Erotic Exchanges and Informal Economies: Sex Work in Ukraine

by

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Abstract

This thesis inquires about sex work and informalities in Ukraine. Problematizing the dichotomy of "the happy hooker" and "the victim of trafficking," I approach sex work as an always socially and culturally embedded phenomenon that deserves to be approached contextually. My study is based on three months of ethnographic fieldwork in the city of Kropyvnytskyi (former Kirovohrad) in Ukraine and 15 in-depth open-ended interviews with local current and former sex workers. Contextualizing sex work within informality, I inquire about informal economic and political practices that sex workers use. I show the place of informality in sex workers' interactions with the police officers, locals, and among themselves: how inventive and imaginary sex workers are in forging various alliances in order to secure their well-being and creating extended social networks that frequently function as social security mechanisms. Drawing on feminist anthropology, I argue that sex workers are not apolitical but instead resort to informal political practices and small-scale resistance practices that are often overlooked and discounted from the sphere of the political. Last but not least, I also inquire about sex workers' narratives about their clients. Building on these narratives, I show that they provide a glimpse of an understanding of existing social anxieties regarding such "big" issues like respectability and civilité.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Dariia Rachok. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Thinking Sex Work: Shame, Agency, (National) Identity", No. Pro00071669, April 11, 2017.

Acknowledgments

Despite the fact that this thesis is signed with my name only and is attributed to me as the sole author, it has been long known in social sciences that knowledge is always already social. Without my dear friends, colleagues, parents, teachers, professors, participants, as well as the authors whom I read and whom I sincerely admire, this thesis would have never existed. However, because of individualistic values of our society, I am given only a few pages to acknowledge all those people, who, directly or indirectly, contributed to the emergence of this thesis.

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Surely, this thesis wouldn't also be possible without the works of many other scholars whose books, book chapters, or articles continuously challenged and inspired me. Finally, though it might seem like a stretch, I would like to thank the whole humanity for shaping me the way I am and for being able to produce this thesis. Ironically enough, precisely because this world is so imperfect, it creates quite some work for anthropologists, who aspire not only to interpret it in various ways but also to change it.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction

> "Given man's inherent irrationality about sexuality and his stubborn refusal to understand it, the best the behavioural scientist can do is to remember Spinoza's admonition, neither to laugh nor to cry, but to try to understand. And, since we have at present no means of being objective about sex, or of really understanding it, we should at least try to understand our lack of understanding and the subterfuges to which we resort in order to perpetuate it."
>
> George Devereux, *From Anxiety to Method*

In just a few lines George Devereux (1967) managed to catch a lot of complexities that many scholars of sex and sexuality struggle with: how can one study something that is regarded as being unworthy of attention, something that is on the verge of taboo? It would be utterly naive to assume that an ethnographer is not susceptible to the moods that are dominant either in his/her "native" culture and/or the culture that s/he studies. And these moods often dictate to be careful about the topic of sex and not to talk about "it" out loud in the absence of grave necessity. So, how does one study sex and sexuality? According to Devereux, one strives "to understand our lack of understanding." (1967, 107). In many ways that is exactly what my project is about.

To be more precise, this thesis is about sex work and informality in Ukraine. I wonder about various strategies that sex workers resort to in order to secure their well-being, whether these strategies have anything to do with informality (spoiler alert: they do), what political strategies sex workers use in order to promote their agenda, and finally, what sex workers say about their clients. When crafting this project, I tried my best to avoid the "usual" questions that people ask when they hear about sex work, namely whether sex work is a choice, or whether it is a reprehensible consequence of patriarchy. Do women in sex work always suffer, or are they just happy with earning allegedly quick and easy money? The best answer to all those questions, most probably, is both and neither. In other words, the phenomenon of sex work is too

complex and too heterogeneous for simple answers. Thus, instead of researching sex work in a vacuum, I decided to approach it contextually. Borrowing Karl Polanyi's (1957) insight on the embeddedness of preindustrial economies, I decided to treat sex work as being always socially and culturally embedded. Because sex work exists on the intersection of the issues of global inequality and migration, stereotypes of the masculine and the feminine and of masculine and feminine occupations and roles, feminization of poverty, and sexual taboos. Researching sex work means inquiring about all these big issues. In other words, sex work is a magnifying glass that allows to see the global in the local.

However, before proceeding further, it is important to briefly define sex work and to provide some context for sex work in Ukraine. When I use the term "sex work" in this thesis, I mean a voluntary exchange of sexual and/or emotional services for money and/or other material benefits or goods. As a rule, I prefer the term "sex work" to the one of "prostitution." But in that rare instances that I use the latter in my own description or analysis and not in the quotations, I treat it as the synonym of "sex work." Because sex work/prostitution remains the subject of terminological and policy debates that have been going on for quite some time (Ditmore, Levy, and Willman 2010; Pitcher 2015), I find it important to clarify how I use the term. In my usage of "sex work" instead of "prostitution" I thus follow the tradition of pro-sex feminists and feminist academics, who "maintain that there is a hypocrisy underlying [radical] feminist critiques of the sex trade and male sexual control, which may indicate that the reinstatement of traditional morality (in the form of heterosexual monogamy) is what has really been at stake all along." (Bernstein 1999, 98). Thus, I do not assume sex work to be oppressive or liberatory per se, I contend that it depends on the particular context and circumstances.

In Ukraine sex work is penalized. According to the Article 181.1 of the Administrative Code of Ukraine, "the activity of prostitution" entails either a warning or a fine. If a person is caught prostituting oneself within the same year twice or more times, the fine payable for the offence goes up. Though prostitution is not criminalized, the activities of pimping, managing a brothel, and procuring are. Those found guilty in either of the above are liable for imprisonment. The exact term of imprisonment depends on the context and severity of the offence. However, as I show in this thesis (especially in chapters 3 and 4), in Ukraine legal and social realities can and do diverge.

Overall, the structure of my thesis is the following. Chapter 2, titled "A Native Outsider," ponders the question of positionality. I discuss the challenges of researching sex work in the environment where it is penalized and reflect on my position of a "native ethnographer" that has greatly assisted me in gaining trust of local sex workers. Problematizing my "nativeness," I examine the intricacies and multiple facets of my relationships with Kropyvnytskyi current and former sex workers. In the end, I conceptualize my positionality as a "native outsider."

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on informality. In chapter 3 I show how prominent informality is in sex workers' relationships with police officers, local bus drivers, and among themselves. I argue that embeddedness of current and former sex workers in social networks sometimes prevents them from moving to other place because of the fear of losing these extended networks that often operate as social security mechanisms. This chapter heavily draws on informality studies. By contrast, chapter 4 deals with people moving through the borders. It provides a historic background to sex work in the 1990s and early 2000s. Building on existing scholarship on early postsocialism, I show how the discourse of human trafficking and the international panic about sexual slavery misconstrued many experiences of women who were going

abroad for sex work by squeezing these women between the narrow categories of the victim and the criminal.

Chapter 5 is a retreat from informality to the sphere of symbolic anthropology. It draws on sex workers' narratives of dirt and cleanliness and, attempting to bridge microcosm and macrocosm, argues that sex workers' interactions with clients and sex workers' narratives about them unveil existing societal anxieties regarding the topics of sex and sexuality. I also show how sex workers discursively assert moral superiority over their clients by patronizingly indulging their clients' sexual fantasies and desires. After this intermezzo, chapter 6 brings back the topic of informality. This time I inquire about informal political practices of sex workers and challenge the notion of empowerment. Building on feminist scholarship, I show that sex workers, similar to other vulnerable and marginalized groups, frequently resort to informal and small-scale political practices instead of the more formal ones that are left for legitimate citizens. Chapter 7 is a concluding one: it provides a short summary of my argument, discusses its limitations, and suggests a few reasons why studying sex work and informality is important.

For this thesis I conducted fieldwork in the city of Kropyvnytskyi — a relatively small city of about 200,000 inhabitants in central Ukraine and the capital of Kirovohrad district (oblast). An industrial city in the USSR, with developed mechanical engineering and manufacturing industries, since Perestroika the city has been losing its significance and experiencing deindustrialization, which resulted in high unemployment rate and increasing poverty. Since the beginning of the war in the Donbass region in 2014 and after the annexation of Crimea, Kropyvnytskyi has accommodated almost ten thousand internally displaced people. In his book on Kyiv, the capital of the country, Roman Cybriwsky (2014) mentions that though the capital city is a shocking example of

coexistence of almost ridiculous wealth and rampant poverty, Kropyvnytskyi, along with some other former industrial cities, provides less contrast and fewer examples of wealth.

Somewhere on the highway at the edge of the city where my participants work some stray dogs live. One of them a few years ago was hit by a car when crossing the highway: the dog frequently walks back and forth between the thin forest strip that goes along the highway and the nearby bus station. This incident, unfortunately, mutilated one of the dog's front paws. The dog is often present on the highway and local sex workers and social workers treat it like a pet, feeding the dog and petting it. Despite the incident and the disability, the dog is not afraid of people. It is quite friendly and nice even toward those whom it has never encountered before, like me. However, somehow everybody calls it a "one-legged dog" — when, in fact, it is a three-legged dog. Still, the name caught on. I saw the dog for the first time at some point in June, when I was waiting for some of my participants at the bus station. Somehow, seeing it on that station, made me think that a one-legged dog is also a metaphor of Kropyvnytskyi.[1] Once an important city with thriving industries, it now struggles with high rates of unemployment, environmental pollution, and various diseases like HIV and tuberculosis.

[1] Kropyvnytskyi used to be called Kirovohrad before 2017. In this thesis, I use Kropyvnytskyi and Kirovohrad interchangeably, following the practices of the locals. However, the whole district (oblast) that the city is the capital of is still officially called Kirovohrad district (oblast), so when referring to the district, I call it Kirovohrad district.

Chapter 2. A Native Outsider

I am standing on a bus stop near a gas station. In front of it there is a local bus depot, where most sex workers run from time to time to charge their cell phones and buy a coffee with a sandwich, and an almost non-functional airport. It is obvious that it hardly functions because the grass on the airport runway is half my height. I am at this stop together with four social workers, three of whom are former sex workers themselves, and with three current sex workers. It is Friday afternoon, so apart from us there are only few other scattered people, waiting for their *marshrutkas* — small, dilapidated, and usually privately owned minibuses — to take them from the city to their home village or town. The stop is on the very edge of Kropyvnytskyi, it marks the beginning of the so-called Znamenskaia Trassa — a route that links Kropyvnytskyi, the main city in the region, with its satellites: Znamianka, Aleksandriia, and Svitlovodsk. It is an open secret that this is the place where you can almost 24/7 encounter a sex worker. They stand on the edge of the route during the day and group at this gas station at night, since standing on the edge of a poorly lit road at night is both fearful and unprofitable — it is doubtful that a client will spot you.

Together with Marina and Lada (both social workers), I am trying to calm down Hrystia, a local street sex worker. She is heavily drunk and shakes while standing. Today she is wearing a light yellow dress, blue denim jacket, and violet flip flops. When she approached us today, she hugged me and Lada, ignoring a couple of other girls. Drunk or not, she is often quite militant and rough, so I am pleasantly surprised by her warm hello and start thinking that maybe she has finally accepted me, almost a month and a half after our first encounter. After some time Lada, Marina, Hrystia, and I separate from the rest and go to a little more secluded space behind the gas station. Hrystia is drunk because she had another fight with her common-law partner and

another unpleasant encounter with the local police. She also suspects that she is pregnant and needs to go to a doctor to confirm that. Lada says that she will provide her with the contacts. Though at first Hrystia appears to be calm, she soon gets steamed up and starts cursing heavily. I slightly caress her hand, trying to calm her down. It works and she calms for some time. In around an hour she decides to leave for (sex) work, so we say our good byes. Again, she hugs me and Lada good bye and thanks me for caressing her hand. "You know, it is a long time since someone was so good to me, I missed it," she says. I hug her in return and promise to call to check up on her. I am torn between two contrasting emotions: on the one hand, I feel relieved and rejoice that she has finally accepted me; on the other, I am horrified that a person can be so thankful for something so simple like caressing a hand. I hate myself at that moment that I can't fully concentrate on her and keep thinking about my relationship with sex workers.

In this chapter I focus on my positionality in the field and relationship with participants. Reflecting upon my position of a "native ethnographer" that has greatly assisted me in gaining trust of local sex workers, I examine the intricacies and multiple facets of my relationship with Kropyvnytskyi sex workers and show that stepping out of research questions informed by feminist sex wars and focusing instead on the concrete issues local sex workers find pressing, can be a very constructive decision leading both to new insights and a better understanding between the researcher and participants. I reflect on my struggles with identity management in the field and show that because my participants chose to emphasize my age rather than my status as a researcher or my class background, those features that initially marked me as an outsider in the end contributed to my acceptance by the community.

Nasha: the Native Outsider

As mentioned in the Introduction, sex work is not legal in Ukraine but penalized with a fine; however, there exist criminal charges for pimping, organizing and/or owning a brothel, and trafficking. Though not a criminal activity per se, sex work is regarded by many in Ukraine as a dishonourable activity and thus is stigmatized. This leads to local sex workers being suspicious of outsiders, so earning their trust can become quite a challenge. Fortunately, I had a few acquaintances who were former sex workers themselves and co-founded an organization that aimed to organize sex workers in the country, establish links and friendships with similar organizations abroad, and influence both regional and national policies on sex work and related activities. Now a registered NGO with a dozen members that systematically expands its influence and scope of activity to other regions — this organization started in 2008 as a small initiative group that consisted of a few sex workers that were also working part-time as outreach workers for another NGO, distributing condoms, syringes, and express tests for HIV and hepatitis. In their free time, they were still going to highways and saunas — main places of sex work in Kropyvnytskyi — to talk to their fellow sex workers about the possibility of self-organizing, safe sex, HIV prevention, etc. Thus, my gate keepers were former sex workers themselves and knew the situation with sex work in the region quite well. By introducing me to their colleagues from the NGO and to street sex workers, they took away some pressure and contributed to legitimizing my continuous presence in the office of the local NGO and on the highway. This office and two local highways were my primary places of participant observation, where I spent the most time. Thus, the issue of access partly conditioned the location of my research. However, there were other factors as well. One of these factors was the consideration that

Kropyvnytskyi is quite "usual" provincial Ukrainian city, a very inconspicuous one, and that it is precisely this inconspicuousness that makes it a good place for anthropological fieldwork. In addition to participant observation, I gathered 15 open-ended in-depth interviews with sex workers: 14 of them were recorded and one was not because a sex worker was not comfortable with my recorder, so I took notes during the interview instead.

Reflecting on my positionality, I conceptualize myself in the field as a native outsider. It might appear as a paradox at a first glance, however, under greater scrutiny I find that nativeness and outsiderness are rather complementary. On the one hand, I am a native, meaning that I am from the same country, able to speak the same languages as my participants, and share with them some of the first hand local knowledge. However, how native can I be if I come from a different and much wealthier city, never been a sex worker myself, never experienced poverty, and was even able to receive a graduate degree — something that most of the local sex workers don't even dream about? (for a discussion of the question of "nativeness" see Appadurai 1988 and Narayan 1993). Zheng (2009) notes in her ethnography of hostesses in Dalian her struggle between her identity as a Chinese woman and an identity of a person living in the "West" and pursuing a graduate degree; she emphasizes that before hostesses accepted her, they used to treat her as an outsider, referring to her as "glasses" and making fun of her looks. To acknowledge this ambiguity, I decided to add a noun "outsider," admitting my very partial familiarity with Kropyvnytskyi sex workers' lives and struggles. I would be naive to assume that I can blend smoothly, when the very way I speak can betray my non-belonging and foreignness.

Coming from an urban middle-class family, I spoke Russian with my participants; and the language I used was prominent and peculiar for many people in Kropyvnytskyi,

and especially for sex workers. As Bilaniuk (2006) shows, in Ukraine the politics of language has been tied to the politics of identity and nation-building; she observes that at least since the 1800s villagers, desiring to appear more educated and to disassociate themselves from negative stereotypes about the village, started to incorporate Russian words in their speech or, at least, to pronounce Ukrainian words in Russian manner (Bilaniuk 2006, 108-109). The language-mixture that appeared as the result was then termed surzhyk (the word initially used to signify, firstly, the mixture of rye and wheat flour, which was considered of lower quality than just the wheat flour, and, secondly, miscegenation, a person with mixed background). Though the sole official language in Ukraine now is Ukrainian, many people speak Russian on everyday basis and can have trouble writing/understanding Ukrainian (especially those who were born before 1991). However, the majority of population speaks surzhyk. Surzhyk or the amount of words in surzhyk that one incorporates into one's speech, can be used (to a certain degree) as a marker to determine a person's socio-economic background. Surzhyk is often associated with lower classes and thus ridiculed as the language of the uneducated and "uncultured." As Bilaniuk observes: "While the statuses of Ukrainian, Russian, and surzhyk were in flux, the emergence of discourse defining surzhyk as low and unacceptable was key in disassociating Ukrainian from low status and moving it to a position of prestige" (Bilaniuk 2006, 106).

When I was first introduced as "Dafna, a researcher from Canada," almost all sex workers decided that I don't understand Russian or Ukrainian and didn't express much interest in me. And I was shy to talk. "Does she speak our language?"— one of the sex workers asked Lesia, a social worker standing near me. "Of course I do," — I was offended and failed to properly conceal my emotions. "Oh, so you are *nasha*," — a sex worker replied. *Nasha* — best translated as ours — is probably one of the most

prominent discursive marks that Russian and Ukrainian speakers use to construct an us-versus-them divide. In that context, being classified as *nasha* meant being classified as a person who can potentially understand "our ways" and who can potentially be trusted (and with whom you have to be sometimes careful as well). Still, desiring to become even more *nasha*, I was permanently ashamed of my way of speaking: my Russian was too "pure," my sentences were too structured, I didn't use almost any obscene words — a stark contrast with the speech of those around me, who were quite skilled in incorporating a great variety of swear words into their speech.[2] Attempting to gain the trust of my participants, I resorted to "impression management" (Goffman 1959) and started to incorporate words in surzhyk and swears into my own speech. Unfortunately, I have no way of evaluating how successful this strategy was and whether those with whom I interacted perceived these surzhyk injections to be "authentic." I strived to appear less shy and soft, more rough and forward, I didn't want to be perceived as a researcher who doesn't know anything about how things "really" are and how they work, because s/he is constantly thinking about some supposedly higher matters. I wanted to be the opposite of that. Trying to pass and to be perceived as a "buddy-researcher" (Snow, Benford, Anderson 1986), I started to incorporate surzhyk and profane language but not too much of it (of course, how much is enough is always a subjective measure): as overusing surzhyk would make it seem like I was simply mimicking my participants' way of speaking.

In his witty piece on fieldwork Erving Goffman cautioned against mimicking the accents of one's participants (1989). He also coldly stated a fact that during your

[2] Since Russian language is quite well-known for its variety of swear words and for its plasticity in inventing new swears, for a person that is very skilled with swears and incorporates a great deal of them, people often say that s/he "is not swearing but rather talking in swears" (*ne materitsia, a razgovarivaet matom*).

fieldwork you always make "an ass" out of yourself — simply because you don't know how small things that are important to your participants function. According to Goffman, it is perfectly fine "to be an ass" (1989, 128) and not to demonstrate appropriate knowledge about these small things. He argues that "the natives will accept as a reasonable thing" (1989, 128) something that is in between their world and the world of a researcher, so a researcher has to balance between mimicry and retaining an old identity. However, as Mitchell Duneier (2001) cautions, a researcher's identity is often fluid and context-dependent: participants might choose to emphasize or de-emphasize certain aspects of it over the course of fieldwork. It seems that my participants often chose to emphasize my age instead of other characteristics. I elaborate on that a bit longer below.

Though I am still not fully certain of how successful I was in managing my social identity, I became less nervous and worried about my position and how I am perceived after a few of the participants included me into their gossiping circles and started to share with me the gossips they had recently heard from others, including the gossips about myself.[3] Another sign that I interpreted as the fact that I became more accepted by the participants (primarily by former sex workers who are now social workers) was the fact that some of them started to heavily police my femininity by commenting on my appearance, asking me about my sex life, and whether I plan to settle down and have children. It was as if they tried to steer me in the right direction and to remedy my insufficient femininity that partially stemmed from me being a researcher. Social workers often gave each other advice on hairstyles, clothes, manicure, pedicure, and other appearance-related issues. Excluded at first from these suggestions exchanges, I

[3] For better or for worse, the gossips about me were usually not that interesting: people wondered about my sex life and hypothesized whom among sex workers and social workers I sympathized with more and with whom less.

then became incorporated in the advice networks: I started to receive suggestions about where to cut my hair, where to paint my nails, where to buy the cheapest clothes, etc. These gestures on the part of my participants mitigated some of my fieldwork anxieties about being an outsider, however, they also resulted in the new ones, in the anxieties about what Goffman called "dramaturgic elements of the human situation" (1959, 237): in worrying whether I didn't commit any *faux pas*, unmeant gestures, or unwillingly sabotaged my performance in any other way (for instance, by overusing surzhyk, swearing too much, inadvertently using some academic jargon, or being too rude when declining another suggestion about how to tie my hair). According to Goffman (1959), the success of one's performance is contingent on the audience: if the latter thinks that a performance is unacceptable, the audience will provide a performer with a (subtle or not so subtle) hint of that. I believe that I was more successful than not in my performance. I base this conclusion on the fact of my inclusion into the gossiping circles and the advice networks of my participants.

Ethnographers often wonder how successful they were in blending in and trying to pass as a native in a community that they study. As mentioned above, they often have to balance between being authentic enough and thus not standing out too much, on the one hand, and going native and blending too much, on the other. And though researchers always try to blend as smoothly as possible, some scholars question how necessary it is and whether it indeed provides better data. For instance, Alison Spedding (1999) reflects on the intricacies of doing a participant observation while being imprisoned in a female prison in La Paz. It might seem counterintuitive at the first glance, but Spedding makes a good case for remaining an "outsider" to the community that you study. According to her, outsiderness grants a researcher a certain degree of flexibility, which is not possible for natives; for instance, it allows to participate in other

social groups or categories. In short, Spedding maintains that researchers benefit from being outsiders and from being identified as such by their participants. Similarly, Sandra Bucerius argues that, contrary to the established ideas in ethnography, an insider status might be "a liability since many assumptions go unquestioned." (2013, 716). According to her, a researcher can learn to use their differences from participants in a productive way in order to become "an outsider trusted with inside knowledge" (Bucerius 2013, 716). As I show below, sex workers' perception of me as of someone from a younger generation and thus technically savvy — these markers of my outsiderness — in the end helped me to become accepted.

Researchers of sex work and feminist ethnographers often note that bearing in mind socio-economic discrepancies that exist between a researcher and a researched community, it is important to establish a relationship of reciprocity with the participants; however, you can hardly find an exhaustive guide on how to do that. I suppose that each researcher of sex work has to find their own way. If at first I was mostly ignored or treated with just "hellos" and "goodbyes," a month into my fieldwork, after what I call a "cell-phone incident," things started to change. Most of the social workers and former sex workers who worked in the NGO regarded me as someone from a younger generation despite the fact that sometimes our age differences were insignificant; in other words, they gave me a different "sociological age" (Zivkovic, personal communication) and thus assigned me to the same generation as their children, regarding me as someone who was more technically savvy. Thus, they were asking me to help them with their smart phones and laptops — and I was happy to help and be of some use. In a month, this fact reached local sex workers. One day, Zoia brought her old phone to me and asked that I see whether it has flashlight. I figured out that it did and showed her how to switch it on and off. I learned that the task was

accomplished successfully when the next time I came to the highway, my participants presented me with a bunch of new "technical" tasks. Ironically, my superficial technical savvy, this obvious signifier of me being an outsider, contributed in the end to me with time becoming even more *nasha*. Though it is out of scope of this chapter, this generational redefining can also shed some light on a long due discussion of class and a certain contingency of age on class. For instance, one of the facts that led to me being assigned to a "younger" generation was the fact that I was still a student. It is quite obvious that had I not been born in a rather well-off family in the capital city, the chances that at the age of 26 years I would be acquiring my second graduate degree instead of nursing a child would have been smaller. I was only two and a half years younger than some sex workers, still, they sometimes referred to me as *"malaia"* (a small one). Secondly, I was the only person around who didn't have kids. All current and former sex workers had (or used to have) at least one child. This also contributed to them seeing me as someone who is younger. Thirdly, my hobbies, or to be more precise, the lack of certain hobbies like watching TV, was also interpreted as a marker of my youth. Admittedly, these three facts (education; mother — non-mother status; preferences for certain hobbies) if explored more in-depth can unveil many things about one's class background as much information (if not more) as about one's belonging to a certain age category.

As I became more and more *nasha*, so enlarged the list of the duties I was trusted with. Packing coffee, tea, syringes, and condoms when preparing for a regular outreach visit with social workers; helping to craft short introductory pieces for the organization's social media pages; translating texts and reports from Russian to English and back; eventually, I was even babysitting children who were bored with long summer vacations and whom their mothers didn't want to see hanging out in the

organization's office, where a child can overhear too much. Was the rapport established? Constantly worrying about my relationships with sex workers, I was calmed at the very end of my fieldwork when we were saying our good byes. "What? Already leaving? Pfff, you just came,"— was the reaction of Nelia, one of a local "veteran" sex workers. She seemed to be genuinely surprised, and I promised to come back the next summer, explaining that I have to go back to write my thesis. Similarly, former sex workers with whom I spent time every day in the NGO office appeared to be astonished that I am "leaving so soon." "You know, I got so used to you being in the office that when you didn't show up one day I was thinking of calling you and asking where the hell you were and why you weren't in the office, working," Arina told me, smilingly. Preparing to leave, I discussed with my participants again the research that I was doing. Since my thesis is going to be written in English, which is of no use to my participants, who don't speak it, I struck a deal that after my thesis is done, I will prepare a short article on sex work in Ukraine that will be based on my research. I was pleasantly surprised that they were the first to ask whether I plan to write something in Russian or Ukrainian after my research. "If you need me to — I will," — I said then. I received an answer that "Of course we need. You know we don't have many allies." Probably, being considered as an ally and being considered of use to my participants was the greatest credit that I could ever aspire for. This final exchange assuaged some of my concerns about the rapport and slightly convinced me that I was not a useless burden, hanging around and asking personal questions.

Interview vs. "A story of your life"

Coming up with a research design that is sensitive to the needs and struggles of vulnerable groups is a challenge, especially if you are separated from this very group by

thousand of miles. Still, it proved to be possible. As Susan Dewey and Tiantian Zheng argue, researchers who study sex work "need to employ an inclusive approach that can involve sex workers in the analysis and interpretation of their lives, behaviors, and life choices." (Dewey and Zheng 2013, 32). Thus, it was important for me when crafting my research design to abandon the binary of structure versus agency (which is usually employed when writing about sex work or similar activities) and of "happy hooker" versus "the victim of trafficking" (that unfortunately continues to inform much of the research on sex work around the world). To escape these shallow dichotomies, I focused my questions on sex workers' point(s) of view, actions, and interpretations of these actions by the participants themselves.

Arriving to the field with "foreshadowed problems" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) rather than with neatly and clearly formulated questions proved to be quite fruitful. Firstly, before even mentioning in passing the possibility of recording interviews, I spent around two weeks sitting in the NGO's office and accompanying social workers to the highway in order to be introduced to sex workers and to give them time to get used to me. Such "the fly on the wall" approach was useful to better understand the problems that my participants are preoccupied with and thus to formulate interview questions and to refine my research agenda. In addition, before starting interviews, I talked to some of the participants — former sex workers — whom I have known before and who acted as my gatekeepers whether there are any pressing problems the organization faces and whether there are topics that it is better not to touch. This kind of "bottleneck" approach to the research, when I crafted research questions with consultation from some of the participants proved to be beneficial: as not only did I get much interesting data, I was able to come with a focus that was interesting to me and useful for my participants.

Because of the ethnographic nature of my research and in order to avoid looming generalizations about sex work, the interviews turned out to be rather oral narratives, unique life stories about one's experience of sex work. When approaching this task, I decided to quit a "production line"-like approach to interviews (asking all and everybody a chain of more-or-less similar questions) and focus instead on what my respondents deemed as important and what they wanted to share with me. Thus, instead of formal interviews, these rather resembled guided conversations. My decision to not interrupt the respondents when they went off on a tangent and started to talk about a totally different subject resulted in participants using this opportunity to talk through some issues: for instance, to reflect on their childhood, their experience of pregnancy, their relationships with parents, etc. It seemed like these conversations had a therapeutic effect on them. The majority of interviews were recorded in the NGO's office, in a small room that temporarily served as a closet, to ensure that nobody will disrupt the conversation or overhear it. The time for interviews was usually pre-arranged; acknowledging that my participants have busy schedules and have to balance their identities as sex workers with their identities as mothers. However, some interviews were recorded on a highway, per request of participants, who did not want to "waste time." To ensure privacy, we went further away from everyone else and sat under some billboard, drinking tea or coffee and talking.

While recording some of the first interviews, I learned about the importance of phrasing the request for one. Initially, when approaching people with a plea for an interview, both former and current sex workers tended to become very wary — somehow the mere wording of "the interview" intimidated some; it sounded too official. By contrast, when I asked "to tell about your life and your views and experience of sex work," the reaction was drastically different: "Oh, I have a lot of stories to tell!" or

"Easy-peasy." Still, after some time my participants got used to the word "interview." Closer to the end of my fieldwork, a few sex workers from a different city were visiting Kropyvnytskyi. They already knew about me, my position, the research that I was doing, and the fact that I was interviewing sex workers. To my own befuddlement, one of these sex workers approached me at the end of the day and asked whether I am planning to interview her. Though surprised, I could not turn down this request and we arranged for an interview on the same day, in a few hours. As I learned during the interview, I talked to many of her friends in the city, and she didn't want to "feel excluded" as she was the only one among them who was not interviewed. This incident made me reflect on the indirect coercion to participate that I unwillingly might have placed on some. There is always a possibility that someone will participate in your study "socially," not out of the genuine interest in the topic, not out of the desire to help but because his or her friends participated. However, human motivation is often a complex amalgam of various desires (and not only desires), so it is hardly possible to disentangle one true motivation.

Lastly, it is important to admit that had I focused on the agency-structure debate, I would not have been able to grasp the full picture of how complex the lives of my participants are and, probably, would have ended up with a misconstrued image that could be easily used to perpetuate the "happy hooker" versus "the victim of trafficking" binary. For instance, though all my participants come from poor families (and some of them did have violent parents, this is by no means generalizable to all of them), they refuse to be seen as powerless victims lacking agency. One of the predominant topics in their narratives was, of course, the narrative of poverty and of its relation to a person's decision to go into sex work. Still, my participants cautioned me against interpreting this experience as an evidence of their powerlessness: while

emphasizing that they are "victims of poverty" they still accentuated that sex work was their choice and that despite the problems they may encounter with the police or clients, they are still attached to this work. Moreover, they also highlighted the business aspect of this work: that they do it for money and treat it as work, differentiating between sex with clients and their intimate personal lives. Had I focused on a more theoretical level, this complexity would have escaped me — the fact that my participants see sex work as a response to their socio-economic circumstances.

Researching sex work in a country where it is not legal forces one to ponder a few questions about the boundaries of il/legality and where you would like to position yourself. Does hanging around with sex workers and continuously observing their negotiations with clients makes one an "accomplice"? Stepping into my field, I wasn't ruminating much about ethical dilemmas of such kind of research on the margins. Fully aware that from the point of view of the state my participants are offenders and from the point of view of a random Ukrainian philistine they are "sick" and "dirty" people, I was not bothered by ethical meditations regarding my "edge" status. I reasoned that my status was derivative of my allegiance and not vice versa: meaning that it was clear to me from the very beginning whose side I was on. Engaging in a research with sex workers or other potentially vulnerable groups, it is hardly possible to stay an uninvolved and disciplined citizen, respectful of the laws and the state apparatus. Perceptively aware of my informants marginal position, I decided to be a "vulnerable observer" (Behar 1996, 6) until the end: to maintain full confidentiality and full fidelity to my participants without limitations. Being emotionally involved with my participants, being entrusted with some secrets that I know are never supposed to seep out on paper, in the end, I know that I am hiding behind clever words like "participant observation," "fieldwork," and "ethnography" my profound anxiety and vulnerability.

That I have become attached to those whom I have to officially call "my participants," whose courage I profoundly admire, and whose trust in me as an ally I deeply value. This fieldwork, this anthropology truly breaks my heart, but as Ruth Behar once eloquently put it, "anthropology that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing anymore." (Behar 1996, 177).

Chapter 3. Informality, Economies of Favour, And Other Survival Strategies

It is a Sunday evening in July. My roommate Lada is still away. Around a week ago she left with her dad and her dog to Smolensk in Russia to visit relatives and relax. Tired from sitting in my room and reading, I decide to wash the dishes, boil water to make some tea, and maybe watch a movie. I open the tap in the kitchen but no water comes out of it. No water comes out of the tap in the bathroom as well. Slightly paralyzed with the fear that something has gone wrong with the plumbing system and that I will have to deal with it on my own in the absence of my roommate (who is the owner of the place), I start hastily googling the news about Kropyvnytskyi and whether there have been any accidents that could, directly or indirectly, cause this water outage. I quickly learn that an accident on the transmission tower that supplies water to Kropyvnytskyi and its satellites is the cause. I learn that this Sunday afternoon a few people climbed the transmission tower and stole some parts of it: transmission towers are made from non-ferrous metals, so by selling the stolen parts on the black market these adventurers would most probably earn some good money. I sigh. Stealing parts of infrastructure (cutting phone or Internet cables, for instance) in order to sell them is a known strategy in Ukraine. One might even call it a survival strategy. Transmission tower was repaired in a week, so water supply was renewed. However, from that time and until the end of my fieldwork, I was always keeping a filled five litre bottle of water in the kitchen, just in case. I decided to be on the safe side.

* * *

When describing everyday experiences of most people in post-socialist spaces, it is essential to mention how pervasive informality is. Informal payments in the healthcare services (Stepurko et al. 2015), informal employment (Nezhyvenko and

Adair 2017), informal economic practices within the police (O'Shea 2015), etc. are just a part of the almost omnipresent informality. In post-socialist countries, the state is not always an entity with a "panoptic gaze" (Foucault 1977) that is able to routinely perform redistributive and disciplinary functions, providing its citizens with necessary services — so, when the state fails to provide certain services, what is "needed by a given segment of a population might end up being provided informally" (Davies and Polese 2015, 36).

Post-soviet spaces have quite a long and interesting history of informality. For instance, Ledeneva (1998) documented the ubiquity of blat in the late Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Russia. Defining blat as "a 'survival kit' reducing uncertainty in conditions of shortage, exigency and perpetual emergency, in which formal criteria and formal rights are insufficient to operate" (1998, 78), Ledeneva showed how people resorted to using extended personal networks in order to obtain goods and services that were otherwise either unavailable or hardly available to them. Scholars have also documented informal practices almost all over the post-socialist space: from Romania and Slovakia to Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine to Kyrgyzstan (Cieślewska 2014; Karjanen 2013; Knudsen 2014; Onoshchenko and Williams 2013; Sasunkevich 2014; Williams and Horodnic 2017). In this chapter, situating Ukraine within the post-Soviet space, I will discuss existing informalities in Kropyvnytskyi and show how sex workers rely on informality and especially on economies of favour in order to sustain themselves.

A Very Brief Introduction to Kropyvnytskyi

It has already become almost a commonplace for scholars in informality studies to theorize Ukraine as a weak state with high informality. It didn't escape their attention

that Ukraine is an example of a "welfare failure" (Polese 2016, 149), and that in the context of Ukraine this "welfare failure" can be theorized as a form of "stealthy violence" (Gilbert and Ponder 2013) in the sense that "individuals are exposed to bare life through inadequate compensation and de facto state-abandonment" (Polese 2016, 149). Davies and Polese (2015) discuss state-abandonment in the case of Chernobyl. They show that the state of Ukraine basically withdrew from this region (i.e. Chernobyl nuclear zone) and left people who still live in the region to provide for themselves. Though Chernobyl is indeed a case of state-abandonment par excellence, Davies and Polese's arguments can be to a certain extent generalized — as the consequences of the state's withdrawal are also evident in other towns and in former industrial cities in Ukraine. One of such former industrial cities is Kropyvnytskyi, former Kirovohrad.

Founded in the late 18th century, it was an inconspicuous and small town until the 1930s, when factories were built and rebuilt and population increased. In the second half of the 20th century, Kirovohrad was an important industrial city with factories that produced and repaired agricultural machines, radio components, typewriters, building materials, furniture, footwear, and food products. However, since perestroika (and especially since the 1990s), the city has seen many dramatic changes. One after another the factories were closing and the level of unemployment was steadily growing. For the years 2010-2011 it was estimated that the level of unemployment in the city was around 10% and that over 40% of its population lived below the poverty line (Kramar 2011). In a similar vein, assessing and comparing regional development in Ukraine, Zhurba notes that "[t]he Kirovohrad region is the last on the index in the social category and in sustainable development. It is also the last on the index for the level of personal safety. The region is characterized by an average level of environmental contamination, a low economic index measurement, particularly

low development rates of business activities, corrupt practices and serious criminal activity, high mortality rates and falling living standards" (2017, 139).

Given the worsened economic situation, since the 1990s denizens of Kirovohrad started to resort to different survival strategies, such as stealing and reselling on the black market parts of infrastructure, going abroad for some seasonal work (including sex work), street vending, and shuttle trade. A rather exhaustive definition and a discussion of shuttle trade can be found in Zabyelina (2012, 98):

> "Shuttle trade is a unique form of international trade developed in the 1990s in the republics of the former Soviet bloc. … In essence, it relates to economic practices, in which shuttle traders or chelnoki 'shuttle' (by analogy with a weaving gadget as in a loom or a sewing machine that moves from one side of a canvas to another) travel from the place of procurement of goods at cheap sources abroad or in major wholesale markets locally (e.g. Luzhniki and Cherkizovsky in Moscow, Sed'moi Kilometer/Avangard in Odessa, Barabashovo in Kharkiv, Dordoi Bazaar in Bishkek) and then back to the point where they resell goods at a higher price. Shuttle trade resembles large-scale cross-border shopping 'wherein private individuals buy goods abroad because of lower taxes and import them for their own consumption, without declaring them in order to avoid paying import duties'. It might include barter of goods and services, exchanges based on trust and mutual self-help, odd and opportunistic jobs and street trading."

Unfortunately, it is now difficult to provide the exact estimates of the scope of these informal economic activities in the 1990s (both for Kirovohrad and for the post-Soviet space in general): due to their illicit character it is impossible to find any official statistics and scholars have only recently become interested in researching informality. However, even crude approximations belie its pervasive nature: for instance, regarding the shuttle trade, Mukhina (2014) argues that in the mid-1990s, at the peak of its popularity, around 30 million people (in Russia alone) participated in it. Mukhina also claims that it was the shuttle trade that supplied the Russian market with around 75% of its consumer goods.

Informal economy continues to nurture Kirovohrad's life. Street vending, for example, has become an almost inseparable part of this city's landscape. Every day from the early morning to the late evening in a small park surrounded on the one side by a local arboretum and by bazaars on three others, you can encounter babushkas selling old clothes, home-grown vegetables and fruits, old plates, cups and silverware, along with other oddities like ceramic or glass statues or old LP players. This phenomenon of unregulated street vending is known in Russian and Ukrainian as "stikhiinaia torgovlia" — spontaneous trading, if to translate verbatim. The adjective "spontaneous" — "stikhiinaia" — however, is derived from a noun "stikhiia," meaning a force of nature that is impossible to manage or regulate (for example, "stikhiinoe bedstvie" means a natural disaster — an earthquake, a tsunami, a hurricane, etc). This phenomenon of "stikhiinaia torgovlia" is indeed difficult to regulate: these ad hoc markets like the one in the park in Kirovohrad appeared as a response to the turmoil of the 1990s and have since mushroomed in the country.

Discussing informal economy, it is also important to mention economy of favours that is no less vital. Lonkila (1997), Ledeneva (1998), Walker (2010), Polese (2016) show how pervasive economy of favours is in the post-Soviet space and how reliance on extended kin or social networks help people navigate their everyday routines. Constant relying on extended networks for support, in its turn, leads to people becoming rooted in a place and refusing to relocate even in the face of danger. Coming back to the Chernobyl case, Davies and Polese (2015) show how Chernobyl nuclear zone residents embrace the place they live in and reject the idea of relocation to a less contaminated region, even when relocation means that it would be potentially easier for them to find jobs. Instead, Chernobyl denizens find it less risky to stay in the nuclear zone and to continue to rely on their social connections in order to provide for

themselves. In other words, social/kin networks have become such an important part of people's lives that they are worth the risks connected to living in an area contaminated with radiation. These latter things: the importance of social/kin networks, fear of losing them, and ensuing rootedness in the place, is what I frequently encountered during my research as well.

Certainly, relying on one's kin networks for support, as well as resorting to informal means of obtaining jobs, goods, or services, is by no means a unique feature of the post-Soviet space. For instance, Loic Waquant documented that due to "the failings of welfare coverage" ghetto residents in the United States often "'moonlight' on jobs" and "'hustle' for money through diverse schemes in order to 'make that dollar' day to day" (2008, 62). Similarly, he also noted the importance of female kin networks for women living in ghettos, stating that "female kin networks are the most reliable, if not the only, source of financial support they can draw on in case of emergency" (2008, 63). However, the post-Soviet space is prominent because of the sheer scope of informality: here informality is not restricted to ghetto areas but on the contrary is a prominent way of organizing exchanges and relations between people and groups in general.

Intersections of money and intimacy

Whether or not money poisons intimacy has been a question that researchers love to ponder. Viviana Zelizer (1994) noted and commented upon some of the most prominent positions and discussions regarding this question. After carefully examining them, however, she reached a conclusion that neither of the existing positions does justice to such an intricate issue. So, Zelizer proposed a new approach which she termed "a good match" approach (1994, 153). What is important, writes Zelizer, is not

whether money poisons relationship or not, but the fact that some of the matches between intimacy and money are viable — "the economic work of the relationship" gets done while sustaining the relationship at the same time (1994, 153). To support her approach, she describes a study of two mothers, who in order to support their children relied on "serial boyfriends". And with time "the boundaries between 'serial boyfriends' and prostitution blurred" (1994, 181). Still, what was interesting and important to note, was the fact that "[c]ontrary to widespread belief, furthermore, it was not the money involved that determined the relationship quality, but the relationship that defined the appropriateness of one sort of payment or another" (1994, 181). It would be thus a simplification to postulate some universal formula of money and intimacy and money and sex.

Similarly, it would be an oversimplification to treat sex work as only a survival strategy and to see sex workers solely as victims of unfortunate circumstances. As argued by Kempadoo, sex work can be understood as "work within a clearly defined industry, as a survival strategy, or as a way of making do when other options are limited or closed" (1999, 225). And it can also be seen as a combination of those. Phrasisombath et al. note in their study of sex workers in Laos that sex workers have some "control over their working situation" and "see benefits regarding their work" (2012, 9). One such benefit is financial stability that allows sex workers to support their families (2012). Likewise, Zheng shows that hostesses in Dalian "viewed their bodies as resources to be capitalized upon" (2009, 185) and "attached a price tag to different body parts and levied cash from customers according to the parts that they had touched" (2009, 184-185).

The topic of being in control over one's life and working situations was also something that I encountered in the field from time to time. For instance, it was quite

common for sex workers to contrast themselves with women who go to bars in order to hook up with men. Speaking of their bodies in terms of capital and resources, they often framed encounters with clients and sex work in general with an emphasis on agency, supply and demand rhetoric, and contract-like obligations that stemmed from their agreements with clients. When talking about a terminological dispute of "prostitution" versus "sex work" and arguing for the term "sex work," Ilona quite in length explained the benefits of sex work in comparison with hook-ups in bars:

> "Well, I want to tell you that yes, every woman, every woman that comes to a bar is selling herself. When she comes to a bar to meet a guy — she does it for something, and not because she wants just to sit around him, chat with him, when he buys her drinks (*ugoshchaet*). Well, it is all good, but what do we have in the end? You leave with him, go to his place, have sex with him, give him a blow job… for…what? For a glass of beer, forgive me? Or for 300 grams of vodka? You sold yourself, we can say so. Without knowing it. Well, knowingly but… How do I explain it to you?.. It is something totally different. Someone can buy you a glass of juice [instead of alcohol], but you will still leave with him and do it [have sex]. And here… In sex work you have a price. You come, you have a price and people have to pay you this price. And in those situations… It is…negotiable, they pretend it is because of love (*po-liubvi*). Yes, a one night stand because of love. And the majority [of women] does it. You can go to any bar (*kabak*) and look at the girls, when they… How they dress up and in different way hint 'take me, please!'"

An emphasis on contractual and transactional side of sex work is also evident in the story of Nelia. She has been a sex worker for around twenty years, and other sex workers joke that she is a "veteran of sex work." During one of my visits to the highway, she told me a story that had happened a few years ago. "A truck driver slowed down near me and offered me 100 rubles [meaning Ukrainian hryvnas] for a blow job [a standard price being 200-250 hryvnas][4]. I told him to fuck off. He told me that I disappointed him and that he wouldn't come here for me again. I told him 'Thanks God, I am not doing that for a hundred.' If he thought that I would beg him —

[4] 100 UAH is around 5 CAD.

he was wrong. I am working here, not giving alms." By distinguishing "working sex" from "leisure sex" (and possibly from "pity sex" as well), sex workers are able to set boundaries between what they do at work and what they do at home and assert some (however small) control and power over their working situations.

Despite being illegal, sex work is seen by many as a legitimate way of earning money. I often heard of it being "an honest way" of earning as well. As evident from Ilona's quotation, sex work is seen as a more "honest" and transparent activity than one night stands, as in a sex worker-client encounter both agree on a price and services beforehand. However, sex work was also described as an "honest" activity in general. For instance, when asked whether her children know that she is a sex worker, Marina said that since she as a parent demands honesty from her children, she is compelled to be honest with them in return and to provide them with truth about her work. Nevertheless, she cautioned: "Parents are parents and it is not important how they earn money, I don't kill anyone, I don't steal… That is the main thing. I honestly earn this money; by what means I earn them — it is another question. It is… It is the question only I can ask myself. Only I can ask it and only to myself." Marina has a degree in accounting, but she doesn't have any job experience because after she finished her degree, she took her first maternal leave and gave birth to the first child. In the absence of other possibilities of employment (companies in Ukraine are reluctant to hire women without job experience who are single mothers), sex work is the main source of income for Marina who raises three children on her own. Possibly, this insistence on her earning money in an honest way is an important mechanism by which she can legitimize her status as a mother and as a provider. Marina was by no means the only one to insist on sex work as an honest way of earning money. Ksenia, who had her children taken away from her because of problems with drugs, told me that she is

not hiding from her neighbours the fact she is a sex worker. "I am not hiding it from anyone in my neighbourhood — I don't care what they say. At least, I am always looking them in the eye and saying: 'You're not gonna feed me *(vy zh menia ne prokormite)*, right?' At least, I am working, I don't steal, I don't kill — I earn my money honestly. Even if I earn it in such a way."

What is prominent in these cases is the fact that both Marina and Ksenia contrasted sex work with murder and theft, stating that whereas the latter two constitute a dishonest way of earning money, sex work is a legitimate activity. From the legal and normative perspective there is little difference between all three activities as all three are illegal in Ukraine — still, as it often happens, in the minds of people some activities tend to be more legal or less legal than others. To understand this discrepancy, it is useful to turn to Polese's (2016) reflection on il/licit and il/legal practices. Drawing on discussions in informality studies, Polese mentions that "the boundary between what is criminal and what is not may be very subjective … There are things that are illegal by local criminal codes but people do not perceive them as 'bad'" (2016, 25). He proposes to approach informal practices not from the view of legality but rather by evaluating whether they cause direct or indirect harm to society. Approached from this perspective, most informality practices, according to him, are either unregulated by the state or illegal but are at the same time socially acceptable because they are seen as practices that do not cause any direct harm to society: they do not affect fellow citizens in a direct and harmful way. Sex work as described by Marina and Ksenia quite neatly falls into this description — though illegal, it does not cause direct harm and is thus more or less acceptable.

Informalities and economies of favour in Kropyvnytskyi

Most sex workers[5] that work on highways in Kropyvnytskyi have very basic education. Many of them dropped out of school and don't even have full secondary education. My own observations regarding the level of education are quite consistent with the data from the survey that was carried out some time before my arrival by an NGO that I was close to. According to this survey, 68% of sex workers in Kropyvnytskyi don't have full secondary education, meaning that they were schooled only for 9 years and never went to high school. Only 8% of sex workers have full secondary education (finished high school). The rest 24% have some type of technical vocational training, meaning that they spent 7 years in school and additional 2-3 years in a technical college (Legalife-Ukraine 2017).[6] In addition, almost all of these sex workers are mothers and have at least one child that they have to provide for. Moreover, because the majority of them, as a rule, do not have a permanent partner (according to the above mentioned survey, in Kropyvnytskyi 76% of sex workers are either widowed, divorced, or have never been married), often they have to provide for their children and elderly parents by themselves. As mentioned above, it is difficult enough to find a permanent well-paid job in Kropyvnytskyi. And it is many more times harder if you have a small child, if you are a drug user, or if you have a criminal record.

[5] I find it important to remind here that I did my fieldwork among street sex workers who might not be 100% representative of sex workers in Ukraine in general. Sex work is a heterogenous phenomenon with its internal hierarchies, where street sex workers are usually considered to be the lowest strata, both because of having the lowest income and because of coming from lower classes.

[6] A usual Soviet and post-Soviet full secondary education consists of 3 years of primary school, 5 years of secondary school, and 2 years of high school. After graduating from a secondary school a person can enter a *tehnikum* — a technical college — instead of high school. *Tehnikum* provides people with 2-3 years of vocational training. One can apply to a university either after high school or *tehnikum*. Ukraine inherited this education system from the Soviet Union and altered it only in 2017.

In this regard, Inna's story is very illustrative. Not long after she gave birth to her first child, her husband was imprisoned, and Inna's mother was diagnosed with double pneumonia. The family didn't have their own apartment or room, so they had to rent a place. Inna could hardly find a place to rent because landlords were sceptical that a single woman with a sick mother and a small child (who was 8 months at that time) would be able to pay the rent permanently and on time. In the end, Inna was able to find a place to rent but the place cost 800 UAH (around 40 CAD) per month. At the time, Inna's salary was 600 UAH per month (30 CAD). She narrated this story with quite some emotion:

> "My salary was 600, and I had to pay 800 for an apartment. But I also had a baby and I needed to feed her, to buy her clothes, shoes, diapers… And she refused to eat random cheap child food but she ate only NAN which was quite expensive for me then. … And I also had to take care of my mother: to buy medicine, to feed her. She had cancer but we didn't know it back then, we were told it is double pneumonia. So she was at hospitals all the time. Doctors tried to cure her pneumonia for two years… Whereas she had cancer. And I had to live with that somehow. My mum had a pension but it wasn't enough. Her pension together with my salary wasn't enough. I went to the market [bazaar] and took the first job that I was offered. I worked there for some time but then I was blamed that there was not enough money in the cash register (*nedostacha*)[7] and I left."

After that Inna found a job as a sales assistant in a local shop. However, she was told that there is a probation period for a few weeks and that this probation period is not paid for (which is a usual situation in Ukraine). In some time, when the probation period was about to finish, Inna was told that she isn't a suitable candidate for the job because she is a single mother. Inna was also able to secure some work on

[7] This situation, *nedostacha* (lack, if to translate verbatim), is a situation of lack of money (sales revenue) in the cash register. From time to time, owners of the spots on the market profit from gullible newbies by not accounting for the fact that vegetables and fruits they sell lose their weight over time. This way, there occurs a discrepancy between the sum that should be in the register for a certain amount of products sold and the sum that de facto is in the register after all products are sold. After unveiling *nedostacha*, owners of the spot blame the sellers for not being attentive enough or accuse them of stealing and thus deduct the lacking sum from the sellers' salaries.

construction sites, but this wasn't permanent employment and she constantly faced lack of money. After an especially tough period, when she had to dumpster dive to find food and clothes for herself and her child, she decided to turn to sex work. She registered on a website and postulated that she works only evenings and nights. This way, she was able to spend enough time with her child and her sick mother. "I was working at nights. With clients. But I knew that after serving one or two clients, I do not need to worry. I can just walk into the night shop, buy all necessary products and bring them home." As mentioned above, Inna's situation is not that outstanding. Many sex workers in Kropyvnytskyi do count every penny and live under almost constant conditions of shortage of money. Social welfare that they receive from the state as single mothers or as mothers with many children is rather symbolic money that does not allow them not to work. It is, then, not surprising that when faced with such a situation, people start growing informal networks and expanding social connections.

One of the most prominent examples of how having connections helps you to get by and even to save on the everyday expenses is an example of sex workers' relationships with local bus drivers. Since many sex workers who work on highways near Kropyvnytskyi aren't from the city itself but live in smaller towns and villages near it, they have to use marshrutkas — local minibuses — to get from home to work and back. One ride in such minibus (depending, of course, on how far one lives from the city and on the time of day) can cost from 30 to 70 UAH (1,5 to 3,5 CAD). Given that in bad days sex workers can have only one or two clients and thus earn only around 200-500 UAH (10 - 25 CAD), paying for the ride to work and back can be a serious sum of money. In order to save and to skip paying for the ride, many sex workers prefer to ride only those minibuses where their friends works as drivers. Some drivers and sex workers not only come from the same village or town but they know each other quite

well by virtue of being neighbours, distant relatives, or classmates. And local etiquette has it that you don't charge your friends and relatives for the same services that you charge other people for. In such cases, thus, drivers do not take payments from sex workers, allowing them to ride for free.

Sex workers also have a silent and mutual agreement with the local road police, DAI (Derzhavna avtomobilna inspektsiia — State Roads Vehicle Inspection). Responsibilities of the "usual" police (that is, of the National Police) end with the city limits of Kropyvnytskyi, so roads between the city and villages and towns in the region are the responsibility of the road police.[8] DAI is responsible for overseeing that drivers respect speed limits, park cars only in those spots where it is allowed, do not drive distracted or when drunk. A month into my fieldwork, I found out that on one of the highways there exist a DAI station and that some sex workers prefer to work quite close to it because of convenience. As I was told by sex workers, sometimes DAI officers bring clients to sex workers: for instance, after the road police stop a car for speeding or for some other reason, they can quickly evaluate the driver and ask him whether he is interested in "having some fun." If the driver agrees, DAI officers then transfer him to sex workers. In exchange, sex workers let the road police officers know about their drunk clients: so, after a client pays a sex worker, he is then stopped by the road police and also pays a fine for drunk driving. The fine that the client pays on the spot in not, legally, a fine, of course, but rather a bribe (it is prohibited to pay fines directly to the police officers; instead, an officer is supposed to file a report about a violation and only a court can oblige an offender to pay a fine). Still, many drivers find

[8] In theory, DAI, the road police, is supposed to slowly wither away as it is substituted with the National Patrol Police. In Kyiv, for instance, DAI was dismantled and the "usual" police (National Police, as it is called after the police reform) was granted extended responsibilities to include those of old DAI as well. However, in Kropyvnytskyi, at least at the time of my fieldwork, DAI still functioned.

it easier and more convenient to pay on the spot, given the fact that the sum they pay on the spot is smaller than the official fine. After the "fine" is paid, DAI officers let the driver go without filing a report about an offence. Profiting from informality, sex workers and DAI officers, thus, developed a kind of symbiotic relationship.

In addition, there exist a lot of connections inside the sex workers' community and between the communities of sex workers and social workers. Not surprisingly, there exist a constant circulations of favours within both communities and between them. One of the favours is to allow another person to use your connections in order to achieve something. For instance, Nadia, who was an IV-drug user, complained that she didn't have a passport because it was held as a "deposit" by her drug supplier: once she didn't have enough money on her to pay for the drugs, so she left the passport as a promise to come later and pay for it. Her drug supplier demanded that Nadia pays 600 UAH (30 CAD). Since she didn't have the money and was sceptical that she would have extra 600 UAH any time soon, she was considering going to the civil registration office and applying for a new passport, claiming that the old one was lost or stolen. Not long after Nadia finished talking, Marina stepped up and told her not to act hastily because Marina had a "friend" who used to be a cop and whom she can ask to "help out" a friend: that is, to go to Nadia's drug supplier and "solve the problem," by taking the passport back. Certainly, this favour was meant to be provided for free — again, as the unspoken code of informality has it, one does not charge friends (of friends) and relatives for favours.

Embeddedness in social networks and importance of social networks makes it difficult for sex workers and social workers to seriously consider the possibility of permanent relocation to other regions or countries in search of better opportunities. As my roommate and social worker Lada told me, "nothing holds me here. My mum is

dead, my dad has a lover now, I don't have children [she had a son who died in a car crash few years ago] — yet somehow I don't move. I have spent all my life here, probably I am just used to being here." However, it is possible to hypothesize that this something that kept Lada from moving was her extended social networks. For instance, Lada always knows when to buy bones and fresh meat for her dog because she knows a neighbour from the fifth floor who works in a butcher shop and who always calls Lada to let her know about fresh meat and bones available. Lada also always has fresh cottage cheese and milk brought to her every Sunday by a friend of another neighbour who drives from a nearby village to the city every weekend. Likewise, a friend of a friend helped her to figure out the situation with too expensive blood tests for hepatitis by making a few calls and asking whether she can have the tests done for a lower price than usual. Moving to a new place means leaving all these networks behind, and since they are indispensable for a person to procure certain goods and services and/or to get access to better foodstuffs or cheaper services, many prefer to stay keeping these networks intact. Lada even joked for a few times about not being able to move, laughing that she was born in this city and will probably die here as well. She told me that sometimes locals twist the old name of the city from Kirovohrad, where hrad means city, to Kirovohrob, where hrob means casket.

However, not all informal practices are mutually beneficial to the parties involved. One type of informality that was rather detrimental to sex workers involved the contact with the National Police. Presumably, this is due to the fact that sex workers' interactions with the National Police are based on a clear hierarchy. From time to time the officers of the National Police will come to the highway with a small stack of papers. These sheets of paper that officers bring along are called by sex workers *"galimye protokoly"* (shitty protocols). A protocol is an official report about a civil (or

other minor) offence which is created by a police officer in order to document when the offence was committed, by whom, what were the circumstances, and which law was broken. An offender has to sign the protocol to acknowledge his or her misdemeanour. *"Galimye protokoly"* mean that the protocols the police bring along aren't date stamped; moreover, quite often the police bring along already written protocols, where it is already specified that someone was prostituting herself, with blank spaces only there, where one has to fill in the name and where one has to sign. Sex workers are made to fill in their names and sign the protocols. Sometimes, one sex worker has to sign multiple protocols at once.

An explanation for such a behavior on the part of the police is quite simple. Since the police institution is a bureaucracy and their reporting and evaluation system is based on a quantitative principle, the officers have to come up with numbers and show that every month, every quarter of the year, and every year they have a lot of cases and that they are able to solve these cases by finding the offenders. Moreover, a senior officer's bonus at the end of the year also depends on the number of cases he is able to show. Thus, police officers collect sex workers' signatures on the protocols only to date stamp the protocols later, when in a certain month they lack solved cases.

As mentioned above, in Ukraine, prostitution is penalized; it is an administrative offence, and if you are caught prostituting yourself, according to the Administrative Code of Ukraine, you have to pay a fine. De jure, after the protocol is made, the protocol is sent to the court; the court reviews it and decides whether to oblige an offender to pay a fine and whether such punishment is fair. If the court deems that an offender has to pay a fine, in some time an offender will receive a notification by post that specifies how much is to be paid and until when. However, de facto almost no sex workers receive these notifications that demand to pay fines. Police officers simply do

not process the protocols and do not send them to courts. As mentioned earlier, the officers are interested in showing a certain number of cases per month and per year, thus they have little to no interest in eradicating prostitution. Such a system sometimes produces outstanding situations: for example, once Nelia signed a protocol and in some time forgot about it — after all, it is a mundane activity. She was already a few months pregnant at that moment, so she didn't show up on the highway for some time. And the police officers didn't use the protocol for some time as well. Ironically, the date that the police in the end stamped the protocol with was the date when Nelia was in the hospital giving birth and couldn't be physically present on the highway. Because of frequent interactions, police officers and sex workers are often on a first name basis and often exchange stories and gossip. This way, sex workers learned about Nelia's protocol. Though this story happened in 2014, it still circulates within the community as a story that exemplifies ironies of sex workers' interactions with the police and, probably, ironies of the whole system.

Chapter 4. "The Rowdy 90s": Bandits, Snickers Bars, And Trafficking

Russian synth-punk group Barto (widely known in small circles) has a song that is dedicated to the period of 1990s. The song is succinctly called "90-e", meaning nineties. The song's refrain goes as follows: "I want to go back to the nineties, to the bandits. They have shaved heads and unshaved balls." Though the second half of their assertion is beyond the expertise of anthropologists of postsocialism, the latter do have to say quite a lot about the first part of this statement, namely, about the shaved heads of the bandits and why bandits were dominating the collective imaginary of the 1990s. For instance, the film *Brother* (*Brat*), released in 1997 by Alexei Balabanov, tells the story of an honest and a little bit naive demobilized soldier Danila, who, per request of his mother, goes from some small provincial town to St.Petersburg to find his successful older brother, who can help him to make a living (according to the mother). On his arrival to St.Petersburg, Danila finds out that his brother is a known hitman and soon becomes entangled in his brother's business with local mafia. Danila's brother Viktor, of course, is a bandit with a cleanly shaved head. *Brother* became one of the most popular films of its era, it may even "have been post-Soviet Russia's most economically successful film at the time given its low production costs" (White 2016, 86), and can be considered nothing short of classic of the early post-Soviet Russian cinema. Researching post-Soviet Russian bandit films and the heritage of Balabanov in particular, film scholar Frederick White notes that "unlike the American gangster films in which law enforcement almost always punishes the criminals in the end, the Russian bandit films portray the bandit as the hero who must, through violence and criminal behavior, overcome social, political and economic barriers." (White 2016, 83). In this chapter, then, I will provide some historical background, focusing on the anomie of the 1990s in the post-Soviet region; the anomie that contributed to an increasing number

of people going abroad in search of work and, what is more important for my study, of sex work.

Postsocialist Anomie and New Masculinities

For scholars of the region, it is an open secret that the first decade that followed after the collapse of the Soviet Union was characterized by high unemployment rates, absence of centralized state power, drastically reduced welfare, expansion of cross border trade, and an increase in various illegal activities (see Caldwell 2004; Humphrey 2002; Shevchenko 2009; Volkov 2016). For instance, Caroline Humphrey observes the rise of protection racket — a practice of "extortion of regularly paid dues … in return for 'protection' controlled by a person or group known in Russian slang as the roof (*krysha*)" (2002, 99). Similarly, Vadim Volkov (2016) documents the phenomenon of "violent entrepreneurship": though the main goal of these entrepreneurs was making money, writes Volkov, they also provided local businesses with services like debt collection, contract enforcement, cash loans, etc. These "violent entrepreneurs" also helped to secure relations with the authorities and thus acted as a "roof" for many businesses. Volkov argues that with regard to the 1990s, "we cannot postulate either the existence of the state or its absence. The term that captures this condition best is 'state formation'" (2016, 155). But since this Schrödinger's state wasn't able to grant its citizens protection in exchange for taxes, this function was taken over by the gangs, who extended their protection (i.e. acted as a roof) in exchange for the regularly paid "fees."

Such gangs were often made up of former athletes, war veterans (from Afghan and Chechen wars), militia and paramilitary employees, whose training and experience prepared them for participating in business, where violence was routine (Volkov 2016).

This is unsurprising, given that, as Yusupova mentions, "[o]ne of the main skills required for carrying out violent entrepreneurship is the competent use and demonstration of physical force" (2015, 56). Thus, the 1990s gave rise to the new type of masculinity — bandit masculinity: an image of a physically strong man with well-trained body and good fighting skills, whose "physical force could be transformed into economic benefits" (Yusupova 2015, 56). Likewise, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman also emphasize that such features like "aggressivity, initiative, and competition" (2015, 59) became representative of new forms of masculinity. It probably should go without saying that this kind of masculinity overemphasized heterosexuality and was thus partly built on homophobia, despite the fact that gangs are quite homosocial spaces.

Apart from the image of a bandit, a violent and aggressive entrepreneur, the 1990s also contributed to producing another type of masculinity. This latter type is sometimes discussed by scholars under the heading of postsocialist crisis of masculinity (Gal and Kligman 2000; Szalai 1991; True 2003) and is to a certain extent exemplified by Venedikt Erofeev's Venechka (2000) from his already classic poem in prose *Moscow-Petushki:* a drunken cable-laying worker, who is fired for an excessive consumption of alcohol and who, while on a train to the town of Petushki to visit his beloved and his child, engages in lengthy philosophical monologues. This crisis, writes True, was a product "of widespread masculine anomie, reflected in the rising male suicide and mortality rates, alcohol abuse, and unemployment and crime rates across the region" (2003, 71). Gal and Kligman (2000) argue that gender regimes of state socialism often led to the situation where men became overly reliant on the state and thus felt frustrated and defeated after the state lost much of its power and authority; Gal and Kligman (2000) conceptualize it as a "big child" masculinity. Whereas women, encouraged by state socialism to strive to attain the unattainable ideal of being

simultaneously a worker, a mother, a wife, and a politically active and engaged citizen, were used to juggling multiple commitments and tasks, so in the times of crisis they found it easier to adapt to changes by supplementing their main source of income with taking on additional tasks.

Not surprisingly, women were also more eager to temporarily leave home in order to secure a better source of income or to find one. For instance, shuttle trade already mentioned in chapter 2, was heavily gendered: Sasunkevich (2015) notes that it is usually considered as a "primarily female activity" (2015, 5). Along with shuttle trade women also dominated the expanding sphere of cross-border sex industry. This is not to suggest, however, that during state socialism it was absent. According to Gal and Kligman (2000, 60), increase in prostitution and other sexual services was, most probably, related to the "same structural patterns," when women, faced with lack of money, started to take on some part-time activities in addition to their main job: "[a]s family finances require, women try to move back and forth between work that provides social benefits and more lucrative, illegal sex work" (2000, 60). However, women did not only engage in sex work on a part time basis in their home towns and countries, a number of them relocated to other places for sex work. For women from Kirovohrad and Krivoi Rog[9] in Ukraine such as my participants the main destinations were, first and foremost, Moscow, Turkey, and Czech Republic. The sheer number of women from postsocialist countries working in the sex industry, both in the capitalist states and at home, soon led to an international panic on human trafficking.

[9] Because my participants are Russian-speakers (predominantly), I use the Russian-sounding name Krivoi Rog instead of a more Ukrainian-sounding Kryvyi Rih.

The Pitfalls of Anti-Trafficking Discourses

Assessing the situation with trafficking in the mid-2000, Gail Kligman and Stephanie Limoncelli note that "the restructuring of the labor market and of social inequalities" (2005, 122) has affected the population differently, depending on gender, class, race, nationality, and citizenship (2005, 122). They emphasize that "poverty, urban and especially rural, is a consistent factor, historically and comparatively" (2005, 122) and that there "appears to be a correlation between national poverty rates and sending countries" (2005, 122). Building on the World Bank and the UN data, Kligman and Limoncelli identify Ukraine (along with Moldova) as the main source countries, heavily affected by poverty and increasing women's unemployment (2005, 128). Kligman and Limoncelli's brief assessment of Ukraine's place within the system of trafficking is also corroborated by the data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM). According to IOM, in 2004-2006 more than 80% of trafficked persons from Ukraine were women and out of all cases of trafficking (that is, out of 1,558 cases), in 65% of them people were trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. In comparison, the second major cause for trafficking — forced labor — is responsible for half as few cases (741 case), that is for 35% of all recorded cases of trafficking. However, it is important to note that despite Ukraine's firm reputation as a source country and a "brothel of Europe," the number of trafficked persons has been steadily decreasing, and 2010 was the first year when the cases of trafficking for the purpose of forced labor (612 cases) outnumbered the cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation (369 cases). Since 2010, in percentile, there have been more cases of trafficking for forced labor than for sexual exploitation. For instance, for 2017, forced labor accounts for 88% (568 cases), whereas sexual exploitation has dropped to 7.6% (49 cases). Observing trends recorded by IOM, Ramona Vijeyarasa (2013; 2015) notes that Ukraine often stands out

from other source countries because of the large numbers of trafficked victims that are reported by the country itself. However, Vijeyarasa cautions that this is partly due to the discrepancies in the definition of trafficking between the UN Trafficking Protocol and the Ukrainian domestic law. If these definitions are reconciled, she writes, Ukraine might lose its status as a country with "the highest rates of trafficking in the world" (2013, 1018).

The discourse of trafficking, however, has its own shortcomings. One of the main discontents with it is usually the fact that trafficking lumps together very different people with very different intentions. For instance, Joanna Busza warns of the danger of "oversimplifying women's realities and choices" (2004, 232), when the differences between those who were tricked into the situation of exploitation and those who entered it knowingly are either blurred or discounted. She notes that ensuing anti-trafficking campaigns rarely benefit women in the sex industry, for whom anti-trafficking efforts only result in additional spendings (for instance, in order to bribe the police officers) and increased vulnerability (women in the sex industry respond to the additional spendings by "taking on additional clients, including those refusing to use condoms" (2004, 246)). Studying global migration, service industry, and the industry of help, available to the victims of trafficking, Laura Agustin (2007) similarly notes that the discourse of trafficking assumes that trafficked migrants are always already passive victims. Thus, she proposes to acknowledge that "there is more than one form of autonomy, the western one, which can only occur within western 'progress' and modernity" (2007, 47), and instead of regarding trafficked migrants as victims "with identities attached to the jobs they carry out" (2007, 47), consider them as "people in flux and flexible labourers … ordinary human beings working to overcome specific problems" (2007, 47). In part, such approach may contribute to a better understanding

of circumstances of those who entered the situation of exploitation knowingly, which was the case of many of my participants.

Kimberley Hoang (2015), who studies sex work in contemporary Vietnam, is quite honest in her ethnography that prior to her arrival to the field site (Ho Chi Minh City) and to establishing contacts with local sex workers, she was interested in studying "trafficked women" (2015, 17). However, as she found out during her research, no women sex workers that she talked to were trafficked into the sex industry but instead chose it over some other activities. For instance, Hoang found out that nearly all the women in the niche "that catered to Western men who traveled on 'budget'" (2015, 50) were former factory and service workers, who left those jobs in order to become sex workers because they viewed factory work and work in the service industry "as far more exploitative than sex work" (2015, 108). However, such an attitude among sex workers was irrelevant to local NGOs and rehabilitation centers that routinely performed rescue operations. Because Vietnam committed to counteracting human trafficking prior to its entry in the World Trade Organization in order to "demonstrate compliance" with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and to "appeal to potential investors from Western nations" (2015, 34). Thus, Vietnamese NGOs started to perform rescue operations in order to reintegrate trafficked women back into the society. However, they often ended up "rescuing" women who willingly chose sex work. Since according to the Vietnamese legislation sex workers could either be "'trafficked victims' in need of aid" or "'criminals' who engage in illicit sex-for-money exchanges" (2015,108), detained sex workers often capitulated and "confessed" to be "victims of trafficking" in order to avoid spending eight months in a detention center (2015, 108). Hence, rigidity of the local legal categories and reluctance to acknowledge the heterogeneity of sex work led to a no-win

situation for all parties: the state, those sex workers who willingly engaged in sex work, and actual trafficked women who required actual help.

Destination Moscow

Before coming to the field, I planned to focus my inquiry on contemporary sex work, the place of informality in it, and sex workers' attempts at self-organizing in order to gain more political influence. However, while in the field, especially during many informal conversations and some more formal interviews with people who worked in this industry for more than a decade, the topic of sex work in the 1990s and the topic of trafficking kept on surging. So, I decided to follow this lead. Overall, sex workers' memories of doing sex work in the 1990s were permeated with references to violence, rampant poverty, migration to a richer city, and, of course, trafficking. Out of all sex workers that I talked to, only one woman, Agatha, had a direct experience of trafficking.[10] Agatha went to Moscow with her new boyfriend for a tour. Upon their arrival they settled in a room and went to bed. When Agatha woke up, she found out that her boyfriend disappeared. Quite soon she also discovered that her "boyfriend" received money for bringing her to Moscow and that she had to work as a sex worker in order to pay the money back. Agatha was reluctant but didn't have any other choice. However, she somehow managed to call her parents in Ukraine and ask them to help her. According to her, it took a few weeks for her parents to get hold of her. Agatha's

[10] I use the definition of trafficking adopted by the UN in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children. According to the Article 3 of the Protocol, "'Trafficking in persons' shall mean 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 2000).

"boyfriend" was taken to jail and she went back to Ukraine with her parents. When she finished narrating this story to me, I asked her what is her opinion on sex work and why she decided to join the organization for sex workers' rights. Agatha answered that "the cases like mine are isolated occurrences. In general, this [sex work] is work… While I was there, I talked to other girls. They were there willingly. They knew where they were going and why."

Though it is difficult to generalize on the basis of my data, Agatha's statement that "they knew where they were going and why" is quite in line with what some of my participants, who went abroad for sex work in the 1990s and early 2000s, told me themselves. For instance, Zhenia became a sex worker a few months before her 18th birthday. At first she was a usual working girl but in six months she became a "madame" in a small brothel. According to Zhenia, she had "good patrons from bandits," whom she, ironically, met during a *subbotnik* at the police station. *Subbotnik* — from subbota, meaning Saturday — means unpaid obligatory work that the police requires to do in exchange for something (e.g. patronage). However, in the case of sex workers it is usually a demand for free sexual services to be delivered at the police officers' convenience. The tradition of *subbotniki* originated in the early Soviet Russia, where "subbotnik" meant "free labor performed at leisure time for the benefit of society; however, by late Soviet times, it was regarded as an inevitable and unpleasant duty" (Odinokova et al. 2014). Zhenia recounted that these bandits offered her the role of a madame and she grasped the opportunity. The bandits received 50% of share for protection, and the remaining 50% were divided between Zhenia and the girls. However, in some time Zhenia's patrons ran into troubles, so she relocated to Moscow in order to avoid troubles herself. She was reluctant to tell the details of what "the troubles" were about, but told me that she is still good friends with one of those

patrons. After working in Moscow for two and a half years, Zhenia then went to the Czech Republic for a year before coming back to Ukraine. The time period that Zhenia told me about was the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Martha's story is quite different from Zhenia's. In 1995, after giving birth to a child, she needed money to support her family. According to her, at the time, the whole city was flooded with advertisements saying that "girls are needed for work in Moscow" and promising high wages, listing the number in dollars. Martha says that the ads weren't clear about what kind of job this was, but that everyone knew what was meant. She called the number listed on such an ad and in some time she was already in Moscow in a two-bedroom apartment with two dozen other girls. Her passport was taken by a pimp, and Martha was told that she had to pay back quite a sum of money: "For travel… it was about 100 dollars… Then we had to give another 100 dollars to a woman who printed the ad and found us. And the remaining 300 dollars we had to pay for an apartment… And as long as we owe this 500 dollars, we don't get to have our documents or the money from clients." She was able to pay the money back in a month. After that, she had 30% of the share from each client, whereas the remaining 70% went to the "madame." Martha worked in Moscow for ten years. She diligently sent money back to her family in Ukraine every week and even visited them from time to time, bringing gifts and more money. During that ten years, Martha changed a couple of pimps and madams, before finally she and "other girls" opened a massage parlour. When I asked her why and how she decided to quit sex work, Martha tells me that she became bored with sex work and decided to go home because her "son was growing up," she was getting older, and "wanted stability" in her life. She then broke up with a client with whom she lived as a concubine and bought a ticket home. According to her, it was difficult to find a job in her home city, and she was working the lowest

paying jobs. She didn't go back to sex work in her home city because of the fear that her relatives will learn about it.

Martha is upfront about the fact that she doesn't consider herself to be the victim of trafficking even despite the very hard and exploitative circumstances that she experienced during her first year in Moscow: she went to Moscow for the money and she knew what job she would be doing. Martha also told me that now, to her knowledge, the situation of sex workers who go abroad is different from what she experienced in the mid-1990:

> "My friend went to Turkey for the job [for sex work], she called me and asked to go with her, but I was already in love with one guy here, so I didn't go. It was around five or eight years ago… She showed me the contract with the woman that was sending her to Turkey, and it was written in the contract that such and such person agrees to pay another person, first name, last name, a certain sum of money. It doesn't specify the reason for payment, but the contract is then sealed by the lawyer. … And she [her friend] went, did the job, came back, oh well, she was deported, but she came so happy and content, she brought a lot of gold [jewelry] from there. So everything was good. She wants to go there again."

Though sex workers' relationships with those who help them to cross the borders and find a place of work might be more formalized now, as in the case of Martha's friend, it was certainly not the case for women who went abroad in the 1990s. Asia went to Moscow during the Perestroika times. Her father became addicted to alcohol during that time and mother wasn't paid her wage many months in a row. Then Asia gave birth to a child. Her father continued to drink and started to beat her mother and younger brother. Asia started to work as a sex worker in her home city but soon she "was offered" to go to Moscow. She agreed: Moscow was a bigger and richer city, and the possibility of earning better money and not disclosing to your relatives how you earn it was very alluring. Though Asia worked in Moscow for only a few years, she admits to like it and that it was a pity to come back, especially given that the reason she came

back was to protect her mother from an increasingly more violent father, who was once "jumping on my mum with an axe." After coming back Asia was working on an international bus and was from time to time having sex-for-money with the driver of the bus — according to her, every penny mattered. She also doesn't consider her case to be the case of human trafficking because she agreed to go to Moscow for sex work voluntarily.

Nataliia is also very upfront about her experience of sex work and is adamant about being a "victim of trafficking." She started to engage in sex work from time to time from the age of 16:

> "It was the time of disintegration on the Soviet Union. Of unemployment and other things. And again, I come from a single-parent family, I was raised only by my mother. And the collapse of the Soviet Union led to my mother, a person with three graduate degrees, working at a foundry and earning money by moving a shovel. And for her self-esteem it was… it was… she started to drink, she became addicted… and we had no money."

Together with a friend, Nataliia started to frequent bars and cafes and hooking up with some men in exchange for food, alcohol, or money:

> "Sometimes they [the clients] gave us money, sometimes didn't but… Sometimes we were able to hustle them for something. Yes, I remember these vending stalls full of "Bounty", "Snickers", and "Mars"… And we would drive to them and he would say "Choose!" And we wouldn't know what to choose. And he would say "Take them all!" And we would take one of each chocolate bars from the showcase… It was chic for us (*My tak shikovali*)."

Nataliia's experience of these chocolate bars (that probably are quite usual for an average "Westerner") as something "chic" is reminiscent of a phenomenon that Jennifer Patico labelled "consuming the West but becoming Third World" (2003) and that was also documented by many other scholars of early postsocialism (Patico and Caldwell 2002; Humphrey 2002; Ries 2002): a "rush to try as many novelties as possible, especially all kinds of unfamiliar foods" (Patico 2003, 32). This overexposure to

novelties and to new bright goods imported from the different "Western" countries projected the feeling of backwardness of postsocialist countries, and thus the desire to catch up and to live as glamorously, as one (presumably) lived in the "West".

In some time Nataliia also received an offer to go to Moscow, and she agreed. She spent there ten years, more or less, and most of this time she was there working as a sex worker for different pimps. When she decided to come back to Ukraine, she faced the problem of not having documents. So she bribed the border officers who were responsible for checking the documents, and they turned a blind eye to her lack of documents. According to Nataliia, it isn't an out of ordinary situation, when a sex worker wants to come back from abroad but doesn't have her passport.[11] She says she has known a few other girls with such a problem at that time and learned about many more cases when she became an activist. Nataliia told me that the easiest way to solve this problem for a sex worker is to go to an NGO that is engaged in anti-trafficking activities and to tell them that you are a victim of trafficking, without documents, and that you want to go to your home city. As a rule, the organization will buy you a ticket and help you with temporary documents. Thus, some sex workers started to use this trick to get home without paying for the ticket back and having to bribe the border patrol. According to Nataliia, the numbers of the "victims of trafficking" from Ukraine that are often presented by the Ukrainian government or by the international NGOs are exaggerated. In part because they include sex workers who "used" this status to receive temporary documents and a ticket back home. Similarly to sex workers in Hoang's study (2015) who agreed to become "victims of trafficking" in order not to be classified as criminals and detained, sex workers from Ukraine were making use of the

[11] The reasons for not having passports are quite different but very prosaic: the passport is frequently lost, held by a drug-dealer or a pimp as a security deposit, etc.

status of a "victim" in order to solve the problem with documents and save money on a ticket and a bribe.

* * *

Russian speakers often refer to the period of 1990s as *likhie devianostye*, the rowdy 90s, implying that it was a rough period for many, characterized by constant lack of money, unemployment, spike in criminal activities, and the possibility of rapid social mobility, if joining the criminal world. *Likhie devianostye* is supposed to be an eloquent and exhausting summary of the state of affairs of postsocialist space for the first decade that followed the fall of the USSR. Faced with the state of insecurity, people resorted to "violent entrepreneurship," cross-border trade (i.e.shuttlers), and labour migration, including migration for sex work. The latter trend, in turn, caused an international concern regarding the question of human trafficking, especially for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Proliferating anti-trafficking discourses and organizations, however, weren't as effective in combatting trafficking as it was hoped for. Moreover, the discourse of trafficking lumped into the same category women who entered sex trade with different motivations and for different reasons and operated within a binary of a "victim of trafficking" versus a "criminal" who is willingly selling sex and violates the laws. Because of this, quite often, the structural issues like unemployment and poverty were blurred and pushed into the background, being overshadowed by an emphasis on an individual and her agency (a criminal) or lack of it (victim of trafficking). However, as my data shows and as some other scholars of sex work have already noted, this dichotomy fails to acknowledge not only the variety of sex workers' experiences but also the inequalities of the existing world-system.

Chapter 5. Dirty Clients, Pure Whores: Sex Workers' Interactions With Clients

Quite often discussions on sex work and prostitution tend to be framed within the binary of structure versus agency and the dichotomy of the "happy hooker" versus the "victim of trafficking," though it is doubtful that either of the categories can account for a variety of sex workers' experiences and suffices to describe such a heterogeneous phenomenon as sex work. Nevertheless, from time to time all sex work is subsumed under one or another category, and it is this conflation that is a major concern to many theorists, as Teela Sanders, Maggie O'Neill, and Jane Pitcher note (2009, 151). Instead of arguing in favour of one position or another, it seems that it will be more fruitful to focus on the meanings that sex workers attach to sex work and to see how they conceptualize what they do, as well as their encounters with clients and other parties. As a starting point for such an inquiry that is at the same time also a theoretical framework, I propose to adopt the point of view proposed by Hastings Donnan and Fiona Macgowan that "[t]he anthropology of sex is also the anthropology of religion, economics, politics, kinship and human rights" (2010, 1), along the point of view of Marilyn Strathern, who, in her study of sexual mythologies existing in various cultures, maintained that all societies use relations between the sexes "to symbolize fundamental structural features of social life" (2016, 280) and that by analyzing society's sexual mythology, one can understand how a society functions and what values it holds dear. By setting their focus on sex work (in its various forms) in different societies, anthropologists and sociologists have been able to understand, for instance, how changes in economic production and in modes of consumption influence ideas about masculinity and femininity (Zheng 2009) or the ideas about what constitutes a successful intimate relationship, as well as ideas on sexual ethics (Berstein 2007). Similarly, researching sex work allowed anthropologists to see how women might use

their status as sex workers to bolster their self-esteem and subvert kinship ties (Cole 2010; Wardlow 2006) and, conversely, how sex work can be used by clients to facilitate male bonding (Allison 1994).

If to believe Chris Hann and Keith Hart (2011) and Monica Prasad (1999), sex work provides a particularly good example to ponder over the relationships of money, authenticity, and intimacy. Researching sex workers' clients, Prasad argues that for many of them the exchange between a sex worker and a client was morally unambiguous. Moreover, it was even seen by many clients as "morally superior to gift exchange [of sex]" (1999, 181) that occurs in romantic relationships. According to the clients, in their exchanges with sex workers there was less hypocrisy and dishonesty, as both parties were clear about their roles and expectations of each other. On a different but a related note, Hann and Hart ask about "the place of sex in society, especially in capitalist societies" (2011, 82). In the book, Hart recounts a conversation with a Ghanian student that took place long ago: after meeting a "Western" woman at a party in Ghana and spending the night with her at her place, the student put some money on the table "as a token of his affection" (Hann and Hart 2011, 82), since, according to Hart, it was a customary gesture in the student's culture — to leave something as a gift for a person one spent a night with, and cash, in the students' view, was no different from other forms of gift but was more useful. However, his intention was misinterpreted by a woman, who decided that he mistook her for a prostitute and took offence. Retelling this story, Hart asks why in many contemporary societies money is seen as something so detached and impersonal that it is even granted the power to instantaneously transform relationships from personal to impersonal. Building on existing research, I would suggest that sex work is indeed a productive object for analysis. However, given the limits of time and space, in this chapter I would like to

limit my focus to what sex workers' interactions with clients can reveal about existing gender insecurities and views on the question of sexual order and disorder.

Public women, public places

Sex workers have quite a history of being associated with disorder, pollution, and danger. As Judith Walkowitz notes in her historical study of prostitution in Victorian England, the passage of Contagious Diseases Acts, though aiming at decreasing the rates of venereal diseases among soldiers and sailors, was targeted at prostitutes, who were submitted to forced check-ups, and in case of finding traces of a disease — interned at special lock hospitals (1980, 1-5). Because prostitutes, as a rule, originated from the poor strata, this social underworld has quickly become associated by the respectable middle- and upper-class Victorians with filth, pollution, and contagion. Hence, a need to regulate the lives of the poor, so that they do not contaminate respectable people (Walkowitz 1980). Laura Agustin makes similar points about the discourses of prostitution in the 18-19th century France. She emphasizes that prostitutes were seen as first and foremost public women—women who spend a lot of time not at home but in public places. Thus, prostitutes were contrasted with respectable and private bourgeois women. According to Agustin, the bourgeoisie associated public women's "loud voices, 'garish' dress, drinking and cursing" with "sexual promiscuity" (2005, 73) and thus, women who sold sex came to be viewed "as pathological subjects capable of contaminating good citizens" (2005, 70). This classification of women was class-based, and class, in turn, was a marker of one's respectability — one's ability to selfmaster, self-discipline, and self-restrict. It was a marker of one's ability to control one's passions (Mosse 1985).

In a similar vein, Norbert Elias in his magnum opus on the civilizing process mentions that the "stricter control of impulses and emotions" (1994,112) becomes most important and most prominent after the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie. According to him, the growing "association of sexuality with shame and embarrassment, and a corresponding restraint of behaviour" (1994,147) coincides in time with the growing social distance between adults and children, and thus with the appearance of the problem of "sexual enlightenment" (1994,147): as children had then to be civilized, meaning they had to be taught to be ashamed of bodily functions and body in general, and to be in control of their desires. Interestingly enough, Elias also mentions in passing that the lack of restraint and a greater freedom to talk about body and its functions was associated not only with children and also with the Orient (1994, 111). In a way, then, the Occident stands in such a relationship to the Orient as the civilization is to the barbarianism and the adult is to the child.

My participants, predominantly, are street sex workers, so they fit quite well into the category of "public women," as well as the category of the "uncivilized:" they spend the majority of their time not only outside the home but in such public places like highways or gas stations. And they also curse, drink, speak in loud voices, and don't adhere to the maxims of respectability and of civilité. However, when it comes to the questions of pollution and purity, some of them have a very interesting perspective to offer. In what follows, then, I will elaborate on the question of purity and pollution within sex work in Kropyvnytskyi. As with the topic of trafficking, the topic of pollution and purity wasn't something that I was consciously looking for. However, during my continuous visits to the highway it kept on surging in the conversations among sex workers and in their conversations with me.

One thing that I noticed was the fact that many sex workers, especially those who have been working on this highway for many years already, have a holistic code of work ethic. For instance, for Nelia it is impossible to come to work unshowered and in dirty clothes. Not being drug- or alcohol addicted, Nelia often feuds with sex workers who suffer from addictions and thus don't care that much for their appearance and outlook. Once, upon my visit to the highway (it was the beginning of July, so it was very hot and dry), Nelia told me that yesterday she saw "some kind of homeless woman" (*bomzhikha*) that she had never seen before working on the highway. According to Nelia, the woman "reeked of liquor and sweat" (*voniala peregarom i potom*), so Nelia approached the woman and told her to leave, adding that if she sees her here again, she will not hesitate to beat her. When telling this story, Nelia looked quite indignant and infuriated with the woman. I didn't even have time to ask her why she had such intense emotions about that woman, because after a short pause Nelia explained it all herself: she told me that "because of this homeless woman" the clients might think that all other sex workers here are dirty, when it is not true. I was quite amazed then by Nelia's strong sense of the workplace ethic. This incident, however, reminded me of another case, when I witnessed the manifestation of sex workers' workplace ethic: in that case Nina and Zoia actively berated a woman who was standing on the bus stop, some hundred meters away from the place where sex workers usually sit or stand, because they recognized that it was a woman who worked only from time to time and only until "she steals something from a client." She was a troublemaker for them, so they wished that some client would punish her.

The issue of the workplace ethic, however interesting, wasn't the main focal point that I was interested in after hearing Nelia's harangue about the importance of appearance; what fascinated me was the topic of dirt (both physical and symbolic) in

relation to sex work and their relationships with clients. Because Nelia finished her tirade with the observation that despite filthiness of that woman, cars still slowed down near her and that she managed to secure a few clients. "What are these men thinking about?" Nelia pondered. In other words, why did clients in some instances prefer a dirty, unshowered, and "reeking of liquor and sweat" woman to Nelia, always showered, in clean clothes, with brushed hair, and always smelling of a good perfume?

Liminality, dirt, and topsy-turvy situations of power

The condition that my participants seem to be marked by is the one of *outside-ness,* both physical and symbolic. Firstly, they constantly spend a huge amount of time outside their homes, in the public. Secondly, the place on the highway where they most often work is outside of the city; it is on the road that connects the city with smaller towns but they are outside all of them, they are in between. Thirdly, they exist outside of a monogamous relationship: they have permanent sexual contacts outside of their relationships, as well as sexual contacts that they have with clients are outside of the clients' relationships. In a sense, they are liminal beings, "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner 1977, 95), they exist on the margins of the highway and on the margins of society. And, as Mary Douglas insightfully remarked, "all margins are dangerous" because "[a]ny structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins" (Douglas 2002[1966], 150).

But which important structure do sex workers put in danger? I would hypothesize that it is the structure of a monogamous marriage, in which gender roles are clearly defined, and which is suppose to be founded upon the idea of romantic love, which is separated from passion. And that in addition to that sex workers also endanger

social coercion to restraint and to the greater civilité. Examining predominant modern sexual arrangements, Anthony Giddens remarks that they are still quite influenced by the ideal of "romantic love" that originated around the 18th century and is premised on the idea of "a mystical unity between man and woman" (Giddens 1993, 39). Interestingly, he also points out that "romantic love" originated in the split between "the 'chaste' sexuality of marriage and the erotic or passionate character of extramarital affairs" (Giddens 1993, 39). Similarly, Gayle Rubin argues that in the modern hierarchy of sexualities and sexual acts it is the heterosexual monogamous partnership that is on the top, whereas all other sexualities are considered either unacceptable or less acceptable and are frequently conceptualized as threatening "health and safety, women and children, national security, the family, or civilization itself" (Rubin 1984, 297). According to a historian George Mosse (1985), such sexual hierarchy is an outcome of the bourgeois morality that came to dominate the world since around the 18th century, around the time of the construction of the nation-state.

These cultural attitudes to sexuality can be conceptualized and explained with the help of Victor Turner's idea of an indicative and a subjunctive cultural moods (1988). Turner suggests that every culture possesses (at the same time) two different grammatical moods. Indicative mood represents culture's quotidian life, its orderly pace, whereas subjunctive mood, manifested through different cultural performances, presents a reflexive critique of society. Turner writes that though the relationship between indicative and subjunctive moods is usually reflexive and dialectical, subjunctive mood is often connected to the themes that are tabooed or surrounded by mystery in a certain culture (Turner 1988, 24–25). From this point of view, sex work can be seen as an activity that threatens this dominant indicative mood of contemporary sexual culture. Framed this way then, the interactions between street sex

workers and their clients (at least at my field site) can be seen as gender-nonconforming space, a space where clients can relax from continuous performance of hegemonic masculinity, in part because street sex workers who they interact with do not often comply with the standards of "hegemonic femininity" (Schippers 2007): they are often unshowered, not groomed, and don't care about manners; they also curse a lot and consume much alcohol — in brief, they engage in such a behaviour that is often considered more masculine than feminine.

Of course, I don't want to suggest that clients stop performing masculinity, not at all. Suggesting it would mean assuming that it is a conscious choice, whereas, as Judith Butler (1988; 1990) has conclusively shown, it is not so. What I suggest here is that clients might not be afraid to cast away some of their civilité and respectability, and appear less cultured and more "natural." They might appear "out of face" (Goffman 1955) of hegemonic masculinity, which, as Sarah Phillips points out, in contemporary Ukraine rests on the image of a man, who "should provide for his family; take up domestic activities seen as befitting a man (i.e., help read and teach one's children, but not regularly undertake housework or cooking); engage in a range of possible activities deemed as masculine — military service, mechanics … and have pastimes such as fishing, playing sports, chess, or cards." (2011,179). In other words, a perfect man should be cultured enough to educate his children but not too much because of the danger to appear effeminate; similarly, he has to be "natural" enough and display some brute strength (for instance, when playing sports) but not too much because of the danger to appear not cultured enough. Performing hegemonic masculinity is, then, observing a careful balance between the demands of nature and civilization. As theorists of masculinity have suggested, masculinity is often displayed first and foremost for other men, since hegemonic masculinity exists only at the expense of

other masculinities (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). But the space where clients are alone with sex workers is free of the gazes of other men and masculinities. This space is thus also free from the constraints that make men balance between nature and civilization.

Yet, there is still another layer to the nature-civilization balance. Though Sherry Ortner once famously claimed that "female is to male as nature is to culture" (1972), it seems that Central and Eastern Europe is a paradoxical case that doesn't fit her well-argued scheme and further questions its supposed universality. In the words of Marko Zivkovic, it is a paradox of the "Reverse Pygmalion" (2006): a situation when women are perceived as the bearers of civilization and are thus prescribed the duty of civilizing their males. However, if class aspect is added to this scheme, the situation becomes even more complicated: respectable middle- and upper-class women civilize and educate their males, who then temporarily cast away their civilité and attempts at culturedness in the arms of street sex workers — lower-class and uncivilized public women. It is an almost Freudian scenario, where men are trapped between civilization and its discontents (Freud 1930). Coming back to Turner (1988), it is possible to argue that interactions with street sex workers allow men to temporarily escape the indicative mood of restraint and civilization. Especially given Ukrainian national anxieties about the country's backwardness and its attempts to look more "European" in the eyes of the international community (Channell-Justice 2017), where being more "European" means being more civilized. And since local women are more civilized than men, it is then men who are under more pressure to act in a more cultured and "European" way. To paraphrase the symbolic scheme of Norbert Elias, the Occident is to the Orient as Europe is to Ukraine as civilization is to barbarianism as Ukrainian women are to Ukrainian men.

Upon my first visit to the highway in Kropyvnytskyi, I noticed that many sex workers do not look like stereotypical sex workers from movies: they are not feminine and slim women with heavy make up, dressed in fishnet stockings and mini skirts and wearing high heels. Street sex workers that struggled with their drug addictions were often slim, but they seemed to not care that much about their overall appearance. Whereas sex workers who were heavy drinkers were, as a rule, quite chubby. And they also didn't pay a lot of attention to their looks. It was quite common for many sex workers to show up to work with unbrushed greasy hair, wearing clothes that weren't fresh, and having dirt under fingernails and toenails. However, such an ungroomed appearance wasn't really preventing them from securing clients and earning money. Nataliia and Nelia told me a story about a sex worker whom I haven't met personally because she works periodically, usually when she needs money for alcohol or drugs. Bohdana, according to them, never cares how she looks: she usually looks dirty and rarely brushes her hair, tying it up instead in some strange manner that Nataliia labelled "a cuckoo's nest." However, when Nelia and Bohdana were working together on the highway a few times, the clients often ignored Nelia and preferred Bohdana instead. To the astonishment of Nataliia and Nelia, it wasn't just "cheap" cars that were slowing down near Bohdana but many "expensive" cars as well. Nataliia and Nelia couldn't wrap their heads around it. Likewise, Nelia also told me that once she went to the highway directly from the beauty salon. She had a fresh haircut, fresh manicure, and was wearing a new white dress and white sandals. In some time a car slowed down near her and Nelia got in. However, to her own astonishment, the client, after carefully examining her with his gaze, told her to get out of the car because she was "too clean." She also recounted that once a client asked her not to shower for a week, telling her that he will come for her in one week and that he needed her "dirty." Nelia was

outraged and told him to "go fuck himself." Hearing numerous stories about clients who prefer "dirty" sex workers and sometimes witnessing these incidents, made me ponder the question why this happens. One of the possible explanations, I suggest, is that sex workers' interactions with clients is, for some clients at least, a gender-nonconforming space, a space where one can relax from continuous performance of hegemonic masculinity, and not care about indicative mood of one's culture: about masculine dominance, about existing hierarchy of sexual acts, and can thus just lose oneself in the interaction with these marginal beings that sex workers are. From this stance, then, Nelia is in the eyes of the clients a cognitive dissonance: she is cleaner and more "civilized" than she is supposed to be. She is a rock-badger from the abominations of Leviticus (Douglas 2002). She does not fit in the existing classification.

When talking about their clients, sex workers do not hesitate to label their clients "perverts" and laugh at the clients' fantasies. I would hypothesize that sex workers' understanding that the clients usually do not confide their fantasies and desires to anyone but them contributes to the way they usually discuss this topic: by discursively asserting their power over the clients. It seemed like sex workers were praising themselves for being better than that, for not desiring anything sexually "weird" but, at the same time, for being able to patronizingly indulge their clients' fantasies. In these discussions sex workers were simultaneously asserting their dominance over the clients and their moral superiority over them. However, at the same time they seemed to pity their clients for not getting what they wanted from their wives or partners and thus for being forced to hide sexual desires from them.

I would like to finish this chapter with an ethnographic vignette from my fieldwork experience. It was late May. Lada, Agatha, and I arrived to the highway to distribute syringes, condoms, and drink some tea and coffee with sex workers. Because

all other sex workers were with clients, only Zoia was there. However, quite soon a car slowed down near us. There were three men in the car. Zoia approached the car and started negotiations. Negotiations were quite brief, so in a minute or so Zoia and the first man from the car went to the thin forest strip that separated the highway from the railway tracks. In around 10 minutes the first man came out of the forest strip and got in the car. At the same time we heard Zoia shouting "Next one!" So, the second man got out of the car and went into the forest to Zoia. He was also absent for ten minutes or so. Lada, Agatha, and I were drinking our tea and contemplating the situation, quietly gossiping about the men's appearance and the fact that they were slightly drunk. After the second guy returned from the forest, he then got into the car but the car didn't leave. As we would learn later, the men were looking for the exact amount of money that Zoia asked for — they had a greater bill but Zoia claimed that she didn't have any change. Thus, the first man and Zoia went into the forest strip again. Together with Lada and Agatha, I barely held my giggles. However, soon the first man returned again, got into the car, and the company left. As Zoia told us after they had left, the guys were not from the city, they were on a trip, and while in Kropyvnytskyi, they decided to go to the sauna and to call for some "girls" to have fun. However, the guys didn't like the sex workers that arrived to the sauna and refused to have sex with them. Sex workers then took offence and one of them cursed the guys, wishing that their "dicks would never be hard again." The guys, according to Zoia, were really scared of this curse, so before arriving to their town and coming home to their spouses, they decided to stop on the highway and to check whether the curse was working. Zoia told us that it didn't, so that both guys were able to get hard but the first one couldn't come. However, she giggled, when the first guy went to the forest again, to give her the money, he asked her just to stay in the forest for some more time, to let his friends

think that “they are doing it again.” He also confessed to Zoia that he told “guys” that he came — otherwise, the guys would laugh at him. This funny anecdote from my fieldwork, I would argue, exposes quite some insecurities that the clients have and in part confirms a suggestion that sex workers are sometimes seen by their clients as someone to whom they can confide and in front of whom they can appear more insecure and vulnerable, or less restrained and civilized.

Chapter 6. "Nothing About Us Without Us": Sex Workers' Political Practices

Setting the scene: informal political practices of the oppressed

People's relations with authorities are often ambiguous and full of equivocation. It is rare when an open conflict is sparked and the authorities are unequivocally challenged. Instead, quite often those who are not fully content with an existing state of affairs resort to more ambiguous actions. The question of what strategies malcontents choose and why, along with the question of what resistance is and how it is made possible, have long been on social scientists' minds. These questions have also been central for scholars studying the issues of power, social order, hegemony, dominance, and subalternity (Ortner 1995; Scott 1985, 1990; Wedeen 1999).

Feminist scholars prominently engaged with the topic of subalternity and resistance, inquiring about how different vulnerable and oppressed groups might possibly harbour their own understanding of the conditions and situation that they are in, despite existing hegemonic ideas (Spivak 1988). This is in no way to suggest that oppressed groups are non-receptive or unsusceptible to hegemony or dominant discourses — on the contrary, feminist scholars have acknowledged an inherently ambiguous position that oppressed groups are in. On the one hand, they are subjected to indoctrination and intense exposure to hegemonic ideas; on the other, they (at least seem) to not fully internalize them. Still, when trying to express their discontent, they might struggle with finding a suitable language in which to express it; in the words of Gayatri Spivak, they might not be able to speak (Spivak 1988). In order to document and define this ambiguity of oppressed groups, feminist standpoint theory scholars, borrowing from W.E.B. DuBois (1996), came up with the notion of "double vision" (Brooks 2007). This concept suggests that, as a rule, members of the oppressed groups

tend to cultivate a double consciousness/double vision — "a heightened awareness not only of their own lives but of the lives of the dominant group" as well (Brooks 2007, 63).

The capacity of being able to understand both the perspective of the fellow oppressed and the one of the oppressor, then, benefits the subaltern subjects, when the latter start to express their discontent. Scott's notions of "public" and "hidden" transcripts (1990) come in handy here. Given that "open interaction between subordinated and those who dominate," i.e. "public transcript" (Scott 1990, 2), is often insufficient to understand the power dynamics and "the whole story about power relations" (Scott 1990, 2), Scott proposes to supplement it with the concept of a "hidden transcript" — a "discourse that takes place "offstage," beyond direct observation by powerholders" (1990, 4). Hidden transcript consists of "those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript." (1990, 4-5). Moreover, the oppressed tend to come up with certain practices that softly challenge the powerholders. Scott calls this "unobtrusive realm of political struggle" (Scott 1990, 183) infrapolitics — various forms of resistance that "dare not speak in their own name" (Scott 1990, 19), such as different activities that test the limits of acceptable like poaching, squatting, etc. Previously, he termed some of these practices "weapons of the weak" (1985).

Hanchard (2006), drawing on Scott's affirmation of everyday resistance and politics from below, proposes to expand theorizations of quotidian politics and thus comes up with a concept of "coagulate politics" that, according to Hanchard, fits in between the level of micro and macro politics and "straddle the boundaries of micro- and macropolitics" (2006, 31). Coagulate politics, according to him, "take place within public spheres and work sites in full view of superordinates, but are largely contingent

upon the encounters between subaltern members, divided by the conditions of labor (agent and consumer) but united by a perceived commonality of subordination" (2006, 34).

In this chapter, then, drawing on feminist theory, Scott's concepts of "everyday resistance," "infrapolitics," and "weapons of the weak," and Hanchard's idea of "coagulate politics," I will attempt to complicate the discussion about politics and redefine the categories of "political practice" and "political activism" by drawing on the practices that Kropyvnytskyi sex workers employ in order to promote their agenda and attract attention to their marginalized situation. Not surprisingly, following Hanchard, I will employ a "rather prosaic but nonetheless accurate definition of politics as the art of the possible" (2006, 30). By politics, then, I will be referring to a variety of behaviours and activities, including community building, participating in local community organizations, HIV awareness work, etc.

Formal and informal political practices and post/socialism

On August 24, 2017, when almost all Ukrainians celebrate Independence Day by visiting friends or relatives, having large family meals, or attending free open air concerts or other festivities, organized by local governments, two different groups gathered in Kyiv on Kontraktova Square, near the monument to Hryhorii Skovoroda, an 18th century philosopher and composer. This monument is a known meeting place and the locals often agree to meet just *"pod Skovorodoi,"* under Skovoroda. Given that the philosopher's last name means "frying pan," locals, most probably, are aware of and enjoy this pun. Both groups are women-only. And they both carry posters and banners with them. However, they came to the Kontraktova Square with different and even opposite agendas. The first group is a radical feminist organization that decided to

organize a protest in support of the Nordic model.[12] The second group mostly consists of former sex workers from Kropyvnytskyi and Krivoi Roh, who decided to oppose the first group and thus to show up and have a small counterprotest. Ukrainian sex workers usually disapprove the idea of implementing the Nordic model in Ukraine, fearing that criminalization of clients will negatively affect their income, increase police presence, and that the clients, after being caught by the police, won't hesitate to retaliate against sex workers. Sex workers appear to want pure and simple decriminalization of sex work — because as of now it is considered an administrative offence.

According to Ukrainian legislation, if you want to organize a protest, you simply have to let the city/town/village administration know about it. You can do it by an e-mail, usual mail, or a telegram. There is no established norm regarding how much time beforehand one must notify the administration — the organizers usually have to rely on the unspoken norms and rules that exist in their city or village and on their sense of how dangerous a protest can be. The first group did everything by the book; however, the second group, didn't — according to them, they didn't have time to do that, coming from other cities all the way to Kyiv. Their red umbrellas — an international symbol of a movement for sex workers' rights — were very noticeable and bright; along with the umbrellas they had a banner saying "Save us from the saviours" (*Spasite nas ot spasatelei*).

This counterprotest, an intervention by former sex workers in the public space, is what one often imagines when hearing about sex workers' politics and political engagement. One, probably, also imagines marches and public demonstrations. However, these gestures are not representative of sex workers' political activism in

[12] Pioneered by Sweden in 1999, this approach criminalizes paying for sex while "removing any sanctions against female sex workers as they are always considered victims." (Sanders, O'Neill, and Pitcher 2009, 87)

Ukraine. Because such interventions into public space require resources that not everyone has readily available to them. As Majic notes, the activities that marginalized groups engage in "contrast sharply with those that more privileged groups … might engage in" (2014, 92). She explains it by pointing out to the issue of "legitimacy." Those who already possess legitimacy in the eyes of the public, may easily focus on more formal ways of political participation and political activism; however, those who don't possess it, need, first and foremost, to establish themselves as such. Thus, it is no surprise that "a significant portion of their political engagement may involve informal, community-based activities to establish themselves as legitimate members of society" (Majic 2014, 91). In other words, much of their time is dedicated to coagulate politics and to infrapolitics. As well as to everyday practices of resistance.

Post-Soviet space is quite famous for varieties of resistance practices that were engendered by different groups both during the Soviet Union and after its collapse. Samizdat ("a specific textual culture" — Forsyth 2018, 350) maintained through the "production and circulation of texts outside of official institutional frameworks" (Forsyth 2018, 350), magnitizdat ("the unofficial practice of (re-)recording uncensored music or speech onto cassette tapes" (Taylor 2018, 342)), rock on bones (the unofficial practice of reproducing officially forbidden music from LPs on X-ray film), monstrations (public demonstrations disguised as a public performance; monstrations are known for deliberately nonsensical slogans like "racoons are people too" and "donate blood, save a vampire") are just a small part of these practices of human ingenuity.

Analyzing informal political practices of late socialism, Alexei Yurchak (2006) notes that it was common for people to create groups and milieus of those who shared similar values and to refer to them as "svoi" (us). However, he cautions, "svoi was not a concept within a binary opposition between "us" (svoi, common people) and "them"

(the state). This public, svoi, related to authoritative discourse neither supporting nor opposing it. Its location vis-à-vis that discourse was deterritorialized" (2006, 131). Rather, Yurchak concludes, they were *vnye* — outside — of this discourse. Considering formal politics and authoritative discourse "uninteresting," they simply tuned out of it for the most part, though obediently performing what was necessary and what was demanded from them on the level of the form. Likewise, late socialism was also notorious for its ironic aesthetics and for stiob — a particular form of irony that was based on "such a degree of overidentification with the object, person, or idea at which this stiob was directed that it was often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of the two." (Yurchak 2006, 249-250). Not pronounced directly as political by those adhering to them, these various practices, nevertheless, carried political messages and can be analyzed as a form of infrapolitics — not challenging the status quo directly and openly, they were rather testing the ground and mocking the status quo while maintaining the most serious face.

"Nothing about us without us"

> Informal political practices that Ukrainian sex workers currently resort to are, certainly, quite different from the practices that were employed by people during the time of late socialism. However, when inquiring about the ways sex workers interact with authorities and police officers, one can very well see the continuity — how current informal political practices are inspired by those of late socialism. With regard to the police, one of the main techniques of everyday resistance is talking back to them. According to Nataliia, a former sex worker and one of the founders of the organization for sex workers' rights in Kropyvnytskyi, police officers are not used to sex workers talking back to them, refusing to sign

protocols that would incriminate sex workers, and demanding that they call a lawyer. Police officers are taken aback by such behaviour and don't always know how to react. But frequent interactions with sex workers who were reluctant to sign the protocols and were indeed calling the organization's hot line to ask for a lawyer to be dispatched taught police officers to be wary of some sex workers and to stay away from them. Nina, who has been in sex work for a few years already, recounted how around a year ago she was getting off a minibus on a highway to start her working day, when her mother suddenly called her on a cell. Getting off a bus, with a phone near her ear, and closing the bus' door, Nina noticed a police car not far away from the bus. According to Nina, at the moment she was preparing for yet another encounter with the police, however, to her own astonishment, the car left. Being one of those sex workers who were often talking back to the officers and calling the organization's hot line at the smallest sign of a trouble, Nina hypothesized that the police decided that she was on the phone with Nataliia (whom many officers strongly disliked for her activism regarding sex workers' rights) or somebody else from the organization and, not ready to deal with Nina's resistance, left. Nina's hypothesis was confirmed some time after this incident, when the police officers suddenly appeared on the highway again and managed to catch sex workers off guard, so the latter had no time to call anyone. Police officers jokingly asked Nina whom she was talking to on the phone that day and when she told that it was her mother, they replied with quite some irony and suspicion that they didn't know Nataliia had already become her mother.

Another infrapolitical tactic that sex workers employ in relation to the police is the matter of how one refers to the police and how one behaves when she is taken to

the police station. The unwritten code of rules on how to behave when the police come and when they take you to the station is very clear and if it is broken by one of them, sex workers' won't hesitate to violently enforce the rules and punish the "offender." During one of my visits to the highway, Nelia told me that not long before my arrival, police officers took all sex workers to the police station. Everybody was acting cool but one girl, who was crying and begging the officers to let her go because she had a child at home. The police didn't answer her plea and instead held all sex workers in the station longer than usual. Because of this, the girl who cried and begged was beaten by other sex workers after everyone was released from the station.

Studying thieves' subculture in post-Soviet Russia, Caroline Humphrey (2002) mentions that thieves had their own set of rules and that it was important for the subculture that members adhere to the rules, that members live "according to the understandings" (*zhit po poniatiyam*). This is somewhat similar to the situation with sex workers: there is an unwritten set of rules and if you want to be a member of this (however ad hoc) community, you better follow them. One of the rules is not to beg the police to let you go and not to cry. Because if you beg them for a favour, you confirm their higher status and acknowledge their power. And acknowledging their power is disapproved of, since in Russian (and Ukrainian) language, the police are often referred to either as "menty" or as "musora" — both are slang words and both have negative connotations. The former, "ment," allegedly comes from the criminal slang of the early 20th century; it came to Ukrainian and Russian through Polish criminal slang. And in Polish criminal slang "ment" was used to refer to prison guards (Zhiganets 1999). The meaning of the latter word, "musor," literally means garbage, trash. However, the word originated in 1920s in Moscow, when Moscow Criminal Investigation Department was created. The name of this institution sounded in Russian as Moskovskii Ugolovnyi Sysk,

thus the abbreviation MUS and the word "musor." Still, it is very doubtful that all those people who use the word "musor" today know its etymology. Even if the similarity between the words meaning "police officer" and "garbage" was incidental at first, I would hypothesize that for those who use the word now this pun is important per se: as it conveys disdain and contempt to the police and, I would also argue, for the state, on whose behalf the police operates.

This discursive practice of expressing contempt to the police by means of using derogatory slang words to refer to them is close to another informal political practice popular both during the Soviet Union and later, namely to the practice of *materit'sya* — using obscene language for the purposes of resistance and/or self-expression. Anastasia Shekshnya mentions that *mat*, obscene language, is also frequently used to ensure "the effectiveness of communication" and that mat is "instrumental in crisis communication" (2018, 354). Explaining the significance of obscene language for culture and politics of socialism and post-socialism, she emphasizes that mat "can play an important role in politics precisely since it can act as an instrument of bonding, becoming the language of 'insiders' but also adding veracity and authenticity to what the speaker is saying." (Sheksnya 2018, 357). Both discursive practices of mat and of using "musor"/"ment" to refer to the police are similar because they recuperate "linguistic or cultural patterns widely rejected as vulgar" (Zusi 2018, 338), violate established norms and rules, and by pretending to be rather cultural than political, these practices disguise their political message. As Peter Zusi succinctly argues: "Resistance does not simply confront the structures of power head on, but may seek paths or detours around those structures, often seeping into the cracks and fissures in the barriers, or inhabiting spaces that have been deemed outside of or irrelevant to the shape of the discourse." (2018, 336).

Among other political practices, it seems important to mention the practice of discursive normalization of sex work. This practice goes hand-in-hand with other small-scale political practices of community-building, raising HIV awareness, and advocating for sex workers' rights. Overall, sex workers' grass roots efforts (however small-scale and insignificant at first glance) aim to challenge existing power relations by engaging with the political with the means of everyday resistance practices. They attempt to re-politicize the issue of sex work from the bottom. Since sex work is, as a rule, an already politicized issue. In case of Ukraine, sex work is still known under the term "prostitution" and discussions around it are attached to the questions of religion (especially of so-called "traditional (meaning Christian) values"), and thus sex work is framed with references to morality, sins, and the need to salvage the women in prostitution. Alternatively, sex work in the Ukrainian formal political discourse is framed through the concept of "European values" and a linear narrative of Ukraine's progress from the Soviet past to the bright European/Western future. According to this narrative, sex work has to be legalized. Whereas sex workers oppose these positions, they attempt to challenge both narratives.[13] As quoted in the title of the subsection, according to sex workers, ideally, politicians and journalists shouldn't discuss the matter of sex work without prior consultation with members of the community, hence "nothing about us without us."

Firstly, when talking about their experience of sex work, they usually attempt to frame sex work as first and foremost work — as a means to earn money — and to

[13] It might come as a surprise to some that sex workers oppose legalization. However, it has its inner logic. The way it is discussed in Ukraine, legalization presupposes that sex workers will register as "private entrepreneurs" and pay a certain monthly tax. Since for some sex work is not a full-time job but they are rather engaging in it from time to time, they are reluctant to register as entrepreneurs (thus disclosing their identity and the fact that they are sex workers) and to pay taxes.

stress that their working identities and activities are drastically different from what they do and who they are in private. For instance, Nataliia, when talking to media representatives about her experience of sex work and her activism, often reiterates phrases "We do not sell our bodies, we offer services" and "Singers work with their throats, dancers work with their legs, we work with… other parts of our bodies." Possibly, the last statement is intended to balance on the verge of obscene and thus to add humour and work as an ice-breaker, humanizing sex workers and rendering them less strange and exotic in the eyes of the public. Similarly, Arina, when I asked her about the purpose of their organization, told me that they aim to "make sex work a usual work… like a hairdresser's job. … Or a manicurist. Or a salesman. Well, we want it to be treated as job and to put an end to discrimination." Based on other interviews and conversations as well, it seems that comparing sex work with other service or entertainment jobs is a political strategy for sex workers: they insist that what they do is offering services and that there is no need to discriminate against this kind of job.

Another important political strategy is raising HIV awareness. According to Asia, it has been an eye-opener for her to learn that many people in her native city think that HIV can be transmitted by sharing a cup or a spoon with an infected person. Shocked by public ignorance with regard to such questions, she told that she plans to go to the local department of education and ask that she and her fellow colleagues are allowed to organize some public lectures in schools and colleges to counter popular myths and misunderstandings about such diseases as HIV, hepatitis, and HPV. "For instance, in my school, where my children go, people trust me. So, if aunt Asia comes and explains everything…" She didn't feel the need to finish the sentence; the way she was talking about it conveyed quite a degree of certainty in the fact that school officials trust her and that she will face no obstacles in organizing these talks in the school her children

go to. Raising HIV awareness, negotiating with some friendly gynaecologists that they examine sex workers, and organizing once in a while lectures by gynaecologists about reproductive health — all these educational practices serve the purpose to make their fellow colleagues from sex work more knowledgeable, spread a word about their activism, and thus engage new members. As Hanchard noted, coagulate politics often involves people "who are in conflict and competition over goods, services and resources" (2006, 30). Sex workers' activism, thus, aims to reduce competition among sex workers and to help them develop some common ground, a shared standpoint that can be, in case of need, transformed into an explicit political position that can be easily communicated to public.

Building and strengthening sex workers' community is the primary aim for many. They believe that their strength partly lies in numbers and that by showing how many people are in sex work now, they will be able to push for at least the most minor changes, such as canceling the article 181.1 of the Administrative Code, the one which defines punishment for the "activity of prostitution." However, one of the main challenges that these activists face is that many sex workers are reluctant to actively participate and especially to talk to media because of the fear of being identified. One of the founders of the organization, Inna, faced such a situation around a year ago. After sex workers' protest, she gave a short commentary about her experience of sex work to the journalists. Inna had her face exposed while talking to them, hoping they would do a proper job and anonymize the comment by at least blurring the face. The journalists, however, failed to conceal her identity and to blur her face. The story had unexpectedly wide coverage, so a lot of Inna's neighbours and relatives after seeing it on the TV, stopped talking to her, ostracizing Inna and her family. To make the matter worse, Inna's daughter came from school one day and told her that "everybody in the

school says that my mum is a prostitute." This fear of being identified and exposed is one of the reasons sex workers rarely resort to more formal political practices like organizing protests, demonstrations, and openly lobbying for one's cause, preferring instead to operate informally.

* * *

Overall, despite the fact that the scope of political practices and techniques available to them is quite limited, Kropyvnytskyi sex workers nevertheless manage to be politically active. However, their political activism exists on another scale different from the usual political activism. Sex workers mainly resort to such practices of everyday resistance like talking back to the police, employing derogatory terms when referring to the police officers, and expressing contempt to the police by refusing to symbolically acknowledge police's power and an asymmetrical relationship between sex workers and police officers. These infrapolitical practices are supplemented by the practices of coagulate politics: community building and raising HIV awareness. In general, sex workers' political practices aim to probe what is possible and to widen the limits of what is deemed possible.

One of questions that seems to arise out of the discussion of informal politics concerns community empowerment and whether constant use of informal political practices can lead to a community empowerment. I would suggest that it doesn't. As Laura Agustín highlights, empowerment is "a word used by those who view themselves as fighters for social justice" (2007, 158) and that "empower is a transitive verb whose subject is the person doing the empowering, a technology aimed at 'constituting active and participatory citizens' and simultaneously linking subjects with their own subjection" (2007, 158). She suggests that empowerment seeks to produce normal legitimate rights-bearing citizens who are able to be involved with the realm of formal

politics. Her discussion unveils taken-for-granted normalcy and legitimacy of an "empowered" political subject and the fact that some oppressed groups or individuals might never become such subjects and that they might not have a possibility to become empowered. However, this is bad news only if one subscribes to a narrow definition of politics and political practice. Feminist anthropologists have long argued for a more inclusive definition of politics, emphasizing that politics is not only the realm of men but at the same time acknowledging that women universally have less political influence (Ortner 1972; Rosaldo 1980; Strathern 2016). Following in their footsteps, it is our task, then, to not only document existing political strategies that women use but also, to quote from Michelle Rosaldo, to link "the particulars of women's lives, activities, and goals to inequalities wherever they exist" (1980, 417).

Chapter 7. Conclusions: Where Do We Go From Here?

Quod erat demonstrandum

This thesis has examined the intersections of sex work and informality in contemporary Ukraine. Framing my inquiry with the help of the concept of informality, I attempted to challenge the binary that sex workers are in sex industry either because of their free choice or because they were forced into this as victims of trafficking. This thesis complicates this picture by showing that there rather exists a continuum between these two points, so the binary of the "happy hooker" versus the "victim of trafficking" misrepresents such a heterogeneous phenomenon like sex work.

Focusing on the level of street sex work, however, I show that despite the fact that women choose this occupation among other options themselves, it is first and foremost poverty that leads them into sexual commerce. Because sex work provides them with flexible schedule and relatively high profits in a short period of time, it is seen by many women as a better option than other jobs available to them. Since many sex workers are (single) mothers, flexible schedule is of paramount importance to them, as it provides an opportunity to spend enough time with their children. Also, women who use drugs, suffer from alcohol addiction, or have a criminal record often engage in street sex work because these groups face continuous difficulties in finding permanent employment.

First, I discuss the place of informality within sex work. I argue that sex workers make use of their extended social networks in order to secure their well-being: they provide favours to each other or make sure that a friend is able to provide a favour for a colleague; they exchange favours with local bus drivers and with the road police. Contextualizing sex work within informality helps to understand people's rootedness in

a place and thus lack of the desire to relocate because of the fear of losing one's social networks, which, in cases of the state withdrawal, function as social security mechanisms.

Given that sex work is classified as an administrative offence in Ukraine and is thus illegal, I show how sex workers discursively legitimize sex work as a means of earning money by distancing it from other prohibited, illegal and criminal activities. I argue that by distinguishing illegal from illicit on the basis that the latter does not harm fellow citizens, sex workers attempt to discursively normalize sex work and renegotiate their status in society. I also show that this discursive practice is a part of a broader picture and that sex workers often resort to various informal political practices. Adopting a broad definition of politics, I argue that practices like talking back to the police, engaging in community building, and raising HIV/AIDS awareness can be theorized as small-scale resistance practices and examples of infrapolitics. Further, I also inquire about sex work in the period that directly followed the collapse of the USSR, because many of my participants started to work as sex workers at around that time. Trying to bridge the global and the local, I show how the issues of deindustrialization and the rise in crime in the 1990s affected the lives of my participants and, directly or indirectly, led them to a decision to go abroad in search of sex work.

Though an increased flow of people through the borders of the newly established nation-states contributed to an international panic on human trafficking (and on the map of human trafficking Ukraine was often listed as one of the main source countries), building on my participants' narratives, I show the shortcomings of the trafficking discourse. I argue that the discourse of human trafficking and thus rendering of women who went abroad for sex work as victims of trafficking gravely misrepresents the

experiences of many women, who knowingly entered the situation of exploitation because of harsh economic conditions and because some of the other possible choices were seen by them as even more exploitative. In addition to that, I show that the discourse of trafficking changes the focus of the discussion: by concentrating on the level of individuals, it shifts the discussion from structural problems like global inequality to the topic of personal agency or lack of it.

Finally, I look at how sex workers discuss their clients, and conceptualize interactions with them. Building on symbolic anthropology, I attempt to theorize sex workers' interactions with clients as a gender-nonconforming space, where clients are less afraid to appear either vulnerable and insecure, or less restrained and civilized. I show that street sex workers provide their clients with the opportunity to relax from the constraints of civilization and from the societal coercion to appear cultured. What do sex workers think of their clients? Building on their discussions about clients, I argue that sex workers often assert their moral superiority over their clients by ridiculing sexual fantasies and desires of the latter. By doing this, sex workers revise and invert power relations between them and their clients and attempt to discursively dominate over them.

Where do we go from here?

It is a *mauvais ton* not to mention the limitations of one's study and not to suggest possible directions for a future research. The first quite obvious limitation of my study stems from the fact that I did my research primarily among street sex workers. And given that sex work is a heterogeneous phenomenon with its internal hierarchies, my findings are of limited applicability to other strata of sex workers. Moreover, all of my participants are women sex workers, and though women are still dominating this

industry, it would be unwise to exclude men and transgender people who also work in the sex industry in Ukraine. My focus on women in sex work is thus another limitation of my study. Men and transgender people in sex industry are indeed a blank spot in the scholarship of sexuality in postsocialist space, and thus, it is my sincere hope that the topic will be addressed by either scholars of sex work or scholars of postsocialism. This is not to suggest that the topic of men and transgender people wasn't studied — on the contrary, scholars have inquired into this, however, they focused primarily on other regions and not on postsocialist space (see, for instance, Hodge 2001, Kulick 1998, Nanda 1999, Özbay 2017).

I also find my discussion of informality rather limited. I provided only partial answers to the questions: "How does informality fit within sex work and how does it manifest in sex workers' relations with clients, police officers, and among themselves?" and "How do sex workers' attempts at discursive normalization of sex work contribute to renegotiating their allegedly lamentable status?" I find those questions to be of significance. I hope to continue researching this topic and thus hope to find more in-depth answers to the questions. As well as new questions, worthy of meticulous anthropological inquiry. I also sincerely hope that in the future I am able to deepen my discussion of sex workers' interactions with clients, as well as to fine-tune the exploration of what sex workers' narratives about the clients can unveil about the "big" questions of morality and of the social order.

Overall, despite my best efforts to do something more than a "surface-scratch" fieldwork, it is difficult to produce groundbreaking results after only three and a half months of fieldwork. Hence, I prefer to treat my findings from this research as only preliminary conclusions; they are rather intimations of bigger issues and interim

summaries. Indulging myself with a musical metaphor, it is rather an overture than a completed symphony.

On the importance of studying informalities and sex work

In this finale it seems appropriate to at least attempt to answer the question why it is important to study informalities or to study sex work. I will start with the latter. As social scientists who study sex and sexuality have repeatedly shown, the boundary between commercial and non-commercial sex is never clear (Bernstein 2007; Day 2007; Donnan and Macgowan 2010). However, assuming the existence of certain relationship between market and intimacy and drawing the boundary between commercial and non-commercial sex without a prior scrupulous exploration of questions related to intimacy and commerce may have devastating consequences for those who engage in sex-for-money or sex-for-goods. Inquiring about why the boundary between commercial and non-commercial sex is important for societies, and why, in contemporary capitalist societies, we tend to think about commercial sex as less authentic, sheds light on the values that we consider important and the hierarchies that we construct. I hope that my humble contribution to research on sex work is a part of a greater project that attempts to do just that.

Last but not least, why study informalities? Researchers of informality dedicate a disproportionately big amount of attention to the so-called Second and Third Worlds, presumably because of the sheer scope of informalities there. Nevertheless, informality scholars are beginning to address informality in the First World as well, showing that despite a tendency toward greater individualism and erasure of social ties, social connections and the phenomena like networking still play important roles even in the lives of people in the First World. Studying informalities and unveiling the role of social

connections might help scholars to challenge the idea of meritocracy that is based on the notion of unmediated individual achievements and the idea of independency. Though, as Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (1994) show, the latter is a very recent invention, it appears to firmly root itself as a benchmark, against which individuals should be assessed. Unveiling the importance of social networks in an era of atomization might challenge the ideas of autonomy and self-reliance, these pillars of modernity. It might show that on a gemeinschaft — gesellschaft continuum we might still be closer to the former than we would like to acknowledge. It might show that, paraphrasing Bruno Latour (1993), we have been less modern than we think.

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