery. Steinmetz (2008) sees the colonial state as a social field, where different colonizers flaunted a special talent in understanding the ‘natives’; on this reading of the local populations, they shaped their policies towards them and reassured their authority. Following the same pattern, sex tourists claim to have a superior understanding of Thai society, shape their own specific policies, and perpetrate them. As mentioned, this misrepresentation, this process of epistemic violence, and this creation of a controllable

mass can be seen as a form of colonialism. In Frantz Fanon's words (1963, 149), colonialism "turns its attention to the past of the colonized people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it". Behaving like the 'state' described by Abrams (1977, 79), the sex tourists' creation of 'Thailand' is a "triumph of concealment" that hides "the real history and relations of subjection behind an a-historical mask of legitimating illusion". In this Thai field, the extraordinary or, to use Agamben's words (Lemke 54ff.), the "exceptional" is the rule. If the girls' backgrounds come up here and there, their always disposable nature makes them look like bare lives more than political persons. If Agamben's *homini sacri* could be killed with impunity, the sex tourist's *mulieres sacrae* can be seduced (and "fucked") and abandoned without consequences.

However, it must be recalled again that this applies to the 'Thailand' known by whoever hides behind the names of Dexter Horn or Seven, namely those few streets in Pattaya and Bangkok. This form of colonialism surely have repercussions on the country at large, on the lives of those girls leaving their villages to enter the sex trade, on the income of bar owners, on the corruption of local police and so on... But, after all, these colonizers who cannot speak a word of Thai, spend their time crawling from one bar to the next emptying their wallets for the sake of satisfying their lower abdomen instincts, while pretending to be cool and laying down the law, are the ones looking a bit ridiculous.

3.3 Adventist Development and Relief Agency

ADRA works with the girls formerly caught up in the Thailand sex trade to provide them a new life far away from their pasts. Programs like this are not government funded. The only way ADRA is able to continue programs like this one, where these girls have a safe place to go, heal and learn, is through private funding from individuals like you and I. Please invest in the lives of these girls, to help them live a normal and productive life outside of the Thailand sex trade. Your gift today gives these young girls a new life!

3.3.1 Plots

In Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)'s narrative regarding their interventions in Thailand, there are five categories of actors: women and girls, their communities, ADRA itself, the perpetrators, and the reader. The plot is quite obviously a

romance with a dragon-killing theme⁶. Maybe also because of the religious nature of the organization, some form of shallow biblical symbolism is easy to spot.

The main story starts, quite literally, in the darkness of “Thailand sex trade”. Poor, weak girls, after being sold by their families or “tricked” into sex trade, are trapped in “a cramped room with no windows”. They are forced to “entertain men” without breaks, and “most of them contract AIDS”. The dragon(s) keeping them in chains are constituted by “predators” who commit “brutal personal violence and abuse”; after being betrayed by their real parents, the girls gain a new sinister parental figure for whom they are daughters and preys at the same time. The perpetrators are evil creatures from the lower world, keeping their victims trapped in a maze of night, confusion and sterility; they have an animal nature, having much in common with the *hominini ferri* described by Agamben (2002). The girls being preys, they become themselves animals for the perpetrators. They are weak and unable to set themselves free; they need somebody else to kill their dragon.

After years of exploitation, the girls end up on the street, and this is when their hero, ADRA, arrives to rescue them from the “labyrinthine underworld” typical for the beginning of romances in Frye’s description (1957, 190). ADRA is a “light in their darkness”, which gives the girls a new life. The organization’s quest is a long history of battles, challenges and successes, all aimed at the improvement of the lives of their multiple targets/heroines worldwide. In the specific case of the actions that they carry out in Thailand, what they do is appearing on the scene when the desperate girls stray aimlessly and desperately on the street, saving them, and then teaching them how to live a normal life. They provide them with food, education, shelter, consultancy, legal help, and *normality*. They also educate third parties about sexual exploitation, in order to prevent the girls from being trafficked and to “end the cycle of violence”. ADRA’s story is an eternal romantic battle full of victories. The organization’s *attitude* is caring and nurturing, but also heroic and somewhat assertive.

After being saved, the girls can start a new, “normal” life, try to heal, learn a job, and have a normal routine. They “get to sleep at night” and “have 3 meals a day”. After that, they can finally “integrate into society”, and put into practice what ADRA taught them; by becoming the organization’s *brides*, they re-gain the innocence they left at their villages,

⁶ In this part of the analysis, I will very closely follow Northrop Frye’s description of romance (1957, 186ff).

they can be children again. Interestingly, their journey resembles to that of Israelites as portrayed by Frye (*ibid*, 191ff): first they are slaves in Egypt/“cramped rooms”, then they are lost in the desert/city streets, finally they reach the Promised Land of *normality*. Normality very much corresponds to Frye’s description of “the victory of fertility over the waste land”, that is “food and drink, bread and wine, body and blood”. Now, they eventually are in their cozy place in the world and reconciled with their dark past, starting a “new life”. However, despite having healed and learned, women will always have “scars” to remind them of what they have been through.

Perpetrators “do not care”, “do not pay”, “trick”, “abuse”; “neglect” and “forget”: they lie and distort the *truth* for their own sake and then forget about those they had deceived. By contrast, ADRA assumingly cares, *informs*, purifies and remembers, but it also pays (!). By taking care of girls’ bodies and souls and by healing their scars, the organization tries to wipe away their past, yet without forgetting as sex exploiters do. As opposed to perpetrators, ADRA knows facts, it remembers. Slavery starts from deceit, from disinformation; ADRA’s liberation is based on information, on *truth*.

Jeffrey (2002) reports the case of the establishment of the so-called “Foundation of the Welfare of Women” in 1956, which had the following purposes: educating prostitutes to “encourage them to return to *normal* life; providing housing, treatment, education, and training to prostitutes seeking rehabilitation; researching the causes and prevention of prostitution; and researching venereal diseases prevention and treatment” (emphasis added). Prostitutes were also provided with vocational training before returning home. The foundation was meant for prostitutes in general, not necessarily for trafficked women, but the narrative interestingly corresponds with that of ADRA. Jeffrey stresses how in those and in the following years, the Thai governments, as well as Thai organizations, were engaged in the attempt of *domesticating*, *disciplining* prostitutes in order to make a good impression in the international arena. Is ADRA trying to make a good impression too?

The organization makes use of a military jargon when describing its activities: they are “on the front lines rescuing girls”. ADRA looks like a disciplined army engaged in a battle against a big, brutal enemy; it is possible for *you* to join it and support it. In relation to this, in the text another story that can be spotted is the one of the reader, *your* story. You are reading their website, you are feeling pity, and you are donating. Right now, you represent the change in the girls’ lives, and you can be their hero, if you support ADRA. Not being

funded, it needs your help in its eternal battle. The enemies against which ADRA is fighting are “predators”, carrying out “brutal personal violence”, and abuse. The enemies are those who buy the girls from their families, those shutting them in dark rooms, those being entertained by them, and those kicking them out in the streets. However, you can also be the enemy, if you ignore the situation and do not support the ADRA army. Enemies “abuse”, “neglect” and “forget”. The enemies live in a comedy of ignorance and false truths that might turn into romance if ADRA receives enough support. *You* can enter the picture by following the rules; *you* can be the *agency* of ADRA’s *act* of saving girls by donating money.

Male Thai writers in the 1970s described prostitutes as poor women in need of being rescued, because of the failure of the State to govern properly, which apparently reflects very much ADRA’s perspective in the 2000s when referring to the ‘exploited girl’ (Jeffrey 2002, 48). Indeed, an important actor very often present in romances is missing in the scene portrayed by ADRA, namely the *king*, the rule of law; in ADRA’s text, there is absolutely no reference to the State, which seems not to exist at all in the Thai scene. According to Frye (1957), the dragon killed by the hero represents the sterility of land, which is itself due to the impotence of the old and helpless king that rules the land. The dragons/perpetrators are being fed with young girls, and the king cannot do anything but see it happen. Only the external, *foreign* intervention of the hero/ADRA can save them. State sovereignty has disappeared; ADRA’s ‘Thailand’ is a *land* more than a nation-state, with its borders open to foreigners eager to *legitimately* take over this role.

In the absence of the ruling king, some ‘state surrogate’ comes up, and it seems to be ADRA itself. Bauman (1991, 20) sees the ‘modern state’ as “a crusading, missionary, proselytizing force, bent on subjecting the dominated populations to a thorough once-over in order to transform them into an orderly society, akin to the precepts of reason”. This description (disturbingly) fits quite well with ADRA’s plot: after the crusade (dragon/exploiter-killing), they introduce girls to their circle, and educate them in order to make them part/integrate them in a “rationally designed society”, which represents the *causa finalis* of the organization. The ‘precepts of reason’ on which they base their actions are religious (Christian) and experiential (they know, they have seen), and put them in a higher position than their objects of intervention.

The girls' sufferance seems to represent a mere support to ADRA's romance, by being the only reason why ADRA exists, but at the same time the girls find meaning and redemption only thank to ADRA. The organization is a merciful hero rescuing and educating the girls, but it is also a fierce fighter giving battle to the brutality, ignorance or carelessness of the enemy. It is supported by people like you, who can donate in order to help it achieve its goal: saving the girls – or getting funds? This story took place in the past, is taking place now, and will take place in the future; it is a sort of circle, where girls are being exploited and saved again and again. The temporal situation is set very vaguely, in a utopic world where the evil can be defeated only by staying united and *disciplined*, and following the rules.

3.3.2 Beyond the Plot

The most obvious linguistic element coming up even at first reading is the almost complete lack of verbs in the active form referring to the rescued girls, and the abundance thereof referring to ADRA. Girls are passive victims to be saved by extremely active heroes from the hands of extremely active villains: they are sold, caught, exploited, kicked out, rescued, taught, re-integrated... Girls are always instructed by somebody else on what to do, bouncing like a ball from somebody's hands to somebody else's; even after being *saved*, they still seem to constitute mere objects of support, not being able to do much by themselves. In the one interview present in the text, 'Mei', after expressing her gratitude for being given "hope" and saved from a "painful and bitter life", she says she is "study[ing] hard so that [she] can have a good job to *help* take care of [her] family" (emphasis added). She knows she cannot simply *take care*, she can only *help*. Interestingly, according to both Dexter Horn and Gods of Thailand, girls working in the sex industry are more than able to support their families with their tremendous income; with the *normal* job following the *normal* education ADRA provides, girls will barely be able to provide their poor families with some *help*. The girls portrayed by sex tourists seem to be much more active and empowered than those portrayed by ADRA.

The interviewee in ADRA's text constitutes, in Spivak's words, a "native informant". She speaks "on behalf of [her] [...] group [...], typically *for* the benefit of the Western investigator or audience". Without being part of the elite or even being located in the West at all, it can be said that her voice, by being local becomes louder and more significant. The subalterns' voices come to the surface not surprisingly saying exactly what they are

supposed to say. When Kapoor (2004, 630, 636-637) refers to the Participatory Rural Appraisal, he claims that subalterns might play the roles they are expected to play, for instance exaggerating their praise to the founder or organization. In the case of ADRA, the interviewee gives an extremely positive image of the organization; there is no way it can even be proven anybody ever said that. However, even so, this kind of critique can be made even in this specific case; by denying her subalternity and praising the organization, Mei is reinforcing her own subalternity.

Kamler's remarks regarding the narratives provided by NGOs are very relevant, especially in relation to the creation of some form of 'Western friendly knowledge', which constitutes a form of epistemic violence. ADRA's narrative perfectly reflects the typical NGO narrative presenting an innocent woman being kidnapped, tricked or forced into prostitution saved by a benevolent actor; according to Kamler, by presenting such a (distorted) reality, organizations "attract more money, are more effective and have more legitimacy".

The narrative frameworks of international organizations have the ability to influence an audience's understanding of development problems. The dominant narratives about the trafficking of women in Thailand are deployed by NGO employees, who are tasked with the role of "speaking for" trafficking victims, sex workers and, indeed, for the Trafficking In Persons space more broadly. NGO employees use these narratives to formulate a clear image of their organization and their roles as advocates, even if such an image reinforces self-versus-other binaries that eclipse their understanding of the women they seek to help. (Kamler 2013, 86)

ADRA describes its targets as an extremely homogeneous group with a common, shared past. Similarly, the interventions it carries out on the girls follow a standard model. Referring again to Spivak, the organization is speaking for "all women's desires and interests", without making a distinction *within* them and *from* them. *Within*, as the interviewed Mei could be any of the girls with their pre-set plot, and *from*, as those intervening assume that girls will expect the same they themselves would. (Kapoor 2004, 635) The creation of this abstract population, however, goes far beyond that.

The organization carries out intervention in order to re-establish its own concept of *normality*. *Abnormality* means years of sexual slavery, entertaining men "all day and night" without breaks and without getting paid, contracting AIDS in "most" cases, and being "cast away". *Normality*, on the other hand, means that the girls "get to sleep at night, have 3 meals a day, the opportunity to have daily baths, and attend schools", besides learning some other "everyday tasks" and being taught on how "to integrate". In other

words, *normality* means sleep, food, hygiene, education and a *normal* job. It looks as if ADRA looked at the girls' bodies as *machines* on which to deploy "procedures of power"; this corresponds very closely to the first pole of "power over life" described by Foucault.

The first of these poles-the first to be formed, it seems-centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls. (Foucault 1976, 139)

ADRA establishes what is good for the girls as a population of body-machines, and acts accordingly by giving them a "body-routine". By knowing that this is the right thing to do, it legitimizes its interventions.

According to the organization, however, the trauma inflicted on the girls is not only "physical", but also "mental and emotional". Agamben's central point in his work *The Open* (2004) is this detachment between "body" and the somewhat divine element that Christians call "soul"; ADRA follows this pattern and treats these two components separately. The re-establishment of the girls' body-routine is a precondition for the healing/redeeming of their souls, which takes place in the (re-?)education, almost rehabilitation of the girls into society. In other words, girls move from an unregulated body-life of physical exploitation, dirt, hunger, and sleeplessness to a regulated routine kindly offered by ADRA; they move from the desperation of an *abnormal* non-life of traumas, to a standard, integrated life of *normal* jobs. Perpetrators, in contrast, only considered the girls as *bare lives*, as bodies with no spirituality attached.

The role played by money is again quite interesting. Girls were sold by their families for money, and one of the elements making the girls' lives before ADRA abnormal is the fact that they did not get paid; together with pleasure, money was the perpetrators' purpose. In a *normal* life, money is the *purpose* to be obtained through a normal job. As mentioned before, money is obviously also an *agency* for ADRA, who cannot save girls without it. Money represents opportunity opposed to coercion, and it is the way out of darkness.

In his article reading Spivak, Kapoor (2004, 632) asks *why* Westerners attempt to get to know and consequently represent the Third World; in other world, what is the real *purpose*? In the case of development work, the most obvious answer is "to help" the "less fortunate", and ADRA's representation of reality definitely fits this picture. As both Foucault and Spivak point out, though, the connection between knowledge and power is very strong, and helping is never disinterested; in addition to that, the institutional

positioning of ADRA is based on Christian religion and its values; however, the organization is also part of the broader framework of iNGOs, and therefore has to mirror their general patterns as well. Also because of this, the given picture is necessarily biased.

Going back to the organization's *attitude*, it can be said that ADRA's representation fits the nurturant parent world-view described by Lakoff. Like a caring parent, she is *empathetic*, as she knows what her child's needs are, and tends to them. Besides, she is *responsible* for both her children and herself; she knows that, in order to provide what is necessary to the girls, she needs financial help from third parties; this is why she calls for help, this is the reason why she presents what she does to the world. Her sense of responsibility towards those who urge her help is the reason why she herself asks for help to others. She protects her children from the bad guys, or tries to repair the caused damage. She wants the girls to be happy and fulfilled, and consequently provides them with education and skills. Fulfillment is obtained through opportunities, which are provided by ADRA, and opportunities mean (financial) prosperity. The organization also provides *freedom* from the sexual slavery the girls were forced to endure, and the "normal" routine they offer them might also be seen as a basis for independent choices. However, Lakoff also mentions the value of *two-way communication* between parent and child, which is completely missing in ADRA's website. The organization is talking to the reader, but she does not talk to her targets; she *knows* what is good, she simply *informs* and *provides*. Interestingly, Lakoff is not directly referring either to parenthood or NGOs, but to the progressive governmental policies; in other words, what ADRA says about herself is exactly what the State is supposed to do. (Lakoff 2004, 12)

ADRA's narrative has all of the elements identified by Kamler (2013) in her interviews with NGO employees. ADRA has a *civilizing* nature, as it envisages a better future for the land, where all Western (and Christian) values will be respected, and more value will be given to work; this can happen only with the external help, of course. The organization is also *moralizing*, somehow treating the country as a new colony in need of being given a more appropriate ethic. In this sense, it is possible to draw parallels to the justifications sociologists from colonial times found for Western imperialism, as Raewyn Connell (2007, 17-18) describes: thanks to the inexorable "laws of progress", sociology could "conflate the problems of the empire with the problems of the metropole", namely "poverty, class struggle and social amelioration".

Moreover, ADRA is trying to make the land legible for the West, by translating what is going on in the country to Western readers, happily overpassing whatever might constitute a Thai value or belief. The NGO also has an Orientalistic attitude, especially taking into consideration its being Christian; she sees her targets as in need of being helped to reach the same level of human/Christian evolution. Moreover, in her speaking *for* the Other, ADRA is *victimizing* her beneficiaries, and highlighting their “lack of agency”. Primarily, however, ADRA is *savior*, and her targets should be all grateful for what she is doing, as Mei is. This strong correspondence between what NGO employees say/think and *write*, means that their perspectives can be heavily reflected in what is to be found online, including their biases and values.

3.4 Alliance Anti-Traffic

Alliance Anti-Traffic (AAT) is a non-profit, non-partisan and non-religious organization that aims to protect women and children in Southeast Asia from sexual exploitation and trafficking. [...] The regional office in Bangkok, Thailand (AAT Reg. Thai) works in trafficking prevention and empowerment, protection, assistance and return of victims mainly in Thailand and Laos.

3.4.1 Plots

As it is clearly shown by the introductory quotation, Alliance Anti-Traffic (AAT)’s website profoundly differs from the previous examples. More specifically in comparison to ADRA, this organization provides a more informative and descriptive text and a less Manichean representation of the world. With its many shades of grey but some sort of dragon-killing theme, the plot seems to be a mature, self-reflective comedy with some romantic elements. The actors playing a role here are AAT itself, its partner organizations, the women and children objects of their intervention, their communities, the perpetrators, and Thai governmental authorities.

The organization represents the main agent. They act with a clear *goal/purpose*: “to eliminate sexual exploitation in all its forms, especially sexual abuse, prostitution and trafficking in women and minors”. In the ideal world where this goal has been met, the organization would not need to exist anymore, it will need to disappear. AAT is well aware of that, when they say, “We work with the aim of becoming unnecessary”. In order to achieve this, AAT *acts* by carrying out different types of interventions in Southeast Asia in cooperation with their partner organizations, their *co-agents*. More specifically, they prevent trafficking, empower women and children, re-integrate them in their communities,

protect them, advocate, provide different forms of assistance, and in general do anything in their power to reach their goal.

AAT clearly indicates the main necessary steps in each activity, but also the limits and the challenges they meet, giving themselves room for improvement. AAT appears to be a wise, considerate, *technical* hero, which is constantly, carefully and precisely doing his best to save the exploited victims. His story starts from experience, not innocence: the web pages openly state that they are “realistic” with all stakeholders. For each of his adventures, the hero tailors his interventions according to the specific victim’s needs, in an attempt to be as versatile as possible; AAT’s *attitude* seems to be very cautious and self-reflective. He manages to save many, and never forgets about them, staying in touch with them and making them independent. He acts in a grey-scale world, where there is no absolute good valid for everybody. However, there seems to be only one shade of black. Perpetrators are portrayed as the only actors responsible for what happens to women and girls, and must therefore be the only ones who will be brought to justice. They abuse for pleasure, and traffic and exploit for money. These *impostors* are evil, greedy, and irredeemable; they are the exact counter-parts to the organization.

The women and children AAT is working for/with have extremely diverse stories. Some of them have already been trafficked, abused or exploited, some are running the risk of falling into the trap of sex exploitation, some are forced to become surrogate mothers, and some live in risky areas. They are helped by AAT to recover physical and psychological traumas, or not to be sexually exploited, stay informed about the dangers, sue their perpetrators, and have justice. They come from different countries in Southeast Asia and have different ages and backgrounds, but they have something in common: enemies, namely sex exploiters, and helpers/savers, namely, AAT and its partner organizations. The women’s communities also play a role, in both the prevention and the re-integration. They represent potential *co-agents*, to be educated and helped in order to enhance their capacity to fight against the big common enemy or to support girls in re-finding their normality after the nightmare they have gone through.

AAT also cooperates with the governmental authorities, which are helped or pushed to improve their laws and make them apply them properly. Unlike in ADRA’s case, the *ruling king* is present here. He may be old, sleepy and not so active, but with the right support and encouragement (in the form of advocacy) given by the hero, he can re-

establish his role and become a *co-agent*. His laws might be rusty and possibly even *absurd*, but he can contribute in the development of a new and more just society for women and their communities to live in. AAT's advocacy goes for both law and law enforcement: Thai authorities are pushed not only to change their policies, but also to make sure that these policies are implemented.

When it comes to the perpetrators' profile, they are seen as the only responsible actors for sexual exploitation and/or abuse, which they carry out either for sexual pleasure or for money. They are to be persecuted, being the only foes; the rest of the actors are to be helped, supported, persuaded, advocated, informed, and so on.; by no chances, anybody else but the perpetrators are to be blamed for what happens.

Re-integration in the communities is the key, being the last step for those who have been exploited by perpetrators and saved by AAT. When preparing communities to the arrival of former victims, the organization is also contributing to the creation of a new society where the women can feel accepted and find their own place. The "recognition of a newborn society" around the hero and his bride represents the typical ending for comedies (Frye 1957). As mentioned, this can happen thanks to better policies and policy enforcement, but also thanks to more educated and prepared communities. Women are home again, they have a job that allows them to make independent choices, they have the support of their communities, and they do not need the hero's support anymore... *This is how it should be*, according to AAT. The reader, by watching this new society being built by multiple actors, indirectly becomes a member of it. There are multiple *agencies* used by AAT to make things as they should be: money, advocacy, but also partner organizations and communities, which can be seen as instruments in AAT's hands, and not only as co-agents.

AAT has a past, a present, and a future. In the past it was part of another organization, it managed to provide protection and assistance to a specific number of victims of trafficking and/or sexual exploitation/abuse, and did much in terms of advocacy, laws, and so on. In the present, it is trying to expand its action, in order to achieve bigger and more meaningful results. In the future, it will open new offices, and have to meet new challenges. The hero is growing slowly, gaining power and facing more and more dangerous enemies, but also being supported by more and more friends; this process looks like some form of preparation for a final, definitive quest, after which, like a conscientious

parent, he will have to disappear. Timing makes the difference for the women and the organization. Before perpetration, the organization works on avoiding risks; after perpetration, the organization works on reintegration. Violation of the body constitutes the borderline between prevention and treatment.

The *scene* where the acts take place is quite interesting; there is a double detachment in terms of place/origin which might be worth pointing out. Firstly, the local/international duality is often mentioned: the international organization works for and with locals, intervening in a foreign country but using mainly local hands. In order for the outside to have a positive impact on the inside, it needs to adapt to the place. Another detachment is constituted by the contrast between “home”, namely the place from which girls willingly or forcefully came and to which they should return, and the place where they were exploited. Salvation is a difficult path backwards; not only women, but also those who stayed should be prepared for the victims’ return; victims should go back to where they belong.

3.4.2 Beyond the Plot

As I mentioned, AAT’s website is far more descriptive and informative than ADRA’s - more than moving stories, it seems to provide valid, proven information. There is even a section with some form of glossary of key terms, namely “human trafficking”, “sexual exploitation”, and “sexual abuse”, which at some point were quite handy even to me, honestly speaking. In addition, AAT organizes preventive campaigns on the field in order to prevent women from being abducted, sold or deceived. It does not put confidence in statistics, but it nonetheless displays numbers referring to trafficking trends from trustworthy UN agencies. Furthermore, it indicates the precise numbers of those whom they helped.

This form of knowledge production and spreading looks very much like the process of ‘information retrieval’ carried out by Western academics as described by Spivak and put into plain English by Kapoor (2004, 632-635). In Spivak’s words, the “raw facts” or “information” gathered in the field is turned into knowledge at academic level, with a good amount of bias; AAT does the same, with the addition that it bases its policies and actions on these data.

Spivak also directly refers to the world of development organizations, which often represent women as “oppressed by second class-cultures” and therefore in need of being civilized (also reflected in Kamler 2013). Even though in very soft terms, and probably inevitably, some sort of civilizing intentions for this “second-class culture” seem to come up in AAT’s narrative as well; for instance, this becomes clear in the references here and there to blurry laws, more or less easily manipulable authorities, and the general need of *educating* (communities, girls, or even the government). To use Kapoor’s words, ADRA most definitely aimed to speak “for all women’s desires and interests” as for a homogeneous mass. On the other hand, AAT, in its attempt to tailor its interventions according to the specific needs of each person, tries not to fall into this trap, giving the beneficiaries as much freedom of choice as possible.

Again referring to Spivak’s argument on the representation of the ‘Third World’ (Kapoor 2003, 682), AAT politically represents its targets by speaking *for* them with local authorities, potential donors, but also the general public who reads the website. The organization also speaks largely *about* them, but claims to be giving voice to the beneficiaries, who were actually asked what would be better for them. The participants’ voices seem to be heard in a background of interviewing and sampling; the stressing of the participation of the targets in the framing of interventions also contributes to legitimizing the organizations interventions.

AAT’s attitude reflects and tries to apply *in toto* the nurturant values described by Lakoff (2004, 13). Firstly, *freedom* for the beneficiaries to find fulfillment as they want, or at least picking from the growing range of choices made available by the organization. Secondly, *opportunity* and *prosperity*, which are both linked to freedom (and money): money is needed to be free, again. *Fairness*: women and children should be treated fairly, and the perpetrators brought to justice for their misbehavior. An *open, two-way communication* is also crucial; this is why AAT always asks its beneficiaries what is better for them. The importance of *community building* is also stressed, as well as *trust* and *honesty*. AAT’s employees themselves are committed to be coherent with these values and follow them closely.

The main idea of the text is that sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and, in general, prostitution must be fought, which is what AAT is doing. This means that AAT serves the interests of the victims or of the potential victims and of their communities, and condemns

the perpetrators of what AAT sees as crimes. AAT is not involved in promoting better conditions for women working in sex trade, even though, as Jeffrey (2002, 74ff) stresses, women's groups in the last decades have been asking for this, often more than protection against exploitation. It looks as if AAT might be faced with the dilemma faced by iNGOs described by Van Esterik (2000), when prostitutes ask for Japanese or English classes in order to facilitate the negotiations with their customers more than for protection or salvation... Also, it might be worth mentioning the case of the organization for prostitute women EMPOWER, which realized that treating the prostitutes as victims would not help, and focused instead on "address[ing] their concerns while they are still working rather than focus upon rescuing or removing them from the trade" (Jeffrey 2002, 121). On the other hand, for AAT, prostitution for the organization is irrevocably a form of sexual exploitation, and as such it must be treated.

At the center of the story is the organization itself, a plural organism speaking with one voice; AAT is "we", "us", "our". Other actors are moving around it, "them". "They" are the victims or potential victims (women, girls, minors...), their communities, the partner organizations, the local authorities, but also the perpetrators. The most active actors in the picture seem to be AAT and the offenders; the others are helped, empowered, persuaded, or simply "cooperate". In other words, the hero "through" or "with" his friends fights against his foes. "We" is strong, has solid ethical principles, and works for the best interest of the victims. However, its existence is in itself negative, as it was born as a response to a problem that should not exist; therefore, it aims at becoming unnecessary, like a parent. The organization wants the targets to become independent, but will still not abandon them in case they are in need. This "we"/"they" duality is mentioned by Kamler (2013) when referring to the *moralizing* narrative she spotted in her interviews to NGO workers: "Thailand is unethical", because "they" (Thailand) are not like "us" (the West)". The West is seen as somewhat morally advanced, and things work there as they should; it is now important to make this people understand how things *should be*. AAT writes that most of its staff is local, so this might not directly apply; however, the kind of ethics (and system in general) they try to apply quite looks like a Western creation.

AAT can intervene on all mentioned actors, and different factors contribute to making its intervention just and legitimate. The organization bases its work on strict ethical principles, which define its morality. These principles are based on their experience, on the will of

being consistent, and on the opinions of the beneficiaries, who apparently have a voice in the matter.

AAT gives a precise image of itself. It is non-religious, non-profit and non-partisan; in other words, it does not aim at generating money, it does not play a role in politics, and it is not based on a specific religion. However, all three factors *do* play a role in the text. Firstly, religion is never directly mentioned, and ADRA's emphasis on the spiritual component of its interventions is not present either. However, the values on which the organization is based are similar. They both aim at taking care of the girls as a whole, as body and spirit: body, by preventing them from being abused, by feeding them and giving them shelter, and spirit by "empowering" them, whatever this might imply in both cases. Beneficiaries are seen as political persons with faceted aspects. The organization takes care of them as a whole, and some interesting contrasts can be pointed out in this sense. There is *medical* support to take care of their bodies; there is *psychological* support to take care of their minds. There is *economic* support to take care of their finances; there is *social* support to take care of their being part of a group. Women are bodies needing therapeutic assistance and money, but also "spirits" parts of a group and with an intellect to watch after. Each factor is a *sine qua non* reintegration is not possible. Girls are not Agambenian *bare lives* (1998) displayed on a shelf/stage that Seven describes, and they are not the homogeneous mass of victims that comes up in ADRA's narrative.

When it comes to its being "non-partisan", it is quite obvious that an organization dealing with advocacy needs to have a political component, besides supporting specific causes. In Collins English Language Dictionary (1987, 1046), the term "partisan" is defined as someone who "strongly supports a particular person, especially when they do this without thinking carefully about the matter". In other words, being partisan means being biased - and AAT, by any means, does not want to be seen as biased. The organization *does* support a group and blame another, but its actions are based on *reality*, not on their assumptions.

Thirdly, like in ADRA's case, the money component plays a major role in the whole text. Even though the organization does not aim at making profit, it acknowledges that money constitutes the main tool, *agency*, to independence. In order to achieve financial independence, women need education and work, financial independence being the precondition for a dignified life. Money is needed in order to become a political person able to make independent choices; lack of money means coercion, means being *forced*. It

is money that gives opportunity. Women lose control over their minds and bodies when being abused and/or exploited, but the organization helps them get it back by offering many alternatives, which all translate into the ability of generating income. Money will give them choices, which will translate into power over their own bodies.

The organization wants to enlarge the range of choices among which women can choose, in order to make their interventions as individual as possible, tailoring them to the specific needs or desires of the project participants. Offering different alternatives means giving a higher degree of freedom of choice to the women. Women are seen not as a species, but as individuals with specific needs, or are they still a mass?

Mezzadra, Reid and Samaddar (2013), refer to Foucault's vision of biopower of that of a power exerting "a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize it, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (Foucault 1976, 137). The authors find it obvious that "both liberalism and development are biopolitical doctrines in this sense of the term".

It is the insistence on the need to develop 'life' which has permitted liberalism to proliferate, like the poison species it is, taking over entire states and societies as conditions for its spread, installing markets, commodifying anything it can lay its hands on, [and] monetizing the value of everything [...].

Without unnecessarily going any further into their digressions on the evils of liberalism and neoliberalism, I think it might be interesting to reflect on this biopolitics-liberalism-development triangle in AAT's case and, why not?, link it to the other websites object of my analysis. Again, strictly speaking, biopower is exerted by the State; however, as the three authors point out, the development apparatus *does* have a role in this, and its policies, interventions and advocacy have led towards the above-mentioned negative processes. For the sake of "administer[ing], optimiz[ing], and multiply[ing]" life, development has contributed in the establishment (or reinforcement) of "neoliberal" systems. Besides,

neoliberal development discourse strips the human of the very properties that distinguish it from other living beings, by denying it, especially, any capacity for autonomy. [...] [O]ur freedom to autonomously decide is taken away at the same time as the constraints of our social relations appear as well as transformed as the internal barriers of the mind.

Obviously, all this goes very far, surely far beyond the intentions of ADRA and AAT. However, reflecting on the idea of an ideal world both organizations have could be interesting.

AAT and ADRA act in an environment where the State is either manipulable or inexistent, and have therefore free hands. The ideal world ADRA pursue is a place where girls are at their place, *where they should be*, have a job, and help in the sustainment of their families. AAT, on the other hand, wants women to re-integrate in their communities, find the job which best suits them, and become independent from the organization. In both cases, the “afterwards” story has been pre-scripted: *find yourself a place in the market*, as long as it is out of the sex trade. This ‘normal’ life the organizations aim to provide their beneficiaries is a reproduction of what a ‘normal’ life would look like in the West. Both NGOs, using Kamler’s terms, “find refuge in their own cultural values” (2013), a form of “static” “space of comfort”; these cultural values, however, are reflected in their policies and actions, which have a concrete impact on their targets’ life.

For sex tourists, as I mentioned, the money-sex exchange is represented as a win-win situation: *do ut des*. Girls are where they should be and do what they should do; this exceptionality is what should be ideally *normal*. Also in this case girls are in their place in the market (strictly speaking, *on* the market), and it is good and profitable for them. While imposing their cultural values, sex tourists, with their monetary power, *are* “optimizing” life. Or that’s what they say.

CONCLUSIONS

My research investigated how NGOs and sex tourists legitimate their actions and perspectives in their websites, in relation to the specific Thai case, without pretending to give a picture of the *real* Thailand. Dexter Horn, Gods of Thailand, ADRA and AAT constitute the mediators between us readers and the inhabitants of the ‘Thailand’ they represent. They produce *knowledge* that we consume and that creates expectations in us. This representation is allegedly based on the information the authors collected from the field. They all have experience of ‘Thailand’, having slept with, assisted, fooled, rescued, enjoyed, educated, talked with, *sampled* many women; they all constitute agency for the otherwise voiceless girls. However, the women’s voices can be barely heard in their texts.

Interestingly, both categories negate each other’s narratives more or less between the lines, persuading their readers that *they* hold the truth by using different strategies. For sex tourists, prostitution is just a profitable business; who denies it is either loser or a liar. For NGOs, prostitution is exploitation: who denies it is a dirty perpetrator to be persecuted. They all have a mission: spread the *truths* they create, to prove that what they do is right and legitimate in their ‘Thailand’.

Both NGOs and sex tourists have an idea on how the natural order of things is or should be. For NGOs, it is a reality where empowered, (more or less) independent women find their place in the world and in the market, being re-integrated in their communities, getting a standard routine, and having a dignified job. In order to establish this form of *normality*, NGOs have to intervene. They see girls as having a physical and political existence, a body and a soul, both of which they take care of by providing different kinds of assistance: healthcare, psychological support, financial help, education, and so on. They act like caring parents having *nurturant* values; they are empathetic, responsible, provide freedom and opportunity, and allegedly carry out a two-way communication with their beneficiaries. Nonetheless, the image transpiring is still that of a homogeneous population whose behavior can be predicted (disciplined?), especially in the case of ADRA.

This orderly *normality* in the form of educated empowered women having a dignified job is exactly what sex tourists are escaping from when going to Thailand. They are looking for *abnormality*, for the sexual circus-like world that they describe and create, a pleasure for the eyes and for the body. Good girls might just be looking for fun, but bar girls and

prostitutes, by selling shows and sex, have a place *in* and *on* the market. Girls are divided into categories, but are still a disposable mass of young flesh in the form of pleasure-providers without feelings - or so the authors try to represent them, at least. Sex tourists have *strict-father* values, based on the idea of hierarchies (on top of which they sit comfortably - being *gods* themselves), a reward/punishment mechanism, and discipline. These men are escaping the banal normality of the US, but at the same time are looking for women who know what their place is, namely at the service of men. In other words, whereas sex tourists are adjusting (and quite enjoying) this abnormality, NGOs try to change it; Western normality is the starting point for sex tourists, whereas it represents the arriving point for NGOs.

The picture of women transpiring in sex tourists' and NGOs' narratives is antipodal. For the former, they are *naturally* cunning, *naturally* sensual, have no issues in having sex for money, know how to treat Western men, and enter the sex trade for fun and/or profit. For the latter, they are victims in need of help to get back a normal life. Again, I do not know if the women they talk about ever overlap; this is just the picture they provide. Simplifying to the bone, Thai women's *natural* promiscuity legitimizes sex tourists' actions; Thai women's *forced* promiscuity legitimizes NGOs' actions.

Both the sex-cash exchange and NGOs' interventions are somewhat 'empowering', which points out how all narratives, at the end of the day, revolve around money; after all, money can be used to feed both families and sexual desires. NGOs can establish *normality* only thanks to the financial help of donors, and sex tourists can reach the *abnormal* Thailand and enjoy its wonders only shelling out some cash. NGOs and sex tourists have the monetary power to intervene; therefore, they do it.

In this sense, it looks obvious that 'Thailand' is in both cases *abnormal*, exceptional, for sure other than the West - and especially in the case of sex tourists, it seems to be a *camp* where exceptionality is the law. Be it in form of a bizarre, grotesque, but paradisiac circus, or in form of an unordered, corrupt(ed), and dark world, there is something *different* in this 'Thailand'. The power both NGOs and sex tourists can deploy here could most likely not be deployed in the West. This happens because a crucial actor is either weak or absent in the picture, namely the state with its laws and law enforcement; interestingly, this appears quite similarly in all four cases.

For sex tourists, the amount of rules they need to care about is extremely limited, and therefore (almost) anything is possible. Local authorities are in the great majority of cases benevolent and compliant figures more than a threat. Sex tourists can therefore set the rules themselves, being free to mate around giving vent to their wildest desires. In ADRA's case, the state is not mentioned at all, and it looks as if the organization was simply taking over its role. AAT, on the other hand, is educating it and manipulating it with its advocacy efforts. In any case, all parties are somewhat acting like 'states' themselves, setting their own rules based on their own (Western) morality, and exerting a form of biopower on their population.

To conclude, it can be said that both NGOs and sex tourists, although with a different attitude and diametrically opposite purposes, are acting like colonizers bringing with themselves their morality and biases, and setting their own rules in the absence or weak existence of a 'state'. Thailand is *different*, a step behind in civilization, and can be either supported in its development (NGOs) or taken advantage of (sex tourists). The *knowledge* they produce is functional to this, and reinforces the legitimacy of the power they exert over the lives of their women beneficiaries/service providers.

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