

Red Light and Red Tape:

Activist Organisations within the Red Light District: the Reclaiming of
Power and its Effect on Discourse.

Masters Thesis

Anell Roos

Graduate Gender Programme

Utrecht University

August 2015

Main supervisor:

Prof. dr. Anne-Marie Korte

Utrecht University

Secondary supervisor

Dr. Rachel Alsop

The University of Hull



Red Light and Red Tape:

Activist Organisations within the Red Light District: the Reclaiming of Power and its Effect on Discourse.

Masters Thesis

Anell Roos

Graduate Gender Programme

Utrecht University

August 2015

Main supervisor:

Prof. dr. Anne-Marie Korte

Utrecht University

Signature:

Secondary supervisor

Dr. Rachel Alsop

The University of Hull



ABSTRACT:

The proposed research will constitute a study of the Prostitution Information Centre and PROUD, the new Dutch Union for Sex Workers, both acting in the capacity of activist organisations within Amsterdam's Red Light District, as situated producers of knowledge within an institution characterised by sexism, oppression, and continuous struggles for power. Drawing from disciplines such as anthropology, feminist studies, and their research related to sex work and sexuality; and employing extensive fieldwork, I will present a systematic ethnography and re-imagining of the current debates surrounding sex work, the role of advocacy groups, and its effects on the lives of women in the battle to redefine and internalise agency, and to redefine structural systems of power.

Both organisations' role in the shaping and maintaining of power relationships, narratives, and new discourses, amidst a dense body of work influenced by 2nd wave and 3rd wave feminism, and the respective debates produced on the nature of sex work and its links to human trafficking, exploitation, and patriarchy will be illustrated. Often, the voices of the sex workers themselves are lost in the academic sphere dominated by scholars, therefore I will consciously strive for a new narrative in which these voices act as the primary influences in current discourses, with feminist scholarship taking on a supporting and complementary position. Heavily influenced by the works of Foucault, Mahmood, and Rubin, I engage in a critical dialogue of power, feminism, academic privilege, and the importance of locating the voices of those most in need of a platform to become authoritative figures in the construction of their lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

My lecturers throughout these two years who have helped hone my feminist persona and help shape this research.

My two supervisors, Prof. dr. Anne-Marie Korte and Dr Rachel Alsop without whose guidance this thesis would not have been possible. My fellow students and friends whose continued support and sisterhood has helped me find my place in both this programme and in the world. My family, whose dedication and love towards the fulfilment of my goals has been invaluable.

And finally, to Mariska, who opened her shop and her world to me in order to become part of a movement where the value of a woman is determined not by others, but by herself. You, PIC and PROUD, are worthy of admiration, respect, and support. I am forever indebted.

De Wallen in Beeld.

Rode lichtjes Spiegelen
in de gracht

Een eenzame klant
Die niets meer verwacht

Hij wandelt en kijkt
Schijnbaar onbewogen
Bij elk raam een vrouw
Diep in haar ogen

Een verschraalde geur
Van bier en wiet
Een onschuldig kind
Dat alles beziet

In het weekend
Is het feest op
straat
Kijken, lachen
Maar niemand
gaat...

Een bijzondere buurt
Vrij en intens
Er wordt geleefd
Je bent er Mens

- Mariska Majoor, 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE:	1
Sex and Power: A Battle of Ideologies and Righteous Movements.	1
1.1: Introduction and Research Questions.....	1
1.2: The Problematisation of a Single Narrative.	3
1.3: Contextual Considerations.	4
1.4: Thesis Structure.....	7
CHAPTER TWO:	9
Methodological Considerations and Definition of Terms.....	9
2.1: Introduction.	9
2.2: Methodology, Reflexivity, and Preliminary Considerations.....	9
2.2.1: Contextualised Positionality and Links to Power and Change.	9
2.2.2: Setting the Scene for Analysis.	15
2.3: Terminology and Associated Meanings.....	16
2.3.1: Sex Work(er):.....	16
2.3.2: Prostitute:	18
2.3.3: Human Trafficking:.....	19
CHAPTER THREE:.....	21
Theoretical and Analytical Background.....	21
3.1: Introduction.	21
3.2: Waves and Schools: Radical Thought and Liberal Counters.....	22
3.2.1: Blurred Lines and Abolitionist Stances.....	24
3.2.2: Agency and Activism: Contested Meanings.....	27
3.3: Liberal Responses to Radical Interpretations.....	31
3.3.1: Introduction.	31
3.3.2: Simplistic Models, Complex Analyses, and a Consideration of Theory and Agency.	31

3.4: Links to Human Trafficking.....	37
3.5: Sex Workers Organisations: A Limited Discussion.....	40
CHAPTER FOUR:	43
Red Light: Empirical Data and Constructed Space.....	43
4.1: Ethnography as Representational Ethics.....	43
4.2: Identifying the Constructed Space.....	44
4.3: Theory and Practice – The Effects of Unchallenged Discourse.....	47
4.4: Power Tactics and Activist Resistance.....	49
CHAPTER FIVE:	58
Discussion and Analysis.....	58
5.1: Introduction.....	58
5.2: Agency and Subjective Interpretations.....	61
5.3.1: Agency and Power:	66
5.4: The Repressive Hypothesis and its link to the socio-political crisis of Red Light.....	67
5.4.1: Hidden Forms of Sexual Profiling.....	73
CHAPTER SIX:	75
Conclusion.....	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	78

CHAPTER ONE:

Sex and Power: A Battle of Ideologies and Righteous Movements.

1.1: Introduction and Research Questions.

With the escalation of socio-political conflicts in Amsterdam's Red Light District due to conflicting perspectives on the best approach from which to organise and regulate the sex industry, activist and pro-sex worker's rights groups have mobilised in response to what they believe are discriminatory and unfair practices imposed by the ruling powers of civil government. Despite the legal status of sex work in the Netherlands, and the ban on brothels being lifted in 2000, sex workers continue to face stigma and unfair discrimination based on marginalised gendered stereotypes and the historically influenced negative perceptions on sex work and prostitution.

With the introduction of tailored strategies designed to impose directly on the lives of sex workers under the guise of modernity, gentrification, and an ultimate improvement in the lives and safety of sex workers, Amsterdam's City Council has defined its position of power as one of exclusion, resulting in inadequate interaction with those who will be directly affected by the proposed strategies. As a result, this thesis arose from the need to understand these new dimensions of power within a historically contentious space. This thesis aims to combine both theoretical analyses and empirical data to construct an argument which shifts the current understandings of gender, power, and socio-political complexities to lead to a new way in which we articulate sex work narratives. Within the scope of feminism, the debate surrounding sex work is polarised, and has predominantly remained the domain of academic enquiry¹. Informing my research questions are factors drawn from both feminist and social theory, as well as my own extensive fieldwork, with a primary aim being to situate the nexus of understanding and knowledge within the grasp of those active in the sex industry, drawing on theories of the centre and the periphery; knowledge production; and situated contexts, supported by feminist theory and heavily influenced by Foucault's influential stance on sexuality:

¹ This is certainly true for some strands of second wave feminism, which has been accused of being static in its academic position (Snyder 2008; Krøløkke & Scott Sørensen 2006).

“Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power” (Foucault 1978: 105-106).

These constructed elements, based on contextual perception and inference, are central in deconstructing current dominant narratives about not only sex work, but also the women who work as sex workers. The nature of the sex industry and its surrounding socio-cultural and political spheres has often led to the term sex worker being used as a description and definition of identity, as opposed to it merely encompassing but one part of a complex human persona capable of embodying whichever elements and traits it considers to be crucial to a realisation of identity. As a response to such a stigmatising process, sex worker unions and advocacy groups have become vocal and influential in challenging hegemonic practices, arguing for an improved system of recognition and involvement in local politics. Such groups maintain a position of strength and solidarity in the face of consistent opposition and are supported by large numbers of sex workers. To bring these two authoritative entities – City Council and advocacy groups – into relation, a critical empirical analysis is needed to identify and understand the various factors that give rise to such an unequal relationship, but which may also lead to a shift in equilibrium, bringing about a more cooperative and effective procedural system of regulation and liberation. To do so, the reliance on Foucault’s work on power and sexuality is paramount. The Red Light District is permeated with all manner of power and influence and is, as such, the perfect example of a clashing of cultures, ideologies, and political manipulation.

As such, my research question will be oriented towards an examination of how activist organisations within the Red Light District navigate repressive structures, as theorised by Foucault, in a context shaped by power struggles in order to renegotiate equal rights and recognition², both in the context of the law as workers and in their marginalised position as women. This goal can only be realised after an extensive examination and critique of feminist theory pertaining to sexualities, power, and finally, epistemological and ontological discourses.

² This recognition may be interpreted in a number of ways; I situate recognition as a core feature of locating sex workers as integral in producing representative and fair truths, resultant in changes positively felt and endorsed by sex workers.

1.2: The Problematisation of a Single Narrative.

Contrary to Gail Dines'³ assertion, feminism is not a singular concept, but rather a recognition that feminism can be a varied collective of ideas, actions, and beliefs that all occupy valuable spaces of authority within discourse, based on the core principle of gender equality. Adherence to simply one feminism leads to a reductive method of reasoning and is an unproductive position to take by virtue of it restricting itself to an ideological stance representative of exclusionary politics and categorisation, resulting in a type of thinking that is particularly harmful when discussing sexuality and sex work within a feminist and political context. An important example of such a crisis is evidenced by the ideological schism between radical feminism, which is associated with 2nd wave feminism, and liberal feminism, closely associated with 3rd wave feminism⁴, which espouses inclusive practices while embracing the notions of choice and legitimacy of diverse identities. Sex work has not been exempt from such conflicts and has been located as a site where identity- and power politics come into play and feminisms are displayed as schools of thought through which to analyse and deconstruct the sex industry.

Andrea Dworkin once stated “think about pornography as a new institution of social control, a democratic use of terrorism against all women... look down bitch because when you look up you’re going to see your legs spread” (as cited by Dines 2014). This reasoning is characteristic of radical feminism’s anti-pornography and anti-sex work stance and its critique of the discursive logic of patriarchal hierarchy in organising society based on gendered truth, and which radical feminism employs as the archetypal model of subordination that needs to be challenged. However, liberal, 3rd wave politics cannot be exempt from critique. While such politics may claim to be an inclusive form of politics, rejecting fundamentalisms and binary systems, it does risk losing focus of pertinent feminist concerns in its march for inclusivity by misinterpreting and justifying possible concerns related to oppression and equality (Snyder 2008).

³ Recounted from a lecture Dines presented at the Feminism in London Conference 2014 which I attended.

⁴ I acknowledge that my simplistic statement does not reject the fact that there is no simple or singular definition of third wave feminism and that diverging opinions and ideological interpretations do occur within movements. For more on the complexities of third wave politics, see Martin (2007); Orr (1997); Snyder (2008) and Van der Tuin (2007).

My work will aim to take into critical considerations both schools and their multiple belief systems, and re-evaluate and construe them into a narrative vying for feminism(s) where the position of the sex worker as a woman is centred in debates, and is read as an entity in possession of power and with the ability to navigate these complexities. These complexities come to light in Foucault's *A History of Sexuality* (1978) where he deconstructs structures of power through a careful analysis of its form, its origin, its receptiveness to forces outside of its purview, and its effect on the construction of socio-political spaces. The embodiment of femininity and all that it encompasses, is another contentious point within the divide of feminist history, and the question of how to include diverse definitions and differences while maintaining a feminist core has been an ongoing concern of feminist thought. Schweickart (1993: 179) reflects on the diversity of femininities and of women's gendered identities when she says "In the last decade, there has been much concern about the differences among women and about the problem of some women speaking of and for all women". She reiterates the fact that the theories and views that define a single unifying identity are crippling. This position hides the diversity of femininities that exist around the world, and portrays only the views of "relatively privileged white, middle-class women" (Schweickart 1993: 179). This diversity of identities, more notably, *feminine* identities, has been problematic in radical feminist discourse as it situates the formation of identities within a patriarchal frame of reference and approval. To extricate femininity, and the creation of other identities, from the confines of patriarchy is an ongoing debate between feminist groups and scholars, with 2nd and 3rd wave politics dominating the debate. Aligning more with a 3rd wave mode of thought, I support the proactive move towards a self-determination and identification which embodies notions of empowerment, free will, and choice, as catalysts for self-realisation. These ideals are based on what is believed to be the three foundational pillars of 3rd wave feminism: the emphasis on personal narratives and intersectional tactics; action (or empirical evidence) over theoretical evidence; and finally, its inclusive nature and rejection of the policing of the personal (Snyder 2008: 175).

1.3: Contextual Considerations.

I will be using the Prostitution Information Centre⁵ (PIC) in Amsterdam as my primary source of empirical data and the interviews that I conducted with the owner will inform my analysis of a socio-cultural space which signifies an array of meanings, responses to municipal pressures, and activist politics challenging homogenous power structures. Along with PIC, which acts as an information centre about the Red Light District, PROUD was established by the owner of PIC as the new Dutch Union for Sex Workers, and as an extension and partner of PIC it is an active union which encourages sex workers to join its cause in order to effectively challenge oppressive laws and plans developed by the Amsterdam's City Council. PIC has been in operation since 1994 when owner Mariska Majoor retired from the sex industry as a window prostitute and established PIC. Acting in an advocacy capacity, Mariska herself is at the forefront of all campaigns, strategies, and projects pertaining to the advancement of sex workers' rights in Amsterdam and the Netherlands. This heavily visible presence allows Mariska to establish a prominent and valid space for change in the face of continual constraints imposed on the District by the City Council, such as gentrification projects aimed at reducing the number of window brothels, and calls for specialised registers for sex workers. Both these calls are rooted in the belief of an intrinsic link between sex work and human trafficking, as evidenced by the directives given by City Council as well as reports by international organisations arguing for the validity of such a link (UNODC 2009, 2014; Dutch National Rapporteur 2013). I will argue that the presence of organisations such as PIC and PROUD act to clarify not only the difference between voluntary and forced prostitution, but to actively challenge popular perceptions and truths regarding the sex industry, including its association with human trafficking and the stigma attached to being a sex worker and/or a prostitute. It is an essential task to engage with organisations in order to facilitate a reading of popular discourse and its moralistic nature to deconstruct potentially harmful narratives.

Within Amsterdam's Red Light District these different views, ideologies, and discourses often seem at odds, with very little comparison or compromise. The initial beginnings of this research, based primarily on initial fieldwork data and theoretical research, pointed in the direction of narrow, singular concepts of power, morality, and gender, based on existing systems of control and regulation, yet it has become clear throughout my work that while oppositional stances exist, they have more in common than is superficially visible. These commonalities may not present themselves visibly in widespread debates and arguments, but rather, they become discernible when layers of meaning, definitions, and arguments are

⁵ Hereafter referred to as PIC.

carefully deconstructed and analysed. Most tellingly was the appearance of a shared moralistic underpinning in regards to sex work and its various manifestations present in the arguments made by both feminist groups condemning sex work, and feminists groups advocating the rights of sex workers. The former stance often critiques sex work as *an institution*, rather than critiquing the rights of women as sex workers. While this does signal a vastly different debate than the latter group's view, it does point in the direction of some shared sentiments⁶. Indeed, this may not be surprising as feminism embraces certain goals and beliefs at its core, but the interpretation and manifestation of those sentiments and goals is what is important in a detailed and complex discussion.

Prostitution has traditionally been researched and analysed within two primary frameworks – one, the ‘liberal/contractarian’ approach and two, the ‘domination/subjection’ approach (Peterson-Iyer 1998; Weitzer 2007, 2009, 2011). The latter has formed the foundation for feminist arguments opposing sex work, citing gross human rights violations, the continual existence and strengthening of a patriarchal society and a devaluation of the female body as its main concerns. Few scholars have dealt with sex work organisations who aim to promote the validity of sex works as a profession and ensure the accompanying rights and freedoms, as it may be construed as an opposition to feminist ideals of equality, worth, recognition, and liberation, as it supposedly conforms to a patriarchal agenda. Exceptions to this may be Valerie Jenness (1990), who examined prostitution as a social issue by analysing COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), a sex worker's advocacy organisation in the United States, and Robert Weitzer (2012) in his work on the international sex industry and his formulation of an alternative to abovementioned frameworks, called the polymorphous paradigm which seeks a more in-depth and thick description of lived experiences of women in the industry. Often, the voices of the sex workers themselves are lost in the academic sphere dominated by scholars, leading to theoretical evaluations and constructions presented as factual truth that are at odds with the lived realities of many women active in the industry.

Breaking away from the liberation vs domination discussion, I will take a more empirical path towards an inclusive discussion on the organisations, councils, and structures involved in the Red Light Industry. By posing the liberation vs domination discussion at the margins of my analytical scope, I will systematically move inwards through various aspects of literature, theory, and empirical evidence to deconstruct existing discourses which precursor truth. This

⁶ However, despite such shared concerns, it must be remembered that radical thought may not always be conducive to the achievement of such rights.

deconstruction will call into question what we assume as truth regarding not only the working of the Red Light District, but will also aim to question the relevance and validity of known theories within my empirical framework. The intent of this work is not to repeat the available literature regarding the above-mentioned opposition in terms of either-or, but to understand the breakdown and mechanisms of those organisations, groups, and individuals who navigate lived experiences within an assumed fixed narrative of binaries. I stress this point as it remains one of my fundamental problems with the available literature: one of disconnect. Acknowledging the relevance and importance of literature does not presuppose acceptance of said literature. Within those discourses, problems remain and new ones arise. A critical flaw emerged throughout my reading of these literatures and the aim in this thesis will be to attempt to bring to light views, stances, and ultimately new discourses that are yet invisible.

I found a suspicious lack of empirical data reflecting the lived experiences of sex workers and resulting dimensions of reality, leading me to question the ultimate relevance of those works to the lives of those in the industry. Rather, I have been confronted with theoretical works of a philosophical and epistemological nature, rather than a sound ontological turn. This brings me to the issue of researcher reflexivity and politics of location. Whereas literatures have often been distinct in its position regarding sex work, thereby influencing not only works to follow, but also impacting societal perception, I will attempt to understand my positionality within the larger scope of research and utilising it to bring together a nuanced and comprehensive argument. I make no attempts at producing truth; instead I intend to problematise the relationship between theory and the experiences of what I observed.

1.4: Thesis Structure.

Chapter two will be dedicated to my methodological framework, where I discuss the importance of sound methodological tools, and the researcher positionality as a vessel of interpretation and knowledge production. I end this chapter with a discussion of relevant terms and concepts used in discourses on sex work, and their collective impact on the production of theory. Chapter Three will consist of a discussion on the theoretical framework and its importance in a new process of theoretical and social construction. In this chapter, I reflect on both feminist scholars, ranging from Catharine MacKinnon to Gayle Rubin, to

works focused on more theoretical discussions surrounding agency, power, and formulations of feminist identities. I dedicate a large section to the debates on feminist schools of thought which in essence, gave birth to a range of theories, discourse, and analyses which continue to influence current feminist debates. To close, I discuss the topic of human trafficking and its supposed links to sex work and prostitution and the manner in which human trafficking has been appropriated as a tool by which activists, scholars, and academics to further their agendas.

In Chapter Four I present an overview of my fieldwork at PIC in Amsterdam, consisting of my interviews, observations, as well as my participation in a march organised by PROUD. My empirical data will shape my thesis structure by delineating themes present in the data and drawing a common thread throughout this thesis. These structural themes will pave the way for a critical analysis of both available theory as well as my own argumentative analysis. Moving on from the empirical framework, Chapter Five will be the focus chapter on discussion and analysis, introducing major theoretical tenets and their specific contributions and shortcomings. In this chapter I will focus on authors such as Foucault, Mahmood, and Rubin and their contributions respectively on power, agency within a restrictive system, and the plight of feminist works. This chapter will consist of a reimagining of these theories and ideas, and will be considered in a new frame of thinking about sex work advocacy organisations in Amsterdam and their previous invisibility within academic discourse.

It is my aim, through the use of empirical data, to cross this divide and examine how lived experiences, socio-political factors, and active organisations cohesively interact to construct spaces of symbolism and activism. It is my view that theory should work for the betterment of those it claims to examine, rather than adapt interpretations of lived experiences to suit theory. Theory, in its most basic form, is nothing more than a construction itself, susceptible to change and critique and it is our role as scholars to be very aware of this ever-changing relationship.

CHAPTER TWO:

Methodological Considerations and Definition of Terms

2.1: Introduction.

Underpinning any social research is a solid foundation built upon sound methodologies, research questions enquiring into the nature of things, and functioning as a model from which to mould theory and build solid directions for any future research. As social research is not restricted to the confines of academic institutions, it is imperative for any research to actively contribute to a richer understanding of human nature, its socially constructed realities, the mechanisms which drive cultural embodiment and how resultant data may lead to a betterment of the human condition through the promotion of equality, fairness, and non-discriminatory practices, with the rejection of essentialist and marginalising practices. As the first step in attempting to fulfil such goals, this chapter will discuss the methodological composition of the research, leading to a discussion on the importance of informant centred research methods as central to a valid and relevant study of ethnographic and other sociocultural contexts. I briefly discuss my positionality and reflexivity as both a researcher and a feminist and how this may impact my approach to research as well as my interpretation of observed event and interviews. I close this chapter with a clarification of relevant terms, definitions, and associated problems assigned with those definitions.

2.2: Methodology, Reflexivity, and Preliminary Considerations.

2.2.1: Contextualised Positionality and Links to Power and Change.

The foundation for this research was built upon empirical research and thick descriptions of events, observations, and interviews conducted in the field during March and April 2015. I conducted several weeks of fieldwork at the Prostitution Information Centre in Amsterdam, an activist organisation vying for the recognition of sex work as a legitimate form of labour and the implementation of accompanying rights. Owned and managed by Mariska Majoor, PIC operates as a public café in the Red Light District, making access relatively

unproblematic. Mariska was open to my research proposal and granted me permission to interview her, to quote from the interviews, spend time in the store and observe the daily routine, as well as providing me with information regarding various projects she is involved in.

In addition to the information I would be provided with by Mariska and my own observations, I had hoped to conduct interviews with women who work as sex workers as it would have provided me with an in-depth and personal narrative regarding their experiences⁷ and interactions with local power structures. Not only is an interview methodology invaluable as a qualitative source of information, but it also complies with the notion of (feminist) standpoint theory⁸ (Bracke & De la Bellacassa 2007) and anthropological interpretivism (Geertz 1973; Martin 1993) by situating those marginalised by society at the centre of importance in knowledge production and increasing the possibility of equal representation. Individuals affected by the socio-political movements within The Red Light District are often left out of important debates taking place in political spaces denied them and where they may be seen as secondary considerations within political debates, with the infrastructure and political stability of the city being seen as the primary consideration. In this vein, feminist standpoint theory is a valuable tool in analysing oppression, as its basic tenet involves:

“The recognition of women as knowing subjects, and their neglected voices and experiences as resources of knowledge, can be considered as feminism’s beating heart” (Bracke & De la Bellacassa 2007: 43).

The authors discuss three elements present in the construction of such a standpoint theory, notably the presence of oppression as crucial to formulating a theory and practice of resistance, positioned as a production of knowledge, and vital reinterpretations of subjective and oppressive masteries. Sex workers are misrepresented on two levels as peripheral subjects: both as women and as sex workers. These levels of misrepresentation are both the result of constantly shifting (yet unequal) systems of power (Foucault 1978) and the continuously changing relationship between those in power, and those subject to that power.

⁷ This specific method served dual purposes: firstly, the emphasis on individual experiences as central to new feminism is located directly in discourses challenging the predominantly 2nd wave notion of a collective ‘woman’ identity as superior to individualistic encounters. Secondly, and while maintaining an emphasis on individual experiences, I had hoped to identify those shared elements and occurrences that many sex workers do experience. This strengthens the resolve to not lose sight of important issues in women’s empowerment internationally while simultaneously upholding and validating distinctive experiences and lived realities.

⁸ It is important to note that feminist standpoint theory and interpretivism originate from different schools and encompass different contextual and theoretical considerations, but may be seen as a complementary use of interdisciplinary methodologies. I discuss both concepts in further details throughout this thesis.

The use of marginalisation on multiple levels impedes, but does not completely foreclose, the ability of sex workers to escape ideological confinement and redefine ideological boundaries and the consequential embodiment of redefined identities. Utilising the centre and periphery metaphor as an application for this specific spatial context, I was able to locate those groups situated at the centre (those who control the mechanisms of power) as opposed to those at the periphery who are partially dependent on the actions on those in the centre for their livelihoods, their access to resources, and their ability to navigate these processes. While this metaphor finds its footing in Marxist analyses and is by no means free from critique, it does establish a starting position from which to locate the relevant actors on the field and to begin the process of dismantling such a rigid metaphor of power relationships and to lay bare the semiotics of sociocultural signification (Geertz 1973: 9).

To accomplish this, it is important to acknowledge the tense relationship between us as scholars, the theoretical base we work from, and the ever-present fallacies of theoretical knowledge and claims to truth. Appadurai (1986: 357) in his article *Theory in Anthropology: Center and Periphery*, calls into question the tendency for social scientists⁹ to use “gatekeeping concepts” to represent certain spaces and contexts as wholes, therefore limiting the discussion into other avenues of thought by defining the “... quintessential and dominating questions of interest in the region”. Geertz (1973: 3-4) argues for much the same sentiment when he says that simply because certain concepts and theories impact intellectual endeavours to such an extent that it is believed that such a theory can be applied to almost any problematic situation, thus perpetuating universalism, it must be remembered that such a usefulness is limited and must be considered as open to change, and even rejection, in the face of new theorisations¹⁰: “it becomes, if it was, in truth, a seminal idea in the first place, a permanent and enduring part of our intellectual armory. But it no longer has the grandiose, all-promising scope, the infinite versatility of apparent application, it once had”.

This crucial turning point in social research is echoed in Gayle Rubin’s seminal article *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality* (1984), in which she lays the groundwork for a new theory of sex. Rubin’s focus being primarily on the evolution of sexual theory and dominant discourses, she aims for a critique of existing theories by

⁹ Appadurai specifically mentions social scientist, but I wish to broaden this term to include all those based in academia and other forms of social and theoretical research.

¹⁰ Indeed, the very foundation of the social sciences/humanities was built upon the recognition that the positivist methodologies of the natural sciences cannot be applied to the interpretive nature of the social sciences/humanities. It seems as though Appadurai correctly highlights the tendency to forget this essential criterion.

meticulously setting apart its flaws and disastrous consequences for society and the struggle for full equality. She argues the following regarding flawed theories on sex:

“These assumptions are so pervasive in Western culture that they are rarely questioned. Thus, they tend to reappear in different political contexts, acquiring new rhetorical expressions but reproducing fundamental axioms” (Rubin 1984: 149).

Thus we may, with confidence, ascertain a powerful and responsive link between the works of critical scholars across multiple disciplines. Such a shared sentiment must be taken as a call for immediate attention to crippled discourses dictating social thought.

Appadurai’s and Geertz’s discussion may pertain to anthropological discourse, but by no means should it be restricted to one intellectual discipline, thus it is possible to apply his critique to feminist studies¹¹ and the work produced on the Red Light District. Furthermore, Appadurai argues that this adherence to notable and relatively fixed theoretical frameworks leave little room for the inclusion of theoretically and analytically different discourses which may affect a change in hegemonic intellectual pursuits. Should such an intrusion of alternative theories occur, an understanding of the power of such theories is often not properly understood or is rejected for its counterarguments against the status quo. Appadurai lists two negative consequences of such an exclusionary practice:

“One is that the discussion of the theoretical tends (surreptitiously) to take on a restrictive local cast, while on the other hand the study of other issues in the place in question is retarded, and thus the over-all nature of the anthropological interpretation of the particular society runs the risk of serious distortion” (Appadurai 1986: 358).

It is not difficult to grasp the existing pitfalls of feminist theory in spaces where the belief exists that a certain ideology or ontology should reign as the normative stance regarding structures and behaviour (Rubin 1984, 1992). In the Red Light District, discourses of an abolitionist stance have dominated the dialogue concerning production of new knowledges and their resultant ability to act as tools of resistance, and to renew old debates. Much like Appadurai advocates a rethinking of the position of the researcher in this troubled static position and the researcher’s impact on these knowledges, we as feminist theorists need to be

¹¹ Lila Abu-Lughod’s *Writing Against Culture* (1991) is a seminal text in exploring the relationship between feminism and anthropology. Henrietta L Moore’s book *Feminism and Anthropology* (1988) serves as an exploration of feminist critique in anthropology and the dualistic relationship between the two disciplines to lead to a critical feminist anthropology.

critically aware of our own positions in the centre¹² and how those positions impact the ones on the periphery. Our interest in how meanings are (re)produced within a specific sociocultural context must be at the centre of our positions as researchers, including a critical understanding of how our identity as feminist researchers may impact the interpretation of such produced meanings. We must occupy a reflexive space wherein we recognise that even the interview setting is a constructed space designed for information extraction. Beyond the incorporation of the meanings of the research site, our own influence must be construed as part of a power dynamic.

Feminist theorists aligned with the oppression paradigm submit to a constructed notion of societal hierarchy and order in which women become those at the margins of a gendered society with men at the centre (MacKinnon 2005, 2011; Bindel 2015; Rubin 1984). This claim cannot be disregarded as false, but it should not prevent or stunt the formulation of new discourses which may counter long-held beliefs regarding the rigidity of structures. New theorisations should be provided the opportunity to explore acts of agency within dominating cultures in order to bring about a process of revolutionising these exact oppressive structures to one day act as a catalyst for the complete restructuring of what we currently see and experience as normative¹³. As researchers, our reflexivity becomes integral to this endeavour and it is this position that motivated my fieldwork experiences and observation. By being an aware *observer* of these dominating structures, I can, through my fieldwork, become a *participant* in this new theorisation movement¹⁴. My fieldwork acted as both the embodiment of, and the motivation for the repositioning of peripheral subjects in the centre to produce new knowledges and interpret symbolisms. It remains my aim to locate new theorisations within the abundant wealth of data in empirical data using methodological tools to analyse complex structures that arise. Reflexivity as a researcher is an important consideration in developing such an approach as I, as a researcher, am never fully separated from my background and its influences in the construction of the self.

Taking the above into account, my access to empirical information could be better understood and contextualised. Unfortunately, I was unable to interview some women as Mariska believed it to be unfair to the women to be, once again, exposed to the questions of

¹² Most notable that of white, Western scholars, but also the status of academic privilege we occupy.

¹³ See Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005).

¹⁴ This position of participant is not without concerns. While I may never occupy the position of participant as a sex worker, thus rendering me incapable of internalising those experiences, my role as a participant ally should be one of support and complementary activism.

researchers¹⁵. This resulted in a number of one-on-one interviews with Mariska herself, and as the owner of PIC and a board member of PROUD, this included prolonged periods of time doing observational exercises in PIC. While I cannot presume to have elicited the ultimate truth regarding the Red Light District from merely these interviews, I can argue that even one singular voice, a voice which is strengthened by not only its position of power and authority within the Red Light District, but also in the political and activist platforms, serves as enough of an urging to re-examine the current state of affairs and discourse. Mariska, as a privileged insider, should be regarded as an individual with the power to elicit change and bring about meaningful dialogue between sex workers, the media, and the City Council. This navigation process within a system of power which represses sexuality and advocates silence on the topic is Foucault's words becoming reality:

“We are informed that if repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an interruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required” (Foucault 1978: 5).

Foucault's work on power relationships, notably in relation to sexuality, heavily influences the manner in which Mariska may be situated as an authoritative figure in the District. If the City Council acts as the primary author of dominant power relationships, Mariska, and by affiliation, PIC and PROUD, may be seen as secondary involved proponents in establishing power norms. Such a secondary position, defined only as such in relation to the dominant City Council, possesses the potential to alter the current state to lead to a more inclusive and equal status. Applicable to every aspect of the socio-political context, its importance in matters relating to sexuality is of special import. Such an analysis lends itself to what Foucault believes to be the true meaning of power:

“... power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault 1978: 93).

¹⁵ Along with myself, a number of researchers and students from various universities were involved in projects pertaining to the Red Light District. It is important to acknowledge that in a sense, Mariska also acted as a gatekeeper. While not strictly in the sense of gatekeeping concepts as described by Appadurai, Mariska does act as a protector of women who may be viewed by researchers as mere tools of exploration and analysis. In addition, my restricted access to one interviewee is acknowledged as a potential pitfall in constructing my argument, as such, I have attempted to steer away from individual debates on the formation of the subject and the object, rather focusing on the collective narrative of PIC and PROUD as activist organisations redefining existing boundaries and regulations.

Foucault will lead my discussion in Chapter Five, accompanied by a discussion on factors which are present in the relationship between activists and the City Council of Amsterdam and the steps needed to break constrictive bounds that are being taken by PIC and PROUD in their capacity as voices and instruments to subvert the ruling power system.

2.2.2: Setting the Scene for Analysis.

Because of its location, function, and its secondary role as a café, I was able to observe the daily interactions of PIC and its clients. In addition to this, PIC also operates as the offices for PROUD. The café is small, with a scattering of tables and with a colour scheme comprising of various shades of red, an ode to the traditional red light associated with prostitution. PIC functions as a café, with Mariska herself preparing the food. The walls are adorned with glass cases full of information relating to the Red Light district and prostitution in the Netherlands. One can find pictures, photos, historical notes, and general information covering the walls. Mariska also sells various books related to the industry and this contributes to her livelihood. She also has a display case full of books available for customers to read, both in Dutch and English. Mariska's position within the Red Light District is strengthened by the fact that she herself is a former prostitute, having worked in the industry for eight years, equipping her with a privileged position of knowledge.

At Mariska's request I did not attend more private meetings as it was considered beyond what she could consciously offer without risking divulging certain anonymities, and discussions with politicians etc. which are not yet suitable to be broadcast. My interviews with Mariska took on a very informal atmosphere, but with semi-structured questions. The reason for this was twofold; firstly, as my knowledge pertaining to PIC and the larger contextual space was still minimal and superficially informed by various theoretical frameworks, I opted to create a space where the conversation could flow freely into various topics, especially those that Mariska herself brought up and found important. Secondly, this method allowed me to slowly build a referential context from which I could articulate more clearly defined questions, and ultimately, new and comprehensive ways of thinking and conducting research. The experience of working with Mariska in a space enveloped in sex work politics was an illuminating and wonderful experience as a researcher. Despite existing research interests in this field, my exposure had been hitherto limited. Entering into such a space, and being

allowed to become part of the conversation, with my input valued and discussed, was an experience crucial to developing a conscientious approach to conducting social research.

2.3: Terminology and Associated Meanings.

This section will be a summary of certain concepts used in this research and their often dual meanings. Acknowledging the fluidity of terms and constructs, and their reliance on theoretical schools, I work towards definitions which relay both past usage, as well as indicating current variability in meanings. I draw from established academic sources, whilst taking into account the manner in which Mariska, PIC and PROUD use various terms, and their subsequent differences.

2.3.1: Sex Work(er):

Sex work may refer to those forms of labour involving sexual activities in a commercial context, usually in exchange for monetary compensation, including, but not limited to; pornography, strip dancing, phone sex, prostitution in any form, and escort services, but can also include those people involved in some aspect of selling sexuality, from film producers to sex store owners and employees. This is also the definition Mariska ascribes to. Sex workers can either be classified as legal or illegal workers depending on the respective country's legislation¹⁶. Mariska prefers to use the term sex worker as an inclusive concept, rather than merely speaking about a prostitute, which comprises but one part of the sex industry in the Red Light District. I will be using the term sex worker throughout my work as an inclusive term in the same manner Mariska does and will refer to specific forms of sex work when needed for clarification.

Turning to academic sources, the definition becomes somewhat more complicated as both abolitionist and liberal groups endow the word with different meanings. However, the majority of scholars use the term sex worker (Cho, Dreher, & Neumayer 2012; Bernstein

¹⁶ Sex workers working legally in the Netherlands may be classified in two manners: as a self-employed person, or a ZZP'er (Zelfstandige Zonder Personeel/Independent Without Personnel), who works in a window, independent escort, or at home, or as someone who is not self-employed and works, for example, in a sex club or for an escort service.

2010; Weitzer 2009, 2010; Phipps 2015), but it has been met with both acceptance and scepticism. The shift from prostitute to sex worker is an important one, and can signal two distinct reactions.

‘Sex worker’ is often met with some resistance by radical feminism as it implies a form of acceptability of the sex industry and sexual commerce as a legitimate form of labour (MacKinnon 2011; Bindel 2015; Overall 1992). By using the term, the practice of being a sex worker becomes legitimised and moves away from a strictly controlled definition of submission and violence under patriarchy. Objections to the term often rely on the main argument that as a sex worker, a woman’s body is a resource to be used by others, with no benefit to her, and that the term furthers a false notion of choice and free will and denies the links between sex work and human trafficking. Such an attitude is seen to devalue the experiences of women who were the victims of trafficking. Rachel Moran, who identifies as a sex trade survivor, spoke at the 2014 Feminism in London Conference and advocated for the complete abolition of the sex industry, calling for the rejection of the term sex worker and urging for a recognition of all women in the sex industry as victims (Feminism in London 2014).

Secondly, groups aligned with the liberal paradigm are more readily open to accept the term as it has the potential to move away from stigmatised connotations and symbolisms and instead points towards an inclusive and representative understanding of selling sexual services for monetary compensation. It rejects the label of these women as victims, but does not deny the existence of structural oppression within the industry, nor the very real instances of human trafficking and exploitation (Gibly 2012; Overall 1992; Peterson-Iyer 1998; Spapens & Rijken 2015). Considering both views, I will continue using the term sex worker as an inclusive term to refer to everyone active in the sex industry. My use of the term – nor Mariska’s and the other women of Red Light – does not negate the experiences of women who have different experiences, nor is it a conscious move towards ignorance and a call to silence oppressed voices. It is a conscious effort to bring to the fore the voices and opinions of those women (and men) in the sex industry who *do* identify as sex workers (in any form) and who do not internalise the notion of ‘victim’. In addition, it also needs to serve as a gateway for those who are being exploited to make their stories heard and affect change and free them from exploitative practices and institutions. Advocating the rights of sex workers remains a central tenet of liberation activists and should not be seen as a direct contradiction and denial of other lived realities.

2.3.2: Prostitute:

Peterson-Iyer defines prostitution and prostitute as follows:

“‘Prostitution’ typically refers to a wide variety of sex-for-payment arrangements. ‘Prostitutes’ range from the stereotypical street prostitute, with or without a pimp, to the upscale ‘call girl’ who operates out of her home or through an escort service” (Peterson-Iyer 1998: 20-21).

This definition defines prostitute in its most basic form, and highlights an important issue. The term should refer to a profession, to a job that is performed and while a woman may identify as a prostitute, her innate character or moral standing cannot be defined by the job she does, nor should such labels be used as tool to further campaigns aimed at either exploiting women or be used by campaigns aimed at ‘saving’ prostitutes from their situations based on a term which has been manipulated in discourse. The majority of women working in the Red Light District may be defined as prostitutes, with the majority working behind windows. Beyond the physical definition of ‘prostitute’, ideological and moralistic definitions face much the same dilemma as that of ‘sex worker’: a person may be coerced into selling her body in service of male sexual entitlement, or can be a woman in possession of agency and choice who consciously chose to enter the sex industry¹⁷. Such definitions are often based on the political, moral, and ideological stance the definer identifies with.

The Coalition Against Trafficking Women¹⁸ (as cited in Weitzer 2007: 451) holds the belief that “all prostitution exploits women, regardless of women’s consent. Prostitution affects all women, justifies the sale of any woman, and reduces all women to sex”. In this definition, agency is devoid of meaning, rendering individual choice obsolete in the face of radical feminist arguments and patriarchal domination. Furthermore, Laura Leder (as cited in Weitzer 2007: 451), and other groups such as Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE), Stop Porn Culture, and the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) (Weitzer 2012: 1339) call the entire institution of sex work (including prostitution) a human rights abuse, essentialising experiences and troubling the ability for terms to be re-evaluated and redefined using frameworks other than radical feminism.

On the contrary, Rubin (1984), one of the foremost pro-sex feminists in the 1970s and 1980s during the Sex Wars, maintains a distinction between sex worker and prostitute. Her

¹⁷ It is important to grasp the fact that the embodiment of agency is substantially different from resisting oppression. This will be further discussed throughout the work.

¹⁸ Hereafter referred to as CATW.

distinction was heavily influenced (or may have even precluded) by her work on sex laws, trafficking, and socially sanctioned control and censorship of sexualities.

In light of this, I use the term prostitute to refer to those women within the Red Light District who sell sexual intercourse or any other form of sexual activity for monetary compensation. In addition, I use the term sexual commerce to describe women who engage in prostitution without any form of coercion while rejecting the term sexual exploitation to define all women in the sex industry, as is the case with supporters of the oppression paradigm. To counter the power and influence of abolitionist theorists, terms need to be actively appropriated by those most affected by this discourse and need to be redefined on the terms of sex workers themselves.

2.3.3: Human Trafficking:

It may be agreed upon that human trafficking, as an act of abuse and a continued process of a gross violation of human rights, is a matter that requires immediate redress from the international community and law enforcement. However, it is the multiple factions of human trafficking, and most importantly, the interpretation of actions viewed as trafficking that needs consideration here. The methodological and analytical tools used to define human trafficking and its manifestations are problematic as various meanings are ascribed to the concept based on different countries' legal systems, the involvement of various organisations working in the socio-economic development sector, the influence of academic sources, and lastly, the worrisome tendency to use conglomerate concepts to describe a complex system of meanings.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (UNODC 2009: 6) identifies problems with the term 'human trafficking' as "The term *trafficking in persons* can be misleading: it places emphasis on the transaction aspects of a crime that is more accurately described as enslavement". In the updated 2014 UNODC report, this is expanded to include three crucial elements in identifying a possible trafficking case: the act, the means, and the purpose (UNODC 2014: 15). Both these considerations are broad enough to allow single countries to adapt their local legislation to their own needs and both editions attempt to include a wide variation of this enslavement idea based on research done in 155 countries across the world. In addition, human trafficking also encompasses forced labour, forced marriage, domestic servitude, organ removal, the sex trade, warfare, and

the exploitation of children in begging (UNODC 2009: 6), with each faction requiring catered laws and prohibitive measures. While this report recognises the lack of a standardised international model to adequately deal with human trafficking in its many forms, the Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children, in her report (2013) defines human trafficking in closer relation to sexual exploitation and the sex trade but also recognises that human trafficking can take multiple forms and can occur anywhere. This is corroborated by Spapens & Rijken (2015: 160) who opt for a limited definition of human trafficking: “involuntary prostitution of adults or the prostitution of minors (persons below 18 years)”. As a result, the Rapporteur’s report identifies the majority of victims of human trafficking as prostitutes and advocates a national registry of prostitutes¹⁹ and investigates the need for better policies in regard to the prostitution sector. Ascribing to such a limited definition, U.S. law uses the term “sex trafficking” to define the “recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” (Weitzer 2012: 1337). This definition is an act-specific approach to delineate the needed boundaries and limitations of sex industry, but is also able to construct target specific approaches to prosecute and end sex trafficking.

In accordance with the sex industry as the primary focus of this research, I recognise the existence of human trafficking as a transgression of human rights, while acknowledging the problems associated with applying such a term in localised contexts. Taking into regard the subsection pertaining to sex trafficking as but one manifestation of human trafficking, I refer to the exploitation of women who were forcibly coerced into the sex industry, not simply in the capacity of prostitute, as human trafficking to act as an inclusive theorisation and approach to the issue. I do this primarily to trouble the concept of ‘sex trafficking’: such a term presents a simplistic and limited understanding of trafficking, as it pertains purely to the exploitation of bodies for sexual commerce, while attention should rather be paid to the connected nature of sex trafficking and forced labour trafficking. Forced labour trafficking should not exclude sex work, as it may also be construed as a form of labour. Acknowledging the existence of various forms of trafficking should not preclude discussions on the interconnected nature of such manifestations and as a result, impede measures to counteract and fight human trafficking.

¹⁹ To date, this recommendation has not been implemented.

CHAPTER THREE:

Theoretical and Analytical Background.

3.1: Introduction.

The geographical, socio-cultural, and political specificities of Amsterdam's Red Light District situates any research and theoretical discourses within a contextualised account of feminist debates and historical narratives. This chapter aims to fulfil two goals: first, to give a condensed overview of such a feminist history as influential in constructing and leading any form of analysis based in the Red Light District; including the US Sex Wars, which garnered much attention in the 1970s and 1980s for its polarising and still-felt aftermath in situating feminist ideologies pertaining to, perhaps most crucially, issues of sexuality as conflicted in their goals. Secondly, through the use of such a history, this chapter aims to link theories originating in such wars to current works of not only a feminist nature, but works that are influential in assisting in an intersectional and dense descriptive and analytical discussion on power, agency, control, the state, and ultimately, the ability of individual self-assessment and validation within a collective movement of equality and liberation.

Central to this chapter is a discussion on 2nd wave and 3rd wave feminism, and despite concerns related to the use of the term wave (Van der Tuin 2007: 10; Phipps 2015²⁰), a short but concise history needs to be present in order to adequately orient my discussion on the Red Light District. I thus start with a brief contextual overview of the interwoven nature of feminist waves and resultant ideological schools of thought, from where I will elaborate on each school's narratives regarding sex work and the institutional structures of oppression and liberation identified in such narratives. Furthermore, I enlist the help of authors whose work, while not specifically geared towards the sex industry, or even feminism, aids in developing a new way in which we talk and theorise about the sex industry. This chapter serves as the foundation for the construction of my analysis in Chapter Five, in association with works of a poststructuralist turn, by authors such as Saba Mahmood, Michel Foucault, and Gayle Rubin.

²⁰ Both Phipps (2015) and Van der Tuin (2007) expresses discomfort with the term 'wave', arguing that the term is generationally delimited, and places strict boundaries on a movement which instead, should be represented by different types of feminism, suggestive of a fluid and slightly overlapping ideological commonality, breaking down dualist methodologies. In this thesis, I will continue to make use of the term 'wave', but will attempt to bridge the schism between them.

To close, I take a critical look at the links between human trafficking and sex work, surmised from both feminist perspectives, and reports originating from spaces such as the UN and Dutch governmental departments, ending this literature review with a short summary of available literature on sex worker's organisations globally, and highlighting the gaps in the validity and helpfulness of such accounts.

3.2: Waves and Schools: Radical Thought and Liberal Counters.

The US Sex Wars, known for its polarising effect between what Rubin (1984) calls the sex-positivist and the anti-pornography feminists, lead to discontent among feminists in the 1970s and 1980s, most notably pertaining to theories of sex and sexuality. According to Van der Tuin (2007) and Krølokke & Sørensen (2006), 2nd wave feminists broke away from their 1st wave counterparts by arguing against the rigid position of the male as the status quo and advocating the complex entity that is the feminine. Intertwined with other movements highlighting the struggles of other minority and marginalised groups, 2nd wave feminism set out to stress the importance of situating the personal as political and locating women as objects of oppression under patriarchy. Krølokke & Sørensen provide a concise summary of 2nd wave politics:

“Radical second-wave feminism was theoretically based on a combination of neo-Marxism and psychoanalysis... They claimed that patriarchy is inherent to bourgeois society and that sexual difference is more fundamental than class and race differences. They even claimed that women – due to their primary social attachment to the family and reproduction – constitute a class and economy of their own, based on the unpaid work in the home, the productivity of motherhood, and their function as a workforce reserve... At the core of this new movement was another significant book, *Sexual Politics*, by Kate Millet (1969), in which she insisted on women's right to their own bodies and a sexuality of their 'own'- a sexuality that is disconnected from the obligations of marriage and motherhood... Thus, in the early phase, radical second-wave feminisms were characterized by a claim for sisterhood and solidarity, despite differences among women and a simultaneous investment in the slogans 'Woman's struggle is class struggle' and 'The personal is political,' directing the feminist agenda to attempt to combine social, sexual, and personal struggles and to see them as inextricably linked” (Krølokke & Sørensen 2006: 9-10).

2nd Wave feminism thus embodied a new rationalisation and movement geared towards the upsetting of oppressive structures of the time through the use of visible and boldly challenging shows of protest. But, even within 2nd wave feminism, different factions split

from the original movement to pursue what they believed to be the true and most worthy issues pertaining to sexism within institutional structures; most notably the critical distinction between sex and gender and its constructivist nature. Krølokke & Sørensen (2006: 14) mention two such factions as important developments in feminist theory: identity politics and difference feminism. The authors delve into the various dilemmas associated with these factions (and in return critique 2nd wave feminism), citing Western universalism, hegemonic understandings of social constructs, and at times, a manipulation of the sex-gender binary as prominent issues undermining said factions²¹. However, the position of difference feminism, and especially its attribution of standpoint theory will serve as a valuable insight into my own research. I move away from the strict way of thinking espoused by difference feminisms and aim to use standpoint theory as a school of thought helpful in understanding epistemological and ontological formations and theories developed by other scholars, such as Appadurai and Geertz (briefly discussed in Chapter Two) in their discourses on personal narratives, interpretivism, and knowledge production.

In contrast, 3rd wave feminism emerged as a reactionary movement against what they saw as an essentialist movement, aimed at upholding binary ways of thinking. Krølokke & Sørensen (2006); Snyder (2008), and Orr (1997) all define 3rd wave feminism as more fluid, focused on individual experiences and interpretations, and as an empowered movement – what Krølokke & Sørensen call “third wave feminists are motivated by the need to develop a feminist theory and politics that honor contradictory experiences and deconstruct categorical thinking” (2006: 16). This is not necessarily a new way of thinking - the issue of the Self and the Other; Us and Them; individual and collective has been debated for decades by scholars across multiple disciplines and is perhaps one of the single most contested, yet important, intellectual debates we can engage in. Adhering to such a binary is problematic, and 3rd wave feminism aims to practice inclusion in all their politics, denouncing the idea of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ feminists, opting instead for a layered meaning in the embracing of the term feminism. In contrast to 2nd wave feminism, 3rd wave feminism has taken into its fold what was once considered oppressive and sexist imagery, symbolisms, actions, and categories, and re-appropriated these contentious entities and themes as symbols for empowerment and a quest to embrace what it means to be ‘feminine’. This means to be intricately involved in new dimensions of power, and thus turning to intersectional theories as crucial to its endeavours.

²¹ I do not delve deeper into these issues as this thesis attempts to merely provide a short history of 2nd wave and 3rd wave feminism in order to support the arguments laid out further in this chapter and in the following chapters.

Snyder (2008) provides us with three distinct differences between 2nd and 3rd wave feminism, highlighted as follows:

“First, in response to the collapse of the category of ‘women’, the third wave foregrounds personal narratives that illustrate an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism. Second, as a consequence of the rise of postmodernism, third-wavers embrace multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification. Finally, in response to the divisiveness of the sex wars, third-wave feminism emphasizes an inclusive and nonjudgmental approach that refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political. In other words, third-wave feminism rejects grand narratives for a feminism that operates as a hermeneutics of critique within a wide array of discursive locations, and replaces attempts at unity with a dynamic and welcoming politics of coalition” (Snyder 2008: 175-176).

3rd Wave feminism is not without its critiques and these will be fully explored in the rest of this literature review as I move to the discussion on sex work, influenced by both waves, and throughout the rest of thesis, most prominently in Chapter Five where I tend to a critical discussion and analysis of both my fieldwork and theory.

3.2.1: Blurred Lines and Abolitionist Stances.

Supporting such views on the sex industry is Catharine MacKinnon (1991, 2005, 2011) whose work includes a discussion on the existent link between prostitution and human trafficking and her belief that prostitution is indistinguishable from sexual exploitation and trafficking. MacKinnon (1991: 1284) accurately describes the position and power of (white) male privilege²² when she says: “An account of sex inequality under the law in the United States must begin with what white men have done and not done because they have created the problem and benefitted from it, controlled access to addressing it, and stacked the deck against its solution”. This quote, while stating truth, is limited in its discussion by reducing gender equality concerns to one mechanism of control, leaving a gap that needs to be filled by intersectional discussions on race, class, and hierarchies with female oriented gender constructs. To aid in contextualising a backdrop for this critique, I refer to another of MacKinnon’s vital assertions:

“That women have voluntarily engaged law at all is a triumph of determination over experience. It has not been an act of faith. Determined to leave a trace, to make sex equality ordinary, to live under social conditions that reflect and reinforce their aspirations rather than suppress or extinguish them, to live in

²² Women’s position and identity were thus formulated in response – and in accordance – to the male status quo.

respect and safety rather than indignity and terror, to redefine social standards in the image of their values, to participate fully in their own times, to save their own lives and those of generations to come, women have long demanded legal change as one vehicle for social change” (MacKinnon 1991: 1285).

This assertion serves as the perfect example to showcase the plight of feminism, whether it be embodied by 2nd wave feminism, or 3rd wave feminism, and all its factions. Indeed, with the blossoming of what some are labelling the 4th wave, these ideals are provided a platform from which they may become tangible experiences of reality and affect positive social and political change by reaching out from restricted academic or localised political arenas, into the lives of women across the globe through not only the media, but also through the accountability to which politicians and academics are held by activist groups. While the quoted sentiment may stand central to the foundation of feminism, the terms under which the engagement of oppression takes place, the methods used to challenging heteronormativity, and the redefinition of unjust and discriminatory categories, must be scrutinised just as swiftly and critically as the structures it challenges. MacKinnon speaks of women, but which women does she mean? Who has taken to claim the responsibility of championing women’s rights? What are their positions of power and privilege? Does this position inadvertently favour one group of women while disadvantaging another? The imbalance of power distribution among women widens the inequalities already present and creates new categories of identity based on the ideals of those who claimed the voice of women. We see this exhibited in the case of the Red Light District, where unequal power relations dominate in a top-down manner to prescribe and control activities. Through the implementation of various action plans, which would in effect, have negative repercussions for sex workers, authority is enacted without the support of those directly affected by such measures. With limited discussions between the City Council and sex workers and respective unions, the decision-making process is disrupted by discourses informed by sources of information often at odds with what sex workers would describe as the normative structure of the Red Light District²³.

Furthermore, authors such as MacKinnon and Julie Bindel are revered as experts on the topic of sex work and human trafficking, but may not garner the same respect from sex workers themselves as they feel they are misrepresented by radical feminists in being labelled as victims of patriarchy and sexual exploitation. Restricted definitions, symbolic interpretations, and a rejection of individualistic subject formation make way for theories based on the

²³ Mariska emphasised multiple times the tendency of City Council to exclude sex workers from relevant discussions and decision-making processes.

collective identity of ‘prostitute’, aligned with victimhood and internalised misogyny characterised by statements such as:

“Adult is distinguished from child prostitution, indoor from outdoor, legal from illegal, voluntary from forced, and prostitution from trafficking... Outdoor prostitution can be rough; indoor prostitution less so. Illegal prostitution has problems that legal prostitution solves. Forced prostitution is bad; voluntary prostitution can be not-so-bad. Trafficking is really, really bad. Prostitution – if, say, voluntary, indoor, legal, adult – can be tolerable life for some people. Measured against known facts of the sex trade, these purported distinctions emerge as largely illusory, occupying instead points of emphasis on common continua with convergence and overlap among the dimensions. These moral distinctions are revealed as ideological, with consequences for law, policy, and culture that are real” (MacKinnon 2005: 272).

MacKinnon then turns to a defence of the term ‘prostitute’ and ‘prostitution’, which she defines as follows:

“Although the full scope and prevalence of prostitution’s arrangements, with all its varieties of transactional sex, is not known, use of this term reflects an evaluation of considerable information on the sex industry, not an *a priori* attribution of victim status. Prostitution here is observed to be a product of a lack of choice, the resort of those with the fewest choices, or none at all when all else fails. The coercion behind it, physical and otherwise, produces an economic sector of sexual abuse, the lion’s share of the profits of which goes to others. In these transactions, the money coerces the sex rather than guaranteeing consent to it, making prostitution a practice of serial rape. In this analysis, there is, and can be, nothing equal about it. Prostituted people pay for paid sex” (MacKinnon 2005: 274).

The above statement by MacKinnon contains several problems. Her inference that the term is inclusive in meaning is directly contrasted by her assertion that the term is defined as a lack of choice, coercion, and abuse. Such a contradiction also belies her belief that it does not necessarily ascribe victimhood to women. Paradoxical sentiments such as these cannot be seen as reliable pillars of theory or catalysts for change and liberation. A further problem is the declaration that prostitution is a practice of rape, contributing to the campaign of prostitution as equal to human trafficking. In my own fieldwork, PIC and PROUD actively fought against stigmas claiming sex workers are the victims of rape by protesting against attributes ascribed to them by those who do not experience what they do on a daily basis. MacKinnon substitutes money for consent, erasing any possibility of sex workers being able to deny clients once money is involved²⁴. Once again, this is a gross miscalculation and feeds into the cycle of oppression and victimhood and strengthens the use of ‘prostituted people’,

²⁴ This has been proven false by numerous studies, and Mariska herself stressed the importance of acknowledging that sex workers are able to say no to a prospective client.

rather than 'prostitute' or 'sex worker'. Radical feminism seeks to challenge patriarchal oppression, yet falls into the trap of objectification by allocating identities and labels where they are incompatible with the contextual space. Finally, MacKinnon's language is problematic. Jeffreys (as cited in Weitzer 2010: 17) argues that politically, language is an important influencing factor in the shaping of discourse, and by using the term *prostituted women* rather than *prostitutes*, advocates aim to display the supposed lack of agency these women possess in order to portray them as objects bought and sold, leading to a resurgence of victimisation. The politicised nature of language can act as a strong and positive force in destigmatising sex work, but may also, as in this instance, further obstruct such change by restricting definitions and discourse as the domain of abolitionist practices.

A disconcerting trend in MacKinnon's article is the seeming ease in which she equates sex workers and victims of sex trafficking without acknowledgement for varying practices. She declares all prostituted people as overwhelmingly poor and cites poverty as the sole motivation for entering prostitution. Once again, this is an erroneous statement. MacKinnon's radical ideological background predisposes her to apply essentialist tactics to strengthen her position, and by locating all sex workers within the same category, she not only erases the voices of oppositional groups who fight for recognition of agency, she also troubles actions aimed at tackling true cases of trafficking, exploitation, and abuse.

3.2.2: Agency and Activism: Contested Meanings.

Peterson-Iyer, in her article *Prostitution: A Feminist Ethical Analysis* (1998) discusses the binary liberal/contractarian and domination/subjection approach to think of prostitution by analysing both paradigms and their consequential categorisation and their ability to influence truths. While the article does indeed introduce us to a more thorough investigation into these approaches, it is a cause for concern when she states: "moreover, I believe that both positions need to play a role in any practical strategy toward prostitution that feminists ultimately embrace" (Peterson-Iyers 1998: 20). My main concern lies with her conviction in the ultimate *feminist* truth regarding prostitution and sex work and her subtle nods towards this truth throughout the article. This is in contrast to one of her main concluding points where she argues for feminists to more clearly listen to those voices of the women in the sex industry and to aid in the social deconstruction of the sex industry as opposed to being the sole

authority on the matter. The article is troubled by the author's contradictory statements and her ultimate adherence to the feminist truth of prostitution – a singular truth within a myriad of meanings. As socially conscious scholars, we should recognise any proclamation of truth as one of many, and not as being the sole definitive truth of a reality. This being said, Peterson-Iyer does, through her position, offer the opportunity to deconstruct her theoretical backing and grounded position to lead towards a discussion where, although we may never truly reach answers, we may reach a plateau for alternate and equally valid stances. Her discussion on the moral assessment of prostitution is especially relevant to my work and links to my discussion on the shared moralistic nature of both approaches.

Peterson-Iyer's discussion on defining prostitution as a foundation of her argument is necessary to deconstruct in order to allow for a more nuanced, and indeed, a more layered analysis of the sex industry. I argue that the author's use of prostitution as the sole defining term used to encompass a range of sexual services is flawed in its characterisation, its discourse, and its resulting reasoning. This definition is an inadequate term to fully describe and understand the complexities of the lived realities of those women in the sex industry, whether that means sex for money, pornography, strip dancing, and other forms of sex related services. It further serves to strengthen my initial comment on the author's adherence to a feminist truth by denying the validity of alternative terms – terms which are also used by those in the industry. It may be said that this denial acts as a catalyst for the erasure of voices and identities by blocking input by parties other than scholars aligned with the domination/subjection approach. In this case, I refer to my fieldwork with Mariska, who offered the following insight when asked what she thought about the terms prostitute and sex worker:

“I use sex worker when I talk about the people that work in the sex industry. But prostitution... sometimes I use it to make something clearer. I mean you can be a sex worker when you work in a peepshow or when you're a cam girl, but you're not a prostitute. The word prostitution is needed to make clear what type of sex work is being done. Sex for money, and thus window girls, they are prostitutes. The physical contact does make a difference. There are two types of sex work that can be performed. Alone, in a group, having sex on stage with your partner, or playing in a porno... or you can sell a physical sexual service to somebody. You're a sex worker, but you're a prostitute” (I: 2 - 2015).

It is clear from this one example that Peterson-Iyer's use of the term prostitute is problematic and needs to be scrutinised. For an alternative view, I turn to Overall (1992) who continues to explore the dilemmas mentioned by Peterson-Iyer, including that of choice, the role of a

socially constructed patriarchy, and most importantly, the fractures between feminists and sex workers, and between feminists themselves. Her work, rather than conforming to the strict binary as illustrated by Peterson-Iyer's work, muddles these strict and tense relationships and symbolisms by questioning their foundations and (future) value. In a statement from the Second World Whores' Congress in 1986 (as cited in Overall 1992: 707), it is argued:

“Due to feminist hesitation or refusal to accept prostitution as legitimate work and to accept prostitutes as working women, the majority of prostitutes have not identified as feminists; nonetheless, many prostitutes identify with feminists values such as independence, financial autonomy, sexual self-determination, personal strength, and female bonding”.

This idea of a shared moral sentiment, despite the absence of the feminist label, was echoed in my fieldwork when the demands of these women were listed, and signals a need for a consideration of post-structural analytics to understand the variation, yet underlying similarities within gender discourses – both academic and by those who experience the effects of the lack of such sentiments. Feminist groups advocating the abolishment of the sex industry would argue that these sentiments, while reminiscent of a feminist spirit, are ultimately constructed in, and serves to uphold, a patriarchal society of male domination, adhering to structural theories of societal hierarchies. By granting women the perception of agency and freedom, patriarchy strengthens its position of a ‘natural’ hierarchy – in this manner, patriarchal power realises its full embodiment by hiding a significant part of its agenda, in line with Foucault's notion of hidden power (1978: 86). This not a new argument, and while debated in a narrow conceptualisation of feminism and sex work, it does at some level resonate with my own fieldwork and research. It is often the case that despite contradicting debates surrounding the validity of doing sex work and the accompanying rights, both feminist groups from the oppression and liberation campaigns tend to share some basic stance regarding sex work as an institution.

Traditionally sex work has been done in service of the strengthening of the male sexual entitlement dogma, requiring the submission of the women in all capacities. It only requires an examination into human trafficking, the illegal sex trade, child prostitution, and other forms of sexual exploitation and abuse to acknowledge the fallacies and problems of sex work as an institution of domination. However, it would likewise be foolish to turn a blind eye to those women, groups, and collectives who have navigated this restrictive space in a manner conducive to a realisation of equal rights. Our focus should turn to the women who have chosen to enter the sex industry without any coercive forces and who, through the aid of

organisations such as PIC and PROUD, work towards a restructuring of the foundational ideas surrounding sex work. This is not an easy task as our feminist identity compels us to seek out and reject practices and policies potentially harmful to the welfare of women. This ideological difference is causative of a rift between feminists and sex workers and as Overall so aptly states:

“Thus some feminists come to despise the work that some other women do, and some sex workers come to resent the belief systems that some feminists hold. But despite this functional explanation, I wondered whether it is possible to respond more positively to the difference of opinion and, indeed, to find a way to reconcile the views on each side” (Overall 1992: 708).

Another point that has often been made is the comparison of sex work to other forms of women’s labour – labour which involves long hours, minimum wages, and also a denial of basic rights – and both forms’ ability to be criticised on a shared basis. Overall (1992: 716) argues that this shared criticism does not negate a moral criticism, but that we need to consider whether other forms of wage labour in capitalism are in some manner more acceptable or morally superior to sex work. This highlights two main components: first, the moralistic argument – which, based on either the liberation or oppression approach – can be made in conjunction with sexual politics, and second, a purely capitalist argument, based on notions of commodification, labour, economic strength, and opportunity²⁵. It is not difficult to see why the latter argument is insufficient to talk about sex work as it largely ignores sexual politics, patriarchal systems of oppression, and structural inequalities related to the exploitation of women’s bodies. Conversely, it would be insufficient to not consider economic arguments in conjunction with the larger sex work discourse – more importantly, the motivations for the choice to enter the industry. It becomes a question of whether or not it is possible to remove sex work from its stereotypical frame of exploitation to rather reconsider it as a legitimate avenue of income generation and agency.

Navigation of an overarching system of oppression and inequality can only be successful if we acknowledge both the power of such a system, but also the vulnerability of these structures to voices and actions from within, slowly changing and disrupting the strict regime of oppression to produce new discourses on sexuality and women’s agency. Crucial to the project is to disconnect exploitation and violence from the sex work institutional discourse. At its crux, sex work is the commodification of sex, an exchange between two people for monetary compensation. This notion is the one being fought for by PIC and PROUD – the

²⁵ For a more thorough discussion on this topic, see Zatz (2012).

right to be acknowledged as workers who do a job, not as the victims of sexist and violent interactions, reduced to bodies to use and exploit for the benefit of the male gaze and pleasure. It is the view of Mariska and PROUD that reducing the argument to such an essentialist stance is a process of dehumanisation of the women in the industry, in addition to the dehumanisation taking place by men as argued by radical feminists. This calls into the spotlight of what constitutes dehumanisation based on one's ideological and socio-political stance. We cannot legitimise dehumanisation based on our perceptions, resulting in another form of devaluation, and should this occur, a continued cycle of oppression and exploitation takes place.

3.3: Liberal Responses to Radical Interpretations.

3.3.1: Introduction.

Constructive counter-arguments against radical feminist thought consist of a clear, thorough deconstruction of the position of radical feminist arguments and a considered reasoning against the application, embodiment, and meaning of core terms and ideologies espoused by radical feminism. What follows is an examination of prominent differences between what is known as radical/abolitionist feminism and liberal feminism aligned with 3rd wave politics. The notion of empowerment occupies a prominent place in both feminist stances, but sees itself interpreted differently. This section will cover not only works by feminists aligned with the pro-sex movement, but will also include references to complementary works aimed at strengthening these arguments, cementing their place in the narratives of new feminism and replenishing outdated models.

3.3.2: Simplistic Models, Complex Analyses, and a Consideration of Theory and Agency.

I include this section as an example of works which, instead of redefining current static models of perception and understanding, rather fall back into a binary, structural understanding of pro-sex work or anti-sex-work. Such works are helpful in its provision of a

summarised review of the dominant paradigms dictating sex work research, but is inadequate to express the continuous evolution in discourses on sex work, as it presupposes an existing and relatively unchanging stance on sexuality. I start with Robert Weitzer, whose work has taken to critiquing radical feminism as a school which views any form of “paid sexual services and performances as inherently oppressive and exploitative” by a male dominated society (2010: 15). Weitzer situates himself in the liberal school, arguing for the decriminalisation of sex work internationally²⁶ and for the recognition of a third, more inclusive paradigm with which to undertake sex research. The third paradigm evolves out of his argument that the two existing paradigms, defined as the abolitionist/oppression and the liberation paradigm, are inadequate in portraying the complexities of ideological constructs and their consequences for future research, and give rise to “a newly resurgent mythology of prostitution” (Weitzer 2010: 15).

Weitzer’s description of the abolitionist/oppression paradigm reiterates much of what has already been discussed in the previous section, but he argues that radical feminism reduces the choice to enter the sex industry as a purely economic one, influenced by gender constructs. This may be seen as selective bias, as described by Appadurai in Chapter Two, which takes place by imposing theory onto contexts rather than allowing for contextual consideration to trouble theory. Abolitionist theorists maintain that the absence of violence does not negate the fact that sex work, especially prostitution, is a form of rape that occurs, and that there is no difference between voluntary prostitution and forced prostitution as the entire practice of prostitution forms part of a patriarchal system which survives by oppressing women. If all choices regarding the female body, by the owner of the body, is believed to have been made in response to some male stimulus, it develops into a problematic issue that ripples outward into other spheres of gendered life. Weitzer’s second paradigm espousing liberation is quite straightforward in its goals as it places emphasis on the agency and free will of women to choose to enter the sex industry, without any form of coercion or force:

“This paradigm holds that there is nothing inherent in sex work that would prevent it from being organized in terms of mutual gain to both parties – just as in other economic transactions” and that it also “... focuses on the ways in which sexual commerce qualifies as work, involves human agency, and may be potentially empowering for workers” (Weitzer 2009: 215).

²⁶ This position is admirable, but Weitzer has failed to confidently distinguish between types of feminist thought, causing an essentialist effect which cripples his argument instead of strengthening it. Weitzer inadvertently reaffirms those binaries he seeks to denounce.

However, Weitzer argues that this paradigm tends to ignore more negative experiences and consequences of engaging in sex work, including the increasing occurrences of human trafficking and abuse. Attempting to bridge the gap between the two paradigms, Weitzer (2007: 1338) identifies the third paradigm as:

“This *polymorphous paradigm* holds that there is a broad constellation of work arrangements, power relations, and personal experiences among participants in sexual commerce. Polymorphism is sensitive to complexities and to the structural conditions shaping the uneven distribution of workers’ agency and subordination. Victimization, exploitation, choice, job satisfaction, self-esteem, and other factors differ between types of sex work, geographical locations, and other structural conditions. Commercial sexual exchange and erotic entertainment are not homogeneous phenomena”.

Prostitution – and other forms of sex work – is a *social construct*, both in its definition and subsequent materialisation, and is thus subject to complexities of a multitude of debates, discourses and experiences, with no one singular definition and manifestation. As such, it must follow as the most logic next step that inclusion of organisations and groups such as PIC and PROUD in local and international conversations instead of favouring viewpoints set forth by abolitionist groups such as SAGE and CATW is the only way such complexities may be understood²⁷. Treating certain stances with partiality is inadequate in approaching the current dilemmas of human rights violation, denial of agency, and the appropriation of a sex worker’s identity by abolitionist groups for their own purposes.

One cannot speak for the many by assuming a power position informed by supposed academic and theoretical authority when the identities being spoken for do not form part of one’s own existence. Acknowledging the double-ended meaning to this, I reiterate my argument that in no manner do I presume to know a truth that is not my own, nor do I presume to dictate views based on my own academic background. What I do aim for is a

²⁷ At the time of writing, Amnesty International had proposed to support the full decriminalisation of sex work, which would lead to increasing the safety of sex workers, as well as affording them full rights of protection under the law which may be denied them in current practices. While this project is wholeheartedly supported by sex workers, activist groups, and liberal scholars (including myself), it has also been met with resistance from abolitionist groups, religious groups, and several prominent Hollywood actors, and organisations such as CATW, who claim the decriminalisation process will do more harm than good. One of the biggest critiques laid against the latter opinion by sex workers and activist groups, is that of privilege. Sex workers argue that such privilege cannot be construed as the singular voice of reason and importance, while neglecting the voices of the sex workers themselves. The proposal is also supported by both PIC, PROUD and Mariska Majoor. This thesis does not allow for a full discussion on this topic, but permit me to argue that this is a fundamental turning point in sex work politics and legislature that must be supported if we at all strive to do justice to the feminist ideals of equality, fairness, and free will. For a full review of this proposal, see <https://www.amnesty.se/upload/files/2014/04/02/Summary%20of%20proposed%20policy%20on%20sex%20work.pdf>.

recognition of both collective and individualistic experiences beyond what theory and research claim to understand, and advocating the legitimacy of these identities in their respective struggles for rights and compassionate treatment by bureaucratic power structures. To do this, consideration for Mahmood's work on women's agency and post-structural feminist theory is a valuable addition, most notably her emphasis on the fallacy of viewing agency as a direct correlation of resistance in the face of assumed oppression (2005: 10). Mahmood maintains that the foundation of feminist politics continues to be located in usurping oppressive structures, saying:

“Freedom is normative to feminism, as it is to liberalism, and critical scrutiny is applied to those who want to limit women's freedom rather than those who want to extend it” (Mahmood 2005: 11).

This recognition however, does not exempt a postulation of a rigid and unchanging relationship between agency, resistance, and oppression. Rather, such relationships must be challenged as essentialist in its universalism, and attention must be paid to the individual actions and procedural embodiments undertaken as crucial to a project of self-realisation, and also of meaningful in understanding and situating free will. Such post-structuralist arguments find resonance with 3rd wave feminism in the shared belief of individualised processes of free will (if not autonomy, as argued by Mahmood 2005: 15), but should not preclude a discussion on the collectivist consequences of such arguments.

The social constructivist nature alluded to by Mahmood should serve as a critique of Weitzer, as his work stems from a sociological approach which places value on 'objective' empirical data as evidence for theory and research methods free from bias and partially reliant on statistics to back its claims, but which in actual fact, reproduces many of the original conceptual crises. In response to Weitzer's critique of radical feminism's subjective position in terms of sex work and gender equality, Gail Dines (2012: 512) seeks to counteract these claims of negative radicalism and feminist subjectivity by arguing that radical feminist thinking developed in response to White, male, educated tropes of knowledge being represented as "... objective scholarship, while the rest of us were dismissed as producing ideology-laden arguments based on anecdotes". Dines immediately moves into a discussion on the gendered context of knowledge production, claiming Weitzer views a "feminist analysis of porn" as incapable of producing "interesting, meaningful, or 'objective'" knowledge (Dines 2012). Weitzer's position of privilege, while visible and of note, does not

detract from his argument that *radical* feminism has been crucial in pioneering the ideology of sex work as inherently damaging and sexist towards women based on a patriarchal system of social construction. Dines argues further that radical feminism takes women's stories seriously by problematising the buying and selling of women's bodies and that contrary to Weitzer's belief, critical feminism does belong in academia. Throughout her response, Dines places herself within, and strengthens, the binary discourse of Weitzer's work with her own radical feminism, illustrated by her language:

“Starting in the 1970s, radical feminists began systematically collecting testimony from women who had been in the sex industry, as well as from *women who had been harmed* by pornography, and we have since amassed a large body of evidence. The thousands of ‘anecdotes’ cohered into data about *the ways that this industry hurts women* in its production and consumption. We did not make this up, and we do not privilege the anecdotes (that also cohere into data) of consumers over the stories of women” (my emphasis) [Dines 2012: 153].

Dines' language leans towards a position wherein victimhood is the only way in which women in the sex industry can be seen as a consequence of the mechanisms of patriarchy in sustaining itself through the proliferation of oppressive practices and gender bias. Certainly, patriarchy by design is harmful to women and Dines is correct in her argument that pornography can be harmful to those subjected to violent forms of sexual intercourse presented in pornography and by extension, in other areas of the sex industry. We are confronted with dizzying amounts of displays of violence against women in any form, notably in the sex industry, with power being the aim in the degrading of women for sexual pleasure, but, as Rubin (1992) brilliantly discusses in her article on pornography, there is a distinct and important difference between sexually explicit and explicitly violent material and practices. I delve deeper into Rubin's work next; focused on liberal responses to radical debates, and a review of liberal, 3rd wave feminist constrictions on the sex industry.

I turn to Rubin (1984) for guidance on an exploration of new theories of sex, supported by Mahmood's (2005) work on agency which serves as a complementary companion source. Rubin (1984: 143) stresses the character of institutional sexuality as the product of human activity, laying open the opportunities for a new theory of sex and a rethinking of Red Light politics, power, and individual capabilities in contributing to a concise and productive analysis of institutional sexism and oppression. The fieldwork conducted for this research was instrumental in clearly illustrating the unceasing and vigorous movements of sex workers and activist groups in challenging forces perceived as threatening, while constantly

embodying notions of self-realisation, individual power in the ability to make choices, and perhaps most importantly, the embodiment of Rubin's new theory on sex.

Rubin, who may be viewed as an antithesis to the likes of MacKinnon, actively sought to destabilise radical beliefs and projected truths about the sex industry by systematically exploring the various components of such narratives and problematising sections she considered in contradiction of feminist ideals. Calling for a demystification of sexuality, and a reconsideration of 2nd wave ways of thinking²⁸, Rubin developed a theory of sex geared towards a complete overhaul of the tools, methodologies, and foundational belief structures underpinning radical, 2nd wave theories: "it must build rich descriptions of sexuality as it exists in society and history" (1984: 149). This alone signals the fluidity of socio-cultural discourses and the impossible task of locating assertions regarding gender and sex within an unchanging climate. It must be located within a constantly evolving scheme of events, thoughts, external and internal factors, but most of all, it must be considered as a product of ever-changing human behaviour.

I discussed the pervasiveness of essentialist thought within feminist theory, associated with Appadurai's gatekeeping notion in Chapter Two, but Rubin goes further and critiques the idea that sexuality is a definable idea that existed prior to social culture and institutions (1984: 149). New developments in the field of sexuality can only occur when sexuality is disengaged from its static position, and taken into the fold of relativism and contextual significance. Such a change must occur within the Red Light District. While positive policy changes have been implemented, City Council continues to act within a strict set of sexual binaries and stereotypes. One only has to consider issues such as victimhood, the position of women, issues of exploitation and gendered perceptions to identify the pervasiveness of sexuality as a predetermined concept. This is supported (and indeed follows on) the work of Foucault (1978) who first recognised the changing nature of sexuality and called for an assessment of the reproductive nature of sexual theory. It is thus imperative to locate sexuality within a constructivist and intersectional framework.

A natural progression of such an acceptance is the consideration of agency. This is a topic which presented some problems in my research. As I did not conduct individual interviews, it is difficult to produce a discussion on Mahmood's work on agency without developing ideas

²⁸ The article in question was written in 1984, at the peak of the 2nd wave movement, thus Rubin's work was met with resistance, critique, and backlash. However, Rubin managed to break from a stagnant school by seeking to undo the damage she believed radical feminism imposed on issues of sexuality.

which may not be reflected in the lives of sex workers in the Red Light District. Thus, while I present a short summary on Mahmood's work, and can air some considerations, I am uncomfortable with postulating theory when I have not been privy to the contextual space that provide validation for such theories. I thus present a possibility of constructivist application and value for a future venture. Presented primarily as a question of how women interact with systems of domination, Mahmood asks: "...how do women contribute to reproducing their own domination, and how do they resist or subvert it?" (2005: 6). Such a question is integral in feminist studies, but confines itself to yet another binary by automatically positioning women within a domination-subjection paradigm, theoretically limiting the options women may in fact be presented with in a constructed space. I argued earlier for the situating of women as producers of knowledge in the centre, and a realisation of this aids in troubling such binaries. Mahmood's work may not pertain to the sex industry, but she offers useful insights into a continuation of Rubin's new theory on sex. I will thus attempt to further incorporate such ideas in Chapter Five, which serves as the primary analysis of fieldwork and theory.

3.4: Links to Human Trafficking.

The validity of the link between human trafficking and sex work is a contentious one with dominant discourses on human trafficking based on certain assumptions, research reports, and statistics that have led to projections being presented as truths, with resultant critiques not acknowledged as relevant enough to change the discourse. Homogenous debates pervade the human rights sector, leaving little room for the recognition of minority voices to express discontent at essentialising practices (UNODC 2009, 2014). The human trafficking argument is pervasive in the Red Light District, serving as one of the justification factors that City Council uses to implement its strategies for change, but, as I will show in Chapter Four, members of PIC and PROUD marched against these claims, rebutting accusations of widespread trafficking, exploitation, and instances of rape and abuse. Instead, they argue that it is City Council which acts as oppressors and exploiters by manipulating and disregarding the voices, opinions, and experiences of sex workers. Investing in a belief of implied victimhood makes this exclusion an easier process, justified by calls to improve welfare and reduce exploitation. A cycle originates from which escape is made difficult. To put this into

context, I provide a short and concise summary of current human trafficking discourse, both in the international and Dutch context.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (hereafter UNODC) postulates that despite international legislation, and subsequent localised laws to guard against human trafficking, there is an increase in both sexual and forced labour trafficking²⁹ (UNODC 2014: 1,5), with victims originating from approximately 152 countries. The UNODC reports that while 49% of victims are women with only 18% consisting of men, sexual exploitation is the largest form of trafficking in Europe, coming in at 66%, with women³⁰ making up the majority of those numbers, and men comprising roughly 70% of traffickers. It is also reported that legislative efforts at curtailing trafficking are failing, with conviction rates falling below what is expected. It is important to acknowledge that while valid critique is laid against some statistical assumptions and perceptions of events which may not be reflective of reality, research models, fieldwork, action plans, and proactive approaches to human trafficking are needed to curtail what is a gross abuse of human rights and dignity.

A pertinent point in determining the validity of interventions in suspected cases of trafficking is the identification of three main elements that need to be present. The UNODC identifies these three elements as:

“The Trafficking in Persons Protocol specifies that ‘the act’ means the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons. ‘The means’ refers to the method used to lure the victim. Possible means are the threat or use of force, deception, coercion, abduction, fraud, abuse of power or a position of vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits. These terms are not necessarily precise from a legal point of view and may be defined differently by different jurisdictions. ‘The purpose’ is always exploitation of the victim, though this can take on various forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, removal of organs or a range of other forms” (UNODC 2015: 15-16).

To lend validity to the crusade of Amsterdam’s City Council, it must be determined whether it adheres to the above definition. While official reports state that its Task Force on Human Trafficking has been effective in its approach to trafficking as a result of broadening its partnership with various municipal authorities, immigration offices, social affairs departments, and other groups and organisation with some stake in the welfare of human rights, it offers no specific action plan or basis for its identification of human trafficking, leaving it to the discretion of state employees to identify potential victims of human trafficking. This is problematic as this lack (or invisibility) of criteria, and the potential for

²⁹ In this section I focus primarily on trafficking of a sexual nature.

³⁰ Of these women, it is estimated that the majority are foreign women, trafficked across international borders.

human bias, is indicative of too wide a margin for misrepresenting certain cases of suspected trafficking. In the Red Light District, this is evident. Current perceptions are extrapolated onto the Red Light District where citizens are starting to act against unfair categorisation and the consequential negative impact on their working environments, livelihoods, and even their personal circumstances³¹. One of the most prominent attempts to curtail the spread of human trafficking and other forms of criminal activities was (and continues to be) the sale of buildings used for such activities to the City Council who in turn sells it to legitimate business owners (Spapens & Rijken 2015: 156)³².

Jana *et al* (2010) provide a critique of mainstream reports and beliefs surrounding human trafficking, calling into question the definition of the term and the epistemology of such reports and their findings. According to the authors, dominant discourses more often than not use the following definition for human trafficking:

“These discourses usually define trafficking as a process where a person loses control over their own life; they equate sex work to trafficking, and stress the restriction of movement of weaker and vulnerable sections of society. Police rescue and so-called ‘rehabilitation’ initiatives become the cornerstone of most of the programmes arising out of this thinking” (Jana *et al* 2010: 69).

The authors argue that such definitions deny the agency of marginalised groups in efforts to reclaim rights and control over their lives, and calls for an intersectional approach to analysing the human trafficking problem. By situating inequalities in race, class, gender, and nationalities as prime causes of trafficking, a comprehensive study may be conducted to ascertain a broader understanding of trafficking and its solutions. This exploratory article by Jana *et al* is of importance as it proactively situates sex workers’ organisations at the centre of the research and recognises these organisations’ role in combating human trafficking while simultaneously reaffirming the agency and rights of those in the sex industry by troubling the notion of victimhood as a universal state of being for sex workers. This combative role needs to be central to policies aimed at reducing human trafficking by including the perspectives of those active in the industry, as the type of knowledge gained from experience – whether voluntary sex workers or those who have been trafficked – possesses insight which may

³¹ Most popular perhaps is the process of applying for a licence to operate a brothel/work as a prostitute. While this process requires the identification through the show of a passport to ensure the legal entrance into the country and to determine the age of the woman, sex workers believe accompanying measures impose criteria characterised by discrimination, including access to private medical records, sexual histories, and other personal data. Thus, the initial process of legitimising identity and thus enabling the women to gain access to certain services, and in turn, to help curtail trafficking, is certainly a measure worth keeping. But the liberties taken by civil authority in its use of power in the control of the lives sex workers need to be re-evaluated.

³² I expand on this strategy in Chapter Four.

strengthen policies, but which may also aid in the recalibration of policies that are in opposition to the needs of those it claims to protect and ‘rescue’. While this article is descriptive of only experiences that lead to a positive outcome, these instances should signal the widespread occurrence of similar stories, while not denying the cases where human trafficking does indeed uphold violence, abuse, exploitation, degradation, and even death.

3.5: Sex Workers Organisations: A Limited Discussion.

Though Jenness’ work is dated (1990), her discussion on the COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) organisation, one of the first sex worker rights organisations in the United States, established in the early 1970s, points towards issues which remain prominent in sex work discourse up to the present. Tracing the origins of COYOTE from its inception in 1973, Jenness evaluates its foundational goals, mission, and aims, and discusses them within two categories: that of viability, and of validity. Jenness argues that COYOTE is fighting for the right to define what constitutes a social problem. According to Jenness:

“COYOTE advocates the repeal of all existing prostitution laws, the reconstitution of prostitution as a credible service occupation, and the protection of prostitutes’ rights as legitimate workers. While acknowledging a number of abuses against women associated with prostitution (e.g., drug abuse among prostitutes, violence against prostitutes, and juvenile prostitution), COYOTE claims that most of the problems associated with prostitution are directly related to the prohibition of prostitution and the stigma attached to sex and especially sex work” (Jenness 1990: 403-404).

Linking to this, COYOTE argues that prostitution needs to be acknowledged as a legitimate form of work which people are free to choose to enter without fear of prosecution or stigmatisation. Establishing sex work as chosen work is entwined with the goals of approaching prostitution as a civil rights issue which aims to protect sex workers from unfair discrimination, (sexual) violence, and the denial of basic services afforded to people in other types of work such as healthcare. These sentiments reflect those of PIC and PROUD, and are rooted in the establishment of a universal system of legality and recognition, and continue to be expressed through protests and petitions.

Jenness moves to a discussion of feminist discourses and uses WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt) as an antithesis to COYOTE. As a feminist activist organisation preoccupied with “... saving prostitutes from the life of prostitution”

(Jenness 1990: 412), WHISPER uses radical feminist arguments to vie for the complete dismantling of prostitution, not simply laws prohibiting prostitution, by arguing:

“Prostitution isn’t like anything else. Rather everything else is like prostitution, because it is a model for women’s condition, for gender stratification and its logical extension, sex discrimination. Prostitution is founded on enforced sexual abuse under a system of male supremacy that is itself built along a continuum of coercion... We, the women of WHISPER, reject the lie that women freely choose prostitution” (Wynter as cited in Jenness 1990: 413).

The two opposing campaigns signal two different strands of feminism, but both have at their foundation the welfare of women as a priority. This shared sense of responsibility has, rather than leading to a unified coalition between opposing groups, led to the division of women in the sex work debate. Such a schism disadvantages constructive discourse and often leads to an imbalance in power relations, with anti-sex work groups opting to save sex workers from inherently harmful positions, while pro-rights campaigns fight for empowerment and equality of sex workers within the context of sex work. The legalisation of sex work in the Netherlands may point towards an acceptance of sex work as a form of labour, but this recognition is by no means equal to the empowerment required to fully eradicate the stigma and discrimination sex workers face on a daily basis. Without a full integration into the national social services division, we cannot proclaim to speak of equality. In the case of WHISPER and COYOTE, and even the case in the Red Light District, sex workers have become the battleground for ideological - and academic – battles raging for authority over the welfare of the lives of sex workers. This authority cannot be allowed to take the form of an elitist style of rule, as is currently the situation in Red Light District with the City Council at the helm of all decision-making. Nor should this authority be the sole jurisdiction of radical feminism’s anti-sex work position, as it will have numerous consequences, including severe resistance from pro-rights groups in the Red Light District who differ fundamentally with the position of radical feminism. It is not then surprising to find limited work on sex work organisations which stems from a liberal perspective, as it may be construed as resistance to ‘true’ feminism. Feminism has become a dividing factor in its involvement in the sex industry with limited abilities to improve its reputation should it continue on its current trajectory of demonising clients, its process of constructing the (fictional) victim, and its adherence to ideologies that face no acceptance in the Red Light District by PIC and PROUD and sex workers. As a reaction, sex workers organisations have moved from the shadows of unimportance to the public eye to make their voices heard and where their own politics,

informed by their experiences, are starting to impact public perception, local political debates, and even the considerations of projects aimed at the Red Light District.

With a review of relevant literature, drawn from literature for an argumentative starting point, and drawing from work based within organisations involved in sexual politics, I now move onto an in-depth and critical discussion on the literary background I proposes to use for the situating of my analysis in Chapter Five. I will delve into the work of Foucault for primary analytical tools, while relying heavily on the literature review for a contextualised approach to my own fieldwork. The empirical data collected must serve as the centre of information extraction and analysis, being only enhanced by reviewed works.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Red Light: Empirical Data and Constructed Space.

4.1: Ethnography as Representational Ethics.

This chapter will serve as a contextualising process of empirical data gathered after a number of weeks conducting fieldwork at the Prostitution Information Centre in Amsterdam's Red Light District and its sister union, PROUD. The aim in this chapter is to, through the use of fieldwork, engage with the theory laid out in Chapter Three and lay the groundwork for an analysis of theory and discourse by being critical of the current data available. As such, ethnography must be viewed as an opportunity to create new embodied ways of understanding, both through the validation of experiences as relayed by those occupying the contextualised space, and the academic narrative as a complementary and constructive aid. O'Neill *et al* (2002: 69) argue for the acknowledgement of the above notion by presenting what the authors call a new way of combining "... socio-cultural theory; experience (life stories); and practice (exhibition/performance) defined as ethno-mimesis to explore and better understand key themes and issues evolving from ethnographic work with female prostitutes". This new model enables scholars who do conduct ethnographic work to actively reflect on their own reflexivity and position in what has always been an extremely rigid hierarchal construct of gender, class, sexuality and race. Occupying a parallel position to this awareness is the acceptance that for all the liberatory consequences ethnographic accounts and the rigorous analyses that follow may result in, ethnographic methodologies cannot be exempt from critique and scrutiny based purely on the rhetoric of 'insider knowledge/truth'.

While a basic tenet of ethno-mimesis is the prominent presence of performance art, as opposed to merely print-based works (O'Neill *et al* 2002: 72), I do not present a form of performance art in this ethnographic text. Rather, I have attempted to take those instances of action detailed in this text as representative of a visual representation of the experiences of those involved. A culmination of the layered socio-political and implied gender constructs that sex workers experience, create, and resist, the actions I describe, I argue, may be construed as a visual mimesis of personalised internalisations in response to external factors and stimuli. I go into more detailed description of these visual representations in Section 4.4: *Power Tactics and Activist Resistance*. I thus start this chapter with a detailed

exploration of my fieldwork data, aiming to adhere to a fair and honest retelling of my interviews, while simultaneously layering such an account with the tools I possess as a research master.

4.2: Identifying the Constructed Space.

Both PIC and PROUD have become synonymous with the advocacy of sex workers' rights and their shared ability to trouble existing mandates and proposed actions within a strictly controlled socio-political sphere. From various projects designed to enforce strategies aimed at renewing the city centre through gentrification, but which rather infringe upon the workspaces and livelihoods of sex workers, to a protest as an act of resistance against hegemonic power structures, the chapter will shape the boundaries of discussion and will highlight those areas of interest that require a deeper analytical discussion in association with the theoretical discourses that have thus far shaped the discussion surrounding the sex work industry.

Themes of importance will be highlighted pertaining to specific aspects of the context of both PIC and PROUD, including the language used, the role of the media, the roles of all women involved in PIC and PROUD, and its ultimate effect on not only wider public perceptions, but the perceived effect on the implementation of laws. It will become clear throughout the chapter that those experiences I recorded and observed do not always reflect current discourses on the topic of sex work, and even less so the discourse related to human trafficking. I will give a general overview of my fieldwork and findings, while also describing in detail specific examples which demonstrate the deeply ingrained and pervasive notions of women's sexuality and gender equality in the Netherlands, exemplified through the interactions between the City Council and sex workers (and at times, the lack thereof). The actions and events I describe originate both from the activism of PIC and PROUD as well as from the halls of Amsterdam City Council. It is my belief that despite these actions originating in two separate spaces, the need for these actions stem from the existing gendered socio-political climate of a patriarchal capitalist system which benefits from the continued subjugation of women in a number of capacities, including that of the labour market. The reactionary actions are thus a response for the maintenance of a specific gendered climate in

the case of the City Council and its proposed projects, and one fighting against this ingrained inequality, in the case of PIC and PROUD and its activism.

The centre has been owned and managed by Mariska Majoor, herself a former prostitute, for over twenty years. Mariska, in her mid-forties, is tall and exudes openness and friendliness. Her long and reddish brown hair is always tied up in a bun or ponytail and she is typically dressed in casual clothes consisting of camouflage pants and a fleece jacket. Mariska's open demeanour is sharpened by a very opinionated and strong personality, strengthened by her time as a prostitute in the 1980s and the twenty years she has since spent in the activist arena and the experiences and occurrences she both witnessed and personally felt. Mariska entered the sex industry when she was sixteen, owing to the fact that she needed money to buy a dog³³; eight years later, she retired from window prostitution and started PIC as a response to an "intense need to explain" (I: 1 – 2015)³⁴, to clarify and overturn the prevailing negative stereotypes pervading the industry.

It is PIC's multi-functional identity which enables the organisation to be successful. Primarily, it acts as an advocacy group for the rights of sex workers by interacting with various groups including the public, academia, the City Council of Amsterdam and other social and political organisations involved in (sexual) politics. PIC is located on Old Church Square in Amsterdam, surrounded by occupied window brothels³⁵. It is in the centre of the tourist hub, making it an ideal attraction for tourists and because it doubles as a café, it takes on an inviting appearance, beckoning interested individuals inside. Throughout my fieldwork people would always saunter in to have a cup of coffee and homemade cake, while perusing the walls lined with information and photos, and occasionally striking up a conversation with Mariska. This atmosphere, a very specific creation, falls in line with the aim of PIC, described as:

"The PIC does not receive any subsidies and provides information about prostitution in the broadest sense of the word to anyone requiring this. People who have questions regarding prostitution can approach PIC [located in the middle of the Red Light District]. PIC can answer almost all of their questions or refer them to other organizations. Tourists, sex workers, their customers and students – everyone is welcome. PIC's goal is to make it easier for people in general to talk openly about sex

³³ Mariska ended up buying the dog, a German Shepherd called Santa, after procuring the necessary money from two customers. She had Santa for thirteen years.

³⁴ This reference structure refers to Interview One that took place in 2015. As Mariska was my only interviewee, I omit her name from references.

³⁵ These windows are cheaper to rent than windows on the main canal and they are often rented by women of colour, who may be older and do not conform to society's beauty standards.

work and to create public respect for sex workers [a word used increasingly frequently rather than ‘prostitutes’]” (www.pic-amsterdam.com).

This correlates with the information I gathered during my fieldwork and it is the intricacies of these goals – their foundation, their methods, their reasoning, and their effects – that I am interested in. PIC acts an information centre, which in itself is indicative of a contravention of those norms and institutions believed to be governing the sex industry; namely silence and the law. Foucault (1978: 6) accurately describes the volatile effect of characterising the relationship between sex and power as repression, positioning people such as Mariska as individuals who actively acts as a transgressor in such a system: “a person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside of the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom”. While Foucault continues to intricately analyse power and sexuality constructs, it is important to recognise Mariska as a woman capable of challenging power through the recognition of an unjust and unequal system which thrives on the regulation of sexuality.

By making PIC both a public space and an activist organisation, it is able to transcend the ever-present (if somewhat simplistic) binary of public-private and legal-illegal. The organisation’s agency and power lie in its structure and ability to bring sex work into the public fore. It is a common assumption that people are curious about the topic of sex work, more so when these people are present in a space where sex work is legal and is, to a certain extent, a normal part of everyday life. This might be in contrast to their everyday lives and/or native countries where sex work is either illegal or considered a taboo topic and this foray into the illicit world of sex often acts as a stimulus to ask questions, to become part of a risqué experience (even only as observers) which may have otherwise been denied to them. By acting as an information centre, tourists are given the chance to experience this transition from public to private by becoming part of the conversation. This is reiterated by Mariska when she says:

“Because you know I always wanted this to be a place for everybody. Where everybody could step into with their problems and their questions to meet each other and to develop an opinion, to find out... whatever. I want to have the feeling that PIC makes sense, so I started to like, collect more people around me, sex workers as well, I saw a big hole in fighting for the rights of sex workers in the Netherlands because we didn’t have any organisations representing sex worker’s rights in the Netherlands and I wanted everything to happen here, I want to see this as the centre of everything regarding sex work in the Netherlands. And that’s what it is right now and that’s uhh... I think it’s great it’s important, it feels good for everybody, but it also feels very good for me. PIC is finally, after almost 21 years what it should be” (I – 1: 2015).

By recounting the origins and evolution of PIC over the span of 21 years, it will emerge that what had started out as an impulsive and personal project to aid a general understanding of sex work has progressed into a fully-fledged organisation respected by local authorities in the local socio-political arena. This is best shown through the multiple platforms and meetings with local leaders PIC and PROUD are invited to in order to discuss matters pertaining to the Red Light District. It was a common occurrence for me to observe conversations between Mariska and other people and groups involved in the politics of Red Light and to pick up on the sharp political edge present in the conversations, especially regarding the maintenance of the workspaces and the restrictions sex workers face in gaining access to financial services. These conversations often led to meetings between activists, the mayor, and other political or social parties, illustrating the visibility and burgeoning power of PIC and PROUD as major participants in social discourse. Rather than being content with the identity and position ascribed to them³⁶, PIC and PROUD established themselves as powers for change in a context of gendered restrictions. Mariska describes this evolutionary process from a small information centre to a power player as messy and time consuming, stating that the first ten years were a financial mess but that this did not hamper her enthusiasm or goals. She then started doing Red Light tours, which financially aided the organisation and enlisted a number of volunteers (most being current or former prostitutes). In her own words, the major catalyst to move towards a more activist position occurred as

“... I became older, a bit more mature, and wiser, I started to interfere more and more with policy makers and I joined all kinds of platforms and things because in the beginning I was, besides the woman who worked for the Rode Draad, the only sex worker that was open about it, so for the media it was very interesting – and for policy makers” (I – 1: 2015).

The combination of media attention, activist involvement, and the increased visibility of sex work politics led to a disturbance in the status quo that defined the Red Light District and opened the space for a renewed debate surrounding issues of concern.

4.3: Theory and Practice – The Effects of Unchallenged Discourse.

By structuring PIC as an activist organisation, Mariska – along with all those involved – had the opportunity to revitalise the debate regarding the legal, moral, and socio-political aspects

³⁶ An identity being attempting to be fixed through the implementation of intrusive policies and programs, which would aid in solidifying the power of City Council in the management of Red Light.

of sex work in the Netherlands, leading to a restructuring of sex work as a social problem. However, it is necessary to understand how the changing of laws and opinions correspond to the timeline of PIC and its activism. As brothels were legalised in 2000³⁷, I was interested in Mariska's take on the constantly changing views regarding sex work, and, starting from the simple assumption that before the change in law the collective attitude toward sex work was one of resistance and disapproval, I enquired. Mariska's response was in fact, the opposite, pointing towards a regression of attitudes. The most important point that surfaced was the distinction between sex work as a business, and sex work as implicit in the human trafficking business. Mariska believes that after 2000 the discussion surrounding sex work has taken a more politicised meaning used for the benefit of policy makers, instead of the wellbeing of the sex workers themselves, whereas before the law change in 2000:

“In the beginning, when I started, things were better than today. If you talk about public opinion, or even politicians... of course they always see prostitution as a problem, but when they changed the law in 2000, and a few years before that, they were more positive about sex work than today. Today they concentrate on human trafficking and sex work. And also people in the public said, ok, we think it's scary, it's very stigmatised already, but you didn't hear so many people talking about human trafficking” (I – 1: 2015).

The correlation between sex work and human trafficking is one characterised by tension, statistics, and gendered perceptions. On the topic of statistics, it is a common strategy to directly equate sex work – and more specifically, prostitution – to the rise in human trafficking, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three³⁸. It is an argument made that the sex industry cannot be distinguished from human trafficking, resulting in a characterisation of the majority of sex workers as victims of human trafficking, leading to an erasure of those women who are not victims, limiting discussion, furthering certain agendas contrary to the betterment of women's welfare, and swaying policies in favour of political power and control. This process may be more disadvantaging towards sex workers as it tends to sweepingly generalise the experiences of all sex workers and creating the singular image of the woman as a victim. PIC aims to counteract this by educating people on the everyday experiences of the Red Light District and by providing a platform to those women who are not victims of human trafficking but rather who have voluntarily chosen to enter the industry, despite the factors that motivated this choice. In addition, it is the hope that this research may aid in this endeavour by creating

³⁷ Before the legalisation in 2000, the City Council implemented what is known as a 'principle of opportunity', where sex work was tolerated despite its illegal nature, on the condition that it not develop into a threat to the integrity of society (Spapens & Rijken 2015: 156).

³⁸ For examples of this strategy, see UNODC's Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2009; 2014); Jana *et al* (2010); Trafficking in Human Beings: Ninth Report of the Dutch National Rapporteur (2013).

a complementary relationship between theory and practice to ultimately lead to a better, and lasting distinction between sex work and human trafficking, ensuring the continued eradication of human trafficking, while at the same time supporting the rights of those who entered the sex industry free from coercion.

Returning to the strategies of activist groups, PROUD was established earlier in 2015, acting as the new Dutch Union for Sex Workers³⁹, claiming a space in the debate by engaging in activist politics and actions. Their goals are stated as follows:

“PROUD consists of a group of (ex) sex workers, supported by scientists and (human rights) activists. All members of PROUD feel a strong urge to fight for more rights, better working conditions and a more positive image of sex work. PROUD is a pressure and lobby group for everyone who works or has worked in the erotic services in the Netherlands, in whatever way, shape or form. PROUD’s objective and ambition is to represent the interests of sex workers; in their work, in politics, in the media and in society in general” (www.wijzijnproud.nl).

It would be incorrect to deny the existence of human and sex trafficking, nor would it be helpful to disregard the links to the sex industry, but it would be playing into the domination paradigm to view “...all types of sexual commerce as institutionalized subordination of women, regardless of the conditions under which it occurs. The perspective does not present domination and exploitation as variables but instead considers them core ontological features of sexual commerce” (Weitzer 2011: 1338). PIC and PROUD’s activism aims to reach a point where such a binary is challenged, opting for a more complex and layered narrative of sex work which is constantly changing in response to internal and external forces. The dominating ideas of sex workers as victims can be disputed while acknowledging the presence of prejudice, exploitation, violence, and systemic injustices.

4.4: Power Tactics and Activist Resistance.

PIC and PROUD’s activism presents itself in response to a proposal by the Amsterdam City Council to implement two different action plans with vast ramifications for the future of the Red Light District as well as the future of the women affected by these action plans. Serving only as an introductory review of these action plans, I will provide a layout of the dynamics present and will be discussing these action plans in more detail in Chapter Five using a critical

³⁹ PROUD has replaced De Rode Draad (The Red Thread) which had served as the primary union for sex workers in the Netherlands. De Rode Draad, primarily reliant on subsidies and donations, went bankrupt in 2012.

analytical frame where its structure will be analysed within the context of power, social responsibility, and the implementation of tactics opposed to the realisation of gender equality and recognition.

In the first instance, the City Council proposed the implementation of Project 1012⁴⁰ in 2007, a gentrification project with the aim of modernising and renewing the city centre, concentrated in the Red Light District⁴¹. The project aims to close all window brothels⁴² along alleyways, side streets and avenues in order to concentrate the remaining windows along the main canal, leading to what is claimed is a safer work environment by reducing the opportunities for sexual exploitation and violence, in turn reducing the occurrence of human trafficking. According to Mariska, there are currently 370 windows remaining in Amsterdam, left over from a total of 480, and with Project 1012, the aim is to bring down the number to 290. This strategy has several disadvantages; first and foremost, in contrast to the belief that the strategy will reduce opportunities for human trafficking by limiting the spaces for such opportunities, it is argued that this will only serve to drive sex work(ers) underground, increasing vulnerability, decreasing visibility and thus regulation, and leading to an increase in exploitation. Other negative consequences include the increased risk of unemployment and decreased financial security, limited state protection, and the fear that women may lose agency when forced out of safe workspaces.

In addition to Project 1012, the City Council proposed another project called Project Eigenraam (Project Own Window), which plans to sell various buildings to non-commercial organisations. These organisations would then rent out rooms to sex workers in order for the women themselves to run their own working spaces. This project aims to increase independence for the women by removing the middle man and placing the management power in the hands of sex workers themselves. While Mariska says that they are interested in, and enthusiastic about the project, concerns remain. The current plan is to rent out roughly nineteen windows, but structurally, Mariska emphasises possible problems. Some of the windows are inadequate based on hygiene provisions, size, safety and infrastructure, making conducting work more difficult than at present. As a result of these problems, it is believed only about thirteen to fourteen windows will be made available; a number which reflects the inadequacy and problematic premise of Project Eigenraam. Furthermore, the number of

⁴⁰ Refers to the district postcode.

⁴¹ Motivating factors for the implementation of Project 1012 cites money laundering, drug-related problems, and human trafficking as negative actions occurring in Red Light that need to be curbed. By imposing a gentrification model, the City Council aims to economically revitalise the area.

⁴² The City Council has already closed roughly 120 windows.

windows for rent in Project Eigenraam will not be able to meet the demand if Project 1012 were to be successfully implemented. Lastly, the money generated from fourteen windows is not enough to cover monthly costs and lower the rent each month and with rent ranging anywhere from between €85 to €150 per shift, many women are required to work six days per week to afford the monthly rent⁴³ in their current spaces. To further its chances of success, City Council has chosen to take a social welfare route by establishing one of its aims as improving the working conditions of the women by cutting out the middleman (pimps and landlords) – an aim which PROUD supports, but which needs to be catered according to the conditions of the women. Additionally, women who run their own windows will still be accountable to the city in the same manner as other building owners, but without the presence of a third party.

The development of Project Eigenraam and Project 1012 at the same time is important to consider in lieu of their respective goals, and should raise a red flag. Taking into account the aims of each project – from gentrification to providing sex workers with some form of independence – it must be asked whether the two projects were not intentionally developed as tools to smooth City Council’s presence and involvement into the Red Light District in a subtle way. The fact that one project aims to reduce the number of windows while the other aims to provide women with their own managed windows comes across as a specifically tailored strategy to placate sex workers into accepting both projects easier without much resistance, thus strengthening City Council’s position of power and decision making. When I asked about this occurrence, Mariska expressed the same sentiment, arguing that neither project will be accepted unless radical changes are made to the agreement. Indeed, Mariska stated that PROUD is heavily opposed to Project 1012 and will fight its implementation. Being successful in this attempt would require not only visible mobilisation, but also the presence of the media on a national level. Mariska firmly believes that should any problems occur, the voices of sex workers will not be swept under the rug as it will lead to further negative consequences, most notably issues of safety, privacy, and anonymity. She says:

“When they introduced the project, we said we’d think about it and that we have a list of demands. One: Project Eigenraam cannot be mixed with 1012, as being a crown on the project, because then we would

⁴³ Rent amounts to roughly €4000 per month for a room the size of about 4 square meters. The rent is then paid to the owner of the building. Night shifts tend to be more expensive than day shifts, given the increase of traffic in the District at night. Thus, while rent is more, the number of windows occupied increases in order for women to see more clients. Sessions last 15min and prices per session are typically €50, which includes oral sex and intercourse, but can be as low as €20 in certain areas. From the money that a women makes, she has to pay taxes and she has to pay for her licence, with the remaining money to be spent on personal needs.

be involved in that one, no fucking way. So they said it's good that it's separated and we should see it like that. If it had been a project on its own [Project Eigenraam], without 1012, it would have been different. Because it's in Red Light, it has a different meaning. Something else happened. The mayor sent a letter to the minister of justice, to ask about changing the privacy laws because he wants to be able to screen sex workers, he wants to know everything about their medical records, their sexual lives, their private lives, everything. I was so angry. He knows how we feel, it was done behind our backs. He's doing everything for the outside world and not for the sex workers" (I: 3 - 2015).

Proposed increases in surveillance and control, advocated under the guise of social security and protection, are little more than tactics to increase the civil bureaucratic grip on the regulation of lives within its system through the mismanagement of power. Projects such as Project 1012 and Project Eigenraam are but one type of control exerted by civil government, but other forms of control and discrimination are noted in other spheres of society.

It is not only in the capacity of City Council that activist organisations face oppression and rejection, but also in the banking sector. The following is an incident that occurred a few weeks into my fieldwork and serves as the perfect example from which to draw a gendered and political analysis. It is efficient in portraying the strenuous and unstable relationship between sex work advocacy groups and bureaucratic structures governing civil society by illustrating the necessity for incidences such as these to be taken as socio-political ultimatums of power and authority. Conversely, these exact ultimatums by bureaucratic structures provide the organisation with the needed defences in order to ultimately achieve their goals. PROUD, as an organisation, requires a business bank account to manage its finances and consequently applied to Triodos Bank for such an account. After a period of two weeks, PROUD received a rejection letter from Triodos Bank citing the following reason for the denial:

"In our consideration of your application we take into account risk and safety aspects, consistency and conflicting interests. The sector in which the services occur is also taken into account. In our application form it is stated that Triodos Bank provides no services to businesses associated with activities in the pornographic sector. The website of PROUD identifies itself as an advocacy organisation for a variety of work forms, including those operating from home, all forms of film, television, and internet work, and as a result, we have reached the conclusion that the activities of PROUD subsequently fall under the exclusionary policies of Triodos Bank" (www.wijzijnproud.nl).

This response presents a highly problematic issue. Not only does the superficial explanation need to be understood, it must be deconstructed to examine those structural inequalities which give rise to this enactment of power – a form of power which is strengthened under the guise

of ‘social responsibility’. It became clear through my conversation with Mariska that she and PROUD considered this a form of discrimination, claiming that:

“It is crazy that sex workers are unable to open business bank accounts, or have access to other services that are available to other people... PROUD is an organisation representing the rights of all sex workers, including porn actresses. Despite PROUD being a registered organisation, they are refusing to help us” (I: 2- 2015).

This response by Triodos Bank points to a manipulation of bureaucratic power in its ability to apply its ethos of social responsibility according to its own needs. Triodos Bank claims to advocate the personal development of people, the importance of social cohesion. The claim to believe in personal, social, and economic growth is brought into doubt by the bank’s refusal to support an organisation based in the promotion of equal rights and gender equality, and its intrinsic links to the welfare of all people and the state. This was not simply a choice made in business criteria, but a choice that actively reflects traditional gender roles and gender discrimination. Based on profession, and its implicit gendered meanings, Triodos Bank’s decision reflects sentiments reminiscent of stigma and institutional bias. Social responsibility and the promotion of equality cannot be maintained by denying sex workers fair access to representation, and the representation’s subsequent capability to negotiate issues of financial stability, equal representation, and other issues pertaining to the welfare of sex workers. Condemnation of the sex industry as an institution cannot be justification for the denial of basic services to women who operate as sex workers, whether by choice or by coercion⁴⁴.

Given the persistence of City Council in its wish to implement these action plans despite vast objections from the parties directly affected by them, it was decided that more direct action needed to be taken to fully express the dissatisfaction felt by PIC, PROUD, and sex workers regarding the severity of the crisis of equal representation in a socio-political platform, PIC and PROUD organised a march through Amsterdam on April the 9th 2015 protesting the closure of windows in line with the goals of Project 1012 and its anti-trafficking goals to deliver a letter to the mayor of Amsterdam⁴⁵ demanding the reopening of closed windows. The letter was signed by nearly a thousand people, most of them sex workers. The protest occurred peacefully from the PIC offices to the City Hall where protesters met with the

⁴⁴ At the time of writing, it became knowledge to me that Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the Dutch minister of Finance had released a statement wherein he utters his support of Triodos’ decision in rejecting PROUD. Furthermore, he stated that as long as *other options exist* where PROUD may be able to acquire such a bank account, Triodos Bank cannot be held accountable for wrongful behaviour. It has also come to light that should Project Eigenraam become a reality, Triodos would then be willing to work with organisations in providing financial services.

⁴⁵ Mayor Eberhard van der Laan.

mayor. Not only were sex workers (who donned masks to hide their identity if they so wished) invited to take part, but supporters were also invited to join the march, and as a result, I joined the march. Nearly two hundred people marched through the streets carrying banners and signs sporting slogans such as: ‘Stop de HEKSENJACHT wij worden niet verkracht’ (stop the witch hunt, we are not being raped); ‘sekswerk ja, stigma nee’ (sex work yes, stigma no); ‘don’t save us, save our windows’; and lastly, ‘Van der Laan je pikt mij baan’ (Van der Laan you’re taking my job’).

The protest moved through the densely populated tourist area of Amsterdam, including the main canal – where the majorities of windows are located – and drew large interested crowds who immediately took to filming and photographing the protest. As a supporter, I did not don a mask, drawing curious glances from some spectators, most likely finding it strange that a prostitute show her identity in public. This aspect of the march was particularly interesting to me as it signalled something of greater importance than simply protecting anonymity. It reflected the stigma associated with being a sex worker; by perusing my unhidden face with curious glances, the belief that sex work(ers) should remain in the shadows is legitimised and reproduced – it is after all, the service one is interested in, not the person. I believe I was at times read and identified as a sex worker, and while I was proud to be part of the protest, it brought to home the accepted iniquitous sentiment of sex work.

The protest was also followed by the media, including a number of prominent Dutch news stations and newspapers. Along the route, interviews would be conducted with protesters, and given the widespread interest and range of questions being asked, I was somewhat astonished at the lack of an in-depth analysis that appeared the following days on television and in the papers. Most reports merely reiterated the same basic principles regarding the aim of the march, and the mayor’s response, with no substantial argument being made as to the underlying causes of concern the sex workers had. No reference was made to structural inequalities aiding the oppression of sex work in a public forum, suggesting a fractured relationship between the media and such advocacy groups; rather, we should consider the notion that the relationship between the media and a bureaucratic structure such as the City Council is much more productive towards producing a stance supporting the City Council’s views. This was further highlighted by the Mayor’s insistence that the ‘fight was over’ and that protests were unnecessary. He also stated that the City Council is doing its best to obtain proper insurance for sex workers along with medical care. At this point, one woman’s voice was heard from the crowd asking how the mayor expects to deliver on those promises when

they (the women) don't even have workspaces. The protest ended soon after with the mayor accepting the signed petition and disappearing back into the building while all protesters filed out of the building. As alluded to earlier, the protest may serve as an example of what O'Neill *et al* (2002) refer to as ethno-mimesis. Though the authors use the term as a way to present ethnographic data as a way of analysis, I believe that an emotional, valuable, and knowing representation of empirical data occurs in real time, enacted by sex workers through the protest. The protest acts as form of interaction with both the City Council and the general public (owing to the fact that the protest was witnessed by spectators on the streets of Amsterdam) and is thus effective in relaying sentiment, meaning, and purpose. It goes beyond what Emmison and Smith (as cited in O'Neill *et al* 2002: 72) call "... merely illustrative and archival". Of course, the interpretation of such a protest by spectators, and even City Council, is subjective, but the audience becomes part of a movement for a brief period of time with the result of marginalised lived realities becoming part of the larger socio-cultural landscape. Boundaries, whether geographical, ideological, or political, become blurred through active resistance against oppressive structures by foraying into contested spaces.

All these examples are symptoms of a system of oppression and political play in order to control the Red Light District according to the wishes of those in power, rather than the wishes of those actors who experience the stigmatisation and discrimination on a daily basis. This schism between lawmakers and recipients points us to various authors who are helpful in analysing this breach. Firstly, Mahmood (2005), in her writings on women's piety in Islam and their various actions within a distinct socio-cultural and political context which critically engages with the idea of agency, is helpful in the perusal of what constitute as acts of resistance, acts of agency, and acts of autonomy, as all three may be interrelated, but may also be theorised as distinct phenomena. In conjunction with Rubin's (1984, 1992) work, these acts will be discussed within the meanings of such entities in Chapter Five. We can already postulate a certain relationship present in the Red Light District by looking at the public-private, and legal-illegal binaries. Politicians and lawmakers may act as the gatekeepers of law and societal morality and normativity, with sex workers positioned as elements existing in opposition to such measures, making the process of maintaining power difficult. This muddling of morality and politics becomes progressively more complicated when the belief in a certain truth pervades the pores of society and creates a dogma citing the strength of this truth and the misguidedness of the ones it proclaims to help.

Secondly, Foucault (1978) offers an exploration of power as part of the repressive hypothesis which situates sexuality and the practicing thereof as a taboo, and except for reproduction, sex is a topic relocated to the domain of silence and an immoral character. To reverse this belief and move sexuality in all its forms into the public domain of acceptance and conversation, it is advised to practice sexuality and to reclaim a sexual identity. While this seems relatively uncomplicated, Foucault troubles this hypothesis by arguing that sexuality has not, in fact, been repressed, but rather that the discourses surrounding sexuality, most notably in the Western world, have changed and have been subjected to power structures aimed at defining and controlling sexuality according to a specific (religious) ethos. I will argue that in the case of the Red Light District, sex has become the defining factor in determining social position, character, and power relations, with little room for a renegotiation of power in its current form. PIC and PROUD however, possess the ability to alter current discourse through its internal structure of power and view of sexuality. By moving outwards through various levels of society and expanding its own ethos of sexuality and gender, systemic power can be destabilised and ultimately altered to give rise to a new discourse on sexuality and sex work. Integral to this is the situation of women as the main protagonists of knowledge production.

Lastly, Bracke & De la Bellacasa's work on feminist standpoint theory may be of some help as it positions women as "...knowing subjects, and their neglected voices and experiences as resources of knowledge, can be considered feminism's beating pulse" (2007: 43). It opens the debate to not only that of knowledge and those who hold and produce knowledge, but it also moves us in the direction of the object-subject phenomenon. Moving from the margins of exclusion and where women do not possess the privilege of occupying the same social strata as men, they may make their way to the centre of knowledge by becoming subjects capable of producing knowledge and truths linked to their lived experiences of oppression and sexism and as the authors argue, to open these lived experiences "... up to a political reinterpretation which takes place in a collective way" (Bracke & De la Bellacasa 2007: 43). This can counteract power structures imposing rigid laws and beliefs from above by positioning women's experiences in the margins of society as that of value and more relevant than top-down sanctions. At its core, this reflects the ideals that PIC and PROUD are fighting for, as they actively contend the impositions on their lives by demonstrating the power of their voices in interpreting their experiences and ultimately, their demands for recognition as workers. Looking at the interactions between Mariska, PIC, PROUD, and the media and City Council, it is not difficult to grasp the need for an approach where the marginalised voices become central in the discussion surrounding male supremacy and systemic patriarchy. It is a

sentiment constantly repeated by Mariska, PROUD, and other groups advocating sex worker's rights that conversations can only be meaningful and productive when it happens *with* them, not *about* them.

By continuously focusing on the domination paradigm, sex workers and their associated problems are pushed back into the realm of invisibility. Mariska claims that feminist groups opposed to sex work manipulate the context to promote their own agendas, and by influencing the position of bureaucratic power structures, the position of the women claimed to be protected by radical feminism is in reality undermined and stripped of agency. PIC is vehemently against this type of feminist politics and is effective in its approach because it establishes a connection between the public-private; policy-practice; and between 'normal' people and sex workers. PIC's organisational structure is in opposition to the theoretical frameworks we are normally confronted with and creates a tangible feel for the reality of experience.

In this chapter I have attempted to produce a concise picture of my empirical data that inform my analysis. I move now to a more critical discussion and analysis of these events to attempt to redefine our ways of perceiving sex work in line with the welfare of sex workers and their needs.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Discussion and Analysis.

“...the discourse on sex has been multiplied rather than rarefied; and that if it has carried with its taboos and prohibitions, it has also, in a more fundamental way, ensured the solidification and implantation of an entire sexual mosaic.”

- (Foucault 1976: 53).

5.1: Introduction.

Having discussed the importance of centring empirical data within research and its contribution to a better development of tools with which to conduct social research, I will, in conjunction with the referential literature I framed as my points of departure, continue into a critical analysis of those empirical elements and evidence of experiences that shape the Red Light District. By focusing on the actors who become producers of knowledge within a bound community, namely the Red Light District, and how their actions reverberate outwards into the wider social, political, and cultural spheres of Amsterdam, it places the priority on the needs of the affected, rather than on the needs of those occupying the ivory tower of control. Beyond merely reproducing empirical data in its transferred form, I will engage with issues of structural inequalities, imbalanced power entities, and the influence of social organisations to produce, what I hope, is a new way of looking at the ways in which traditional feminist research has been done pertaining to issues of sexuality and sex work. As a result, I wish to produce new endeavours at knowledge which go beyond the rigidity of radical feminism’s ideologies, towards a point where essential elements of experiences are at the forefront of meaning. By giving voice to the marginalised groups which have been situated as secondary considerations⁴⁶ in theoretical developments by radical feminism, it becomes clear that current discourses on the Red Light District cannot remain static and need to be subjected to critique, both from an academic perspective and from the perspectives of inhabitants of the District.

Drawing on my theoretical overview in Chapters Two and Three, I move onto scholars whose works possess the necessary attributes to develop and supplement these theoretical analyses

⁴⁶ This secondary consideration is often one of victimhood.

into an empirically focused narrative of theory and experience. To accomplish this, I felt the need to move beyond the work of scholars that deal explicitly with sex work. As a result, I engage with Saba Mahmood and Michel Foucault as central authors. Each author's expertise on the subjects of power, agency, the state, and socio-political formations will be brought into relation to the situational context of PIC and PROUD I developed in Chapter Four. The primary aim of this analysis is to bring together empirical data, various branches of theory, critiques and commendations, into a descriptive analysis of the current socio-political and gendered climate in the Red Light District. The secondary aim is to highlight how PIC and PROUD, as visible representations of the Red Light District, are the embodiment of a navigation process of power relations and gendered politics and shape these relations to reflect what they believe is the just and correct state of affairs. Furthermore, I hope to show how the central positioning of those bodies experiencing the politics and social constructionism of sex work leads to a better, more elaborate, and beneficial form of discourse through which to shape future research endeavours.

To begin, I turn to Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005) for guidance on navigating agency, autonomy, and feminism within spaces historically ordained according to strict gender hierarchies. As noted in Chapter Four, this discussion is limited by the restrictions encountered during my fieldwork, but the discussion on agency and resistance is an important one. In Chapters Three and Four, Rubin (1984; 1992) had already indicated problems associated with the interpretation and use of 'agency' within feminist discourse – notably in her critique of radical anti-sex schools – and Mahmood enables me to broaden that particular argument while simultaneously commenting on analytical and theoretical harms when discussing any form of sociocultural research. Mahmood showcases two distinct complications located within research assigned to the study of cultures, society, and the human element; namely cultural relativism and essentialism. Both detrimental, it is the process of navigation Mahmood engages in which is critical to her overall ethnographic work. Mahmood shows how self-identification and the practice of agency within this context is not necessarily defined as a feminist practice *by those who take part*, but rather how feminist labels are often assigned, or rejected, by those observers standing at the margins of a specific socio-cultural context, unable to fully grasp the complexities of contextual structures, leading to the categorisation and objectification of relevant groups and individuals. In the Red Light District, the labelling of practices, personas, institutions, and identities are based upon such ideas of oppression and resistance, with City Council, and perhaps more importantly, the Dutch and international society in general, being foremost producers and maintenance forces

of gendered structures which reproduce static beliefs and institutions. Navigation of new identities is often shrouded in the shadows of structural entities, hampered by power relations unequal in nature. While located in a geographically different context than Amsterdam's Red Light District, Mahmood's work has the ability to influence discourse and current feminist thought outside of geographic boundaries. Feminist discourse must, as one of its primary aims, trouble the idea of agency within unchanging institutions, leading to an understanding that crosses ideological divides and strengthens liberal schools of feminism. Such an undertaking should be an ongoing project, and as her work is influenced by the likes of Foucault, extrapolation of meaning and insight is possible.

Sex workers in Amsterdam do showcase instances of dissatisfaction with ruling powers, and, in its simplest form, this may be construed as a form of free will and agency. However, we may not be able to confidently call this resistance, as sex workers need to remain in this institution in order to work and earn a livelihood. Change must occur within the system, translated as a positive change in the manner in which sex workers engage with the personal self and conduct interactions with said ruling powers. Much like the women in Mahmood's work, sex workers do not necessarily claim a feminist agenda, but rather claim the recognition that as women and workers, they deserve the right to shape their own choices and lives within a specific institution, whether that incorporates actively challenging problems within such a system, or living in accordance to the regulations in place. As feminists, we need to support women and support international campaigns for the decriminalisation of sex work in order to fully realise this potential.

Foucault's work is especially paramount in understanding power structures and relationships within the Red Light District, as shown by Rubin in her focus on Foucault in theories of sexuality. Of particular interest is Foucault's emphasis on the Repressive Hypothesis as a method of control used by ruling systems of power in defining sexuality and gender, and his subsequent critique of this model. Throughout this chapter I will bring into relation both theory and practice, simultaneously offering new insight while adhering to my original position as a researcher incapable of producing truth based on my personal observations. At all times I aim to maintain the distinction between myself as a researcher and sex workers as primary directors of theory and relative truth.

5.2: Agency and Subjective Interpretations.

An exploration into 2nd and 3rd wave feminism aided in placing historical factors into context, to situate feminist scholars on the continuum of liberation and oppression, and most importantly, it aided in creating a need for the introduction of works of other forms. For this objective, I turn to Mahmood and Foucault whose complementary works deal with the deconstruction of power, agency, political might, and gender politics to reach a plateau where simple categories may be understood as mere placeholders for a more sophisticated discussion, inclusive of intellectual differences, and strengthening the positions of activists and scholars alike. To start, Mahmood's (2005) writings on the possibility of agency being attained within what is believed to be systems of oppression will be brought directly into relation to the activism of PIC and PROUD, most noticeable through the protest through the city as well their reactions against Project Eigenraam and Project 1012. It is also possible to argue that the establishment of both PIC and PROUD, despite being more than twenty years apart, is in itself an enactment of personal and collective free will and agency by its rejection of prescribed norms and practices. Through its mere existence the first step in positive reevaluation and change has been set in motion by establishing a discomfort with ruling norms and structures. Foucault (as cited in Mahmood 2005: 17) makes the argument that power is not simply a top down movement of control and domination, but rather a multi-directional force which shapes "...new forms of desires, objects, relations, and discourses". I show that PIC and PROUD's activism is a reflection of this process through the reclaiming of terms and stereotypes, and that its actions in turn elicit response from City Council. While such a response may not lead to immediate changes in policies, the pressure exerted is enough to cause a disturbance in a neatly organised structure of power and create rifts in political cohesion. Such rifts open up spaces for stronger acts of resistance, and may act as the catalyst for the needed change.

The collective result of protest marches, continuous activity within PIC and PROUD, and the increased visibility of sex workers and their activism, points towards a change in the centre and periphery metaphor by shifting boundaries and allowing a change in the roles actors play in the Red Light District. From the marginalised periphery, sex workers are steadily moving towards the centre where the most influential use of power is located. As is already occurring, these slow changes are not the result of a top-down movement of power, but rather an illustration of the fluidity and changing nature of power and its reaction to fluctuations in

society and alternative power displays. Foucault has argued that sex has become the prominent shaping factor of power and society, with its regulation and embodiment acting as a reflection of society's obsession with sex and sexuality. As a result of constant urgings to locate truths regarding sexuality, it has become the focal point of societal organisations, illustrated when Foucault (1978: 78) says: "...a certain inclination has led us to direct the question of what we are, to sex". Sex thus orders society, but society has also become an influential force in notions of sexuality. The Red Light District then, pre-eminent in its practices regulating sex work and its liberal inclusion of prostitution as a form of sexuality, has failed in its duty to go beyond the assignment of labels, and to include a possibility and space for an understanding of sexuality within the confines of the individual – the individual being the vessel of constructivism and expression. This cripples discussions on agency and free-will through its controlled expressions and definitions of sexuality, and thus requires an examination of Mahmood's work.

Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005) is an ethnography in which an analysis of Islamic socio-cultural spaces, lead to an examination of the mosque movement undertaken by women in Egypt and the actions these women undertake in their practices under Islam. Mahmood questions the assumptions made by traditional feminism in regard to the position of women within Islamic culture; an important topic considering the power Western feminism possesses in dictating feminist discourse worldwide. Through this ethnography, Mahmood not only challenges these Western assumptions, but also aims to find the position of Muslim women in a context defined by power structures – structures that are predominantly male. While my research does not deal with religious structures and their power dynamics, the author's theorisations can be useful in a discussion on the Red Light District as both cases attempt to understand women's positionality and conceptions of agency within broader notions of power and gender, as informed by Foucault. Referring back to Appadurai's critique of scholars' tendency to gatekeep concepts, Mahmood seeks to deconstruct traditional feminist discourses used in researching the non-West by illustrating instances wherein these accepted theories find little to no support. One prominent example is that of agency and all it entails. Rather than locating agency as an inherent act of resistance against an oppressive structure or power, as is often the implied definition of agency, Mahmood argues that in the case of these women, they find their own forms of agency within the Islamic culture and religion, thus subverting the idea of agency as the intentional antithesis to oppression. As a result, Mahmood asks the question:

“One of the most common reactions is the supposition that women Islamist supporters are pawns in a grand patriarchal plan, who, if freed from their bondage, would naturally express their instinctual abhorrence for the traditional Islamic mores used to enchain them. Even those analysts who are sceptical of the false-consciousness thesis underpinning this approach nonetheless continue to frame the issue in terms of a fundamental contradiction: why would such a large number of women across the Muslim world actively support a movement that seems inimical to their ‘own interests and agendas’, especially at a historical moment when these women appear to have more emancipatory possibilities available to them?” (2005: 2).

This fundamental contradiction Mahmood refers to finds resonance in the discussion on the Red Light District as it has been prominent in the construction of the district’s identity as a binary order, and as a methodology that furthers the agenda of those who benefit from such a system through discourse, actions, new legal and social impositions, and the consequential spread of beliefs. Alison Phipps (2015) argued that women’s empowerment was often a dubious term because of its appropriation by conservative ideologies: “it also reminded me of other problematic agendas, in particular around sex workers and Muslim women, which use the idea of women’s liberation to reinforce particular value systems, dominate social, political and cultural Others, or save women from themselves”. Liberating the use of women’s empowerment from the clutches of (neo)conservative politics has become synonymous with the activism of sex workers in their own battles for the ability to have their voices heard and has found resonance with post-structuralist works denouncing an analysis based on purely observable phenomena organised within a stratified structure. It is, however, difficult to discuss individual agency and free-will in this thesis, but it should, in future research, be a primary consideration when studying organisations and larger institutions.

To illustrate the entwined nature of empowerment and (neo)conservative politics, I refer back to Chapter Four where I described my empirical data. Mariska described her distaste for radical feminist groups, as well as religious oriented groups⁴⁷ who aim to ‘save’ women from sex work and prostitution. The position these groups occupy is in direct opposition to the women in the sex industry who, according to Mariska, are in the majority when choosing to not respond to these groups during visits and find the attention unwelcome. Not only do these women have to fend against such organisations, but also against feminist groups who have taken on positions on authority in the discussion on sex work. Two prominent figures she

⁴⁷ One such group is Scharlaken Koord (Scarlet Cord), a Christian based organisation who aims to help women leave prostitution by visiting windows three times a week in groups and informing women of options available to them. While the organisation views itself as a social work organisation, many women working behind the windows, and Mariska, view them as unwelcome as they work from the assumption that all women behind the windows are there involuntarily. This ‘saviour complex’ is seen as misguided and unwanted.

names as forerunners of the radical feminist groups are Karina Schaapman and Renate Van der Zee⁴⁸ who both make direct links between human trafficking and prostitution, and who argue that the current system is a failure in its implementation of decriminalisation. Mariska had the following to say about the effects of radical feminism and other abolitionist groups on the dynamics of the Red Light District:

“You can only have an honest discussion if you give people the possibility to look from other points of view – positive and negative ones. And that’s not what they do. They see prostitution as something that doesn’t fit in our modern civilisation. Because it’s not a respectful way to deal with women, which is interesting because they completely ignore male sex workers in their discussions. Yes, they see sex work as sexual exploitation. They see the customer as the male party that is taking advantage of the weak position of the women in the world. And every time I talk to people like that, the only thing they constantly ask, is don’t you think it’s so terrible that this is happening? And then they mean trafficking. That’s the only thing they think about. And they honestly believe, which is your right, for them prostitution is evil, it’s not the way you should deal with your body, your sexuality. They force their opinion and view onto people around them, and I’m allergic to that” (I: 1-2015).

The binary division becomes clear when analysing excerpts like these where the accusation is clearly made that abolitionist groups do not have the welfare of sex workers at heart, but rather, that welfare is defined according to strict ideological codes which are appropriated to spaces and situations despite a foundational fallacy of not contextualising experience. To aid in problematising the position of sex workers as women who entered the sex industry through coercion or force, rather than individuals who made conscious decisions to enter the sex industry, Mahmood (2005: 15) states the rhetoric of traditional debates surrounding the actions of all women across the globe: “one could, of course, argue in response that, the intent of these women notwithstanding, the actual effects of their practices may be analyzed in terms of their role in reinforcing or undermining structures of male domination”. This rhetoric, she argues, ignores the “... projects, discourses, and desires that are not captured by such terms” and remains rooted in binary systems of thought characterised by submission and resistance (Mahmood 2005: 15).

Sex workers in the Red Light District take part in the politics of Red Light and civic bureaucracy everyday through their continued presence as active sex workers. This participation is not, as a binary understanding would have us believe, a reaffirmation of patriarchal and capitalist domination, but rather a complex procedural practice in which

⁴⁸ Van der Zee is a journalist famed for her abolitionist position on sex work, human trafficking, and violence against women. Schaapman is a politician associated with the Dutch Labour Party (and a former prostitute) who is also opposed to sex work and makes direct links between prostitution and human trafficking.

freedom of choice is enacted, regardless of the supposedly inherent subordination of women. In Mahmood's opinion, the belief that women's participation in structures and movements which supposedly espouse female subordination reinforces this oppression, is problematic to the foundations of feminist theory. The feminine is rejected if assumed to be constructed under the male gaze, leading to a critical point in feminism, namely the enactment of choice. Individual and collective actions, thought processes, and consequential effects on different parts of society are all taken as part of patriarchy which cannot be escaped, creating a vacuum in which socio-cultural and political phenomena are observed and analysed. Rather than upholding an oppressive system through the belief and reinforcement of such a sentiment, we must view new actions, thought processes, and behaviours as consequences of decision-making processes based on a need to escape such restrictive boundaries – still connected, but enforcing a conscious re-appropriation of traditional gender hierarchies and view of society with the aim of challenging heteronormative structures. Mahmood convincingly argues that in order to accomplish such goals, agency needs to be conceptualised as an entity based upon historical and cultural specificities (2005: 14), removing it from a predetermined value based on existing understandings of power. Thus, it is impossible for radical feminism to determine whether or not women possess agency in the sex industry based solely on radical theories of sex, gender, and patriarchy. A radical author such as MacKinnon cannot, in good feminist consciousness, ascribe an identity, or an assumption of agency and free-will when the subject is not present. Mahmood says:

“Viewed in this way, what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency – but one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment. In this sense, agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms” (Mahmood 2005: 15).

Not only does this binary penetrate the layers of meaning within the District, but it also directly influences the centre-periphery argument by strengthening its premise rather than dismantling it. It strengthens the foundation of the Self-Other debate while situating certain groups, such as radical feminist scholars, at the centre of knowledge production. Groups and organisations such as the City Council, the United Nations, Dutch governmental departments, and even Amnesty International, are situated the centre of knowledge, power, and opportunity, while sex workers are located at the margins of control over their lives and workspaces. With the establishment of PIC and PROUD, and the involvement of other interest groups such as the Red Umbrella Fund, Mama Cash, and Sexpertise, the marginal

positions are actively being challenged and progress is being made towards a move to the centre of importance in pursuit of new definitions of sexuality, identity, and gender politics. This move is not only imminent, but necessary for the process of fighting for equal rights and recognition and positioning sex workers as critical actors in the construction and validity of their own lives. City Council has, in its efforts to improve the City Centre and Red Light District, given rise to more than simply sanctioned implementations, but has provided sex workers and interest groups with the necessary tools and resources to go beyond such projects and bring about a resistance on a scale beyond what was foreseen by validating complaints and issues of importance as rooted in the problematic Project 1012 and Project Eigenraam. The power of City Council has acted in a manner contradictory to its original aim, and has led to new forms of power originating, causing a clash between powers, authorities, bureaucrats and sex workers. PIC may be viewed as a central convergence of situated and contextualised power, based upon an agenda formed in response to dominant discourses portraying not only the Red Light District, but sex work internationally, in a negative light. It becomes the metaphorical counterpart of City Council, and by referring back to the centre and periphery argument, presents an imaginative and influential counterargument to oppressive impositions. The boundaries of the centre and periphery are shifted when the traditional role of City Council; and the peripheral role of PIC are challenged. As shown through my fieldwork, the activism embodied by PIC, Mariska, and all other participants actively blur boundary lines by systematically moving away from the periphery, into the centre where the position of knowledge producers may be ascertained. A continuous process of awareness, interaction, and a process of making problems visible, aids in the strengthening of activist politics.

5.2.1: Agency and Power:

Mahmood primarily uses a poststructuralist lens to analyse discourses on power, agency, and binaries, often critiquing post-structuralism for its tendency to

“... conceptualize agency in terms of subversion or resignification of social norms, to locate agency within those operations that resist the dominating and subjectivating modes of power. In other words, I will argue that the normative political subject of poststructuralist feminist theory often remains a liberatory one, whose agency is conceptualised on the binary model of subordination and subversion” (Mahmood 2005: 14).

Despite this critique of post-structuralism, it remains a valuable methodological consideration in deconstructing the intricate levels of power within the Red Light District by troubling existent structural inequalities and subversion. Central to this is locating power and its functions of re-appropriation and constructing socio-political contexts suitable to its needs, as well the effect socio-cultural discourse has on the manifestation of power. This relationship is definitive in acknowledging the fact that we cannot define agency based on set of criteria, but that agency is dependent on the flux of concepts, norms, activisms, and personal politics. Allowing the binary model to continue limits not only a superficial understanding, but closes us off from the opportunity to redesign discourses free from restrictive categories. Mahmood then moves to incorporate Foucault and Butler and their respective discussions on power and the subject into her discussion on women's agency and the impact of these theories on practices of free will. Removing the subject from strict binaries, Foucault (as cited in Mahmood 2005: 17) defines the paradox of subjectivation as: "the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she chooses to become a self-conscious identity and agent". As mentioned, the proposed strategies, developed to cement dominant control, have become sites of resistance, equipping PIC, PROUD and sex workers with the means to bring their concerns and needs to light.

Both the abolitionist and empowerment paradigms, their advocates, and the actions described in Chapters Three and Four, will be discussed in relation to Foucault's writings on power, and more specifically, his work and critique in the Repressive Hypothesis. This hypothesis, in its most basic form, has been the single most used form of language of current politics and socio-cultural dimensions regarding sexuality and its (in)visibility. I will discuss the Repressive Hypothesis in its current form and its presentation in the dominating discourses put forward by City Council and other groups involved in the upholding of an unchanging hierarchy of social worth. Following this, I will present Foucault's critique of the hypothesis by using the example of PIC and PROUD's activism within the Red Light District to directly challenge pervasive and invasive action plans by the City Council.

5.3: The Repressive Hypothesis and its link to the socio-political crisis of Red Light.

As we are dealing with a struggle of power and its hold on sexuality within the Red Light District, and continuing from Mahmood's writings on women's sexuality and agency within a designated set of beliefs and norms, it is the logical next step to move towards a framework dealing exclusively with power and knowledge. For this, I delve into Foucault's *A History of Sexuality Volume 1* (1978) for guidance on how to approach and take apart the unbalanced relationship between civil authorities and those subjects in its grasp. To not only understand this relationship, but to gain insight in how to equip organisations such as PIC and PROUD with the necessary tools to subvert this dominance will be the aim of this analysis.

Foucault starts his work by postulating that the Repression Hypothesis, functioning so long as the tool of oppressive power, is flawed in its pillars of truth, creating a false sense of entitlement and power. Foucault illustrates the manner in which sexuality is spoken about, controlled, and interpreted through means of authoritative power:

“As if in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present” (Foucault 1978: 15).

A manipulation of discourse in such a manner results in the relocation of nonconforming (acknowledging the status quo as a social and ideological construction) sexualities to the realm of silence and invisibility bears some resemblance to the situation in the Red Light District today. The Red Light District operates legally under Dutch law for several reasons, but remains subjected to discourse analyses developed in a space unfamiliar with sex work politics experienced by sex workers. It is the belief that legalising sex work would lead to better control over illegal activities as well as clamp down on businesses operating without licences. Another primary aim of legalising sex work was to effectively deal with rising numbers of human trafficking within the Red Light District through the implementation of various policies, guidelines, and action plans, with the majority of these action plans being the responsibility of the various City Councils across the country, thus distributing power and allowing for a unique embodiment of power and control in each municipality according to the aims of local government. It is argued that all new laws protect the positions of sex workers, and while certainly true in many cases, the definition of protection changes according to the shifts in the ruling City Council. As I have shown in Chapters Three and Four, the backlash against these strategies has been prominent and has introduced an element of not only gendered resistance, but has also lead to widespread media coverage, thus causing an outward

ripple of awareness and a renewed interest⁴⁹. To put this in perspective, I refer to the notion of silence and discourse that Foucault argued to be integral to the maintenance of a regime of discourses:

“Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies” (1978: 27).

What is revealed is the complex structural relationship between discourse, constructed as law or born out of resistance, and the powers it embraces as a protective defence against undesired influxes of ‘othered’ meanings. The Red Light District is an example of such a complex relationship between different discourses and the constant tug of war between imposed meaning and the meaning that is taken to be understood by those that are supposed to be accepting of silenced (hence, controlled) discourses. My fieldwork emphatically highlighted the changing nature of meaning and the usage of such meanings to counter oppressions. Leading from Mahmood, I argue that the implementation of Project Eigenraam and Project 1012 are deliberate shows of domination over sexuality. Power, as a dominant force held by the City Council, cannot be escaped from. It can, however, be subjected to movements closer to its core which have the ability to alter power dynamics to ultimately result in a permanent transition. During the protest march, when sex workers descended on the offices of the mayor, it was not only a display of a physical blurring of boundaries, but a metaphorical strategy to destabilise institutionalised perceptions of control by challenging both the mayor and the City Council on the grounds of discontent and political bureaucracy. While both 2nd and 3rd wave feminism would support the usurpation of such oppressive powers as that of City Council, it is 3rd wave politics that recognises the complex tools needed to deconstruct such tactics in order to recognise the multitude of motivations and goals, at the same time acknowledging that such strategies do not challenge sex work per se, but rather challenges affronts to personal beliefs and rights. The implementation of both projects at the same time is central to the maintenance of City Council’s power by conjoining the goals and presenting them as beneficial to sex workers. Instead, the implications would rather become detrimental in nature as the closure of over a hundred windows in Project 1012 cannot compensate for the

⁴⁹ As this thesis is limited by time constraints and is informed by fieldwork gathered during some time in the past, I urge readers to not take these debates as the full and complete portrayal of the sociocultural and political factors present in the Red Light District. Numerous changes and new forms of protests have emerged in the time since the data were gathered, thus my arguments should be viewed as preliminary analysis of prominent issues prevalent, while emergent actions should be viewed as progressions and successes of reactive and activist based resistance.

roughly fourteen windows opening in accordance to Project Eigenraam. In the end, the sex workers would be crippled in their ability to retain power and agency in their private lives, with City Council retaining executive control. PIC and PROUD thus become symbols of not only challenging the system, but the very real presence of sex workers as workers capable of choice and worthy of listening to.

City Council may feel this resistance and is attempting to control such shows of resistance. Pollis (1987: 402) in her review of *A History of Sexuality* defines the repressive hypothesis as follows:

“The repressive hypothesis holds that, beginning in the 17th century and following a period of relative openness about sexual matters, they were increasingly subjected to forces of prohibition, censorship, denial, and non-recognition. At the personal level, repressive power acted negatively on sexuality. At the social level, the onset of repression neatly coincided with the development of the industrial, capitalist society”.

With repression acting as a sentence to disappear, the law functioned alongside repression to legitimise the boundaries placed on the discussion on sexuality. Foucault agreed with the repressive hypothesis in its reasoning that sex had become something to control, to limit to certain spaces, and that the mechanics of the repressive hypothesis became the main tool to accomplish this mission. However, Foucault asks why and how this took place. Foucault has shown that discussions regarding sexuality have increased across the centuries, but the manner in which it is talked about, the manner in which sexuality is shaped as a concept, and eventually, as the enactment of those concepts and influences, is the problematic point in history. Parallel, and intertwined, with increasing acts and shows of power, the issue of sex and sexuality has become a highly controlled one. Sex has become part of the realm of rationality and reason, rather than that of freedom, enjoyment, and passion. The re-appropriation of sexuality not only takes place by City Council (and to a larger extent the Dutch Legal system) in its continuing attempts to control the embodiment of a sexuality that is traditionally not considered socially sound, despite its legal status in the Netherlands, but also by PIC and PROUD, and even individuals who actively seek to redefine their sexuality within the scope of both their jobs as sex workers, but also in their personal identities. The latter process however should not be viewed as a continuation of a restrictive process of control and definition, but should be seen as reactionary process in which reappropriation becomes the only way to reverse those prohibitionist tactics employed by a civil government characterised by privilege. The situatedness of power becomes troubled by this resistance, if not immediately usurped.

Foucault's work on power and sexuality situates the City Council as a seat of power using the law to further its regulations governing sexuality, thus being an example of the repressive hypothesis in action, while at the same highlighting the power of PIC and PROUD as the embodiment of Foucault's critique on the repressive hypothesis. The repressive hypothesis creates censorship and functions as the way in which ruling states and entities can legitimise the silencing of sex(uality) outside of pre-determined meanings and policies. This silencing process leads to what Foucault calls the triple edict of "taboo, nonexistence, and silence", acting to further strengthen the position of governing entities to limit, and eventually, eradicate any supposed transgression of said laws that may challenge the entire dogma of repression and silencing. The tactics of City Council (and national laws), in its effort to regulate sex work, is an enactment of the repressive hypothesis as it seeks to repress *undesirable forms* of sexuality, and it acts as a conduit through which to discuss sexuality in a certain context. It attempts to redefine the enactment thereof by imposing regulations which will curb sexualities that do not fit into a 'socially and morally sound model'. Such an exploration of sexualities, and the commercialisation thereof is limited by the censorship of symbolisms and the curtailing of definitions. While this may be construed as repression, it also retains an element of public discussion and definition, but remains a discourse damaging to the rights of sex workers in their definitions of sex work and sexuality. Promoting discussion while restricting movement and choice is a powerful tool of bureaucracy in its goal to control and censor. The curtailment of undesirable forms of sexuality does not find a permanent foothold within the Red Light District, based purely on the shifting relationship between sex workers and City Council and the already troubled status of hegemonic power held by City Council. Dominant control may still be exerted by civil government based on political influence and the influence male hegemony has in the hierarchy of power, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to accomplish the implementation of oppressive structures due to the growing involvement of sex workers in the constructions of their own lives. This by no means indicates that all regulations and strategies are designed with oppression as the goal, as institutionalised regulatory practices are needed to ensure the safety and protection of sex workers in a volatile world. It is the implementation and the exclusionary practices that preclude these strategies that is problematic.

Foucault's fundamental belief that knowledge, power, and language were intrinsically linked and dependent on each other for meaning resulted in a critique of the repressive hypothesis as it curtailed the production of knowledge and subsequent new power. Despite a claim that more intellectual, scientific, and thus 'valid' move towards sex research would lead to a better

understanding of sexuality, promising the betterment of society, the repressive hypothesis and its proponents prohibited a free and truly intellectual discussion about the complexity of sexuality beyond the scope of marriage, law, and social decorum. Breaking away from this hypothesis is essential in understanding the solidified and unchanging position of the City Council and the reactionary forces opposing its discriminatory and restrictive laws. City Council's response that the appropriate laws are already in place to protect sex workers and that any further protests are unnecessary is indicative of a regression into a space where the grasp on forcefully obtained power and the right to knowledge production is clung to, regardless of the consequences for those in marginalised positions of submission and adherence. These marginalised positions become platforms for resistance against the triple edict mentioned above by turning their positions into subversive forces of action. PIC's existence in itself becomes a resistant force of knowledge production by constructing a productive platform for interaction with the public, who more often than not, are subjected to the views of the popular discourse surrounding sex work as reproduced by City Council. PIC and PROUD instigate revolt and revolution by moving against repression and openly challenging sexual injustices by changing the discourse through their activism and community involvement. During the protest through the streets of Amsterdam the protesters carried posters with various slogans (as shown in Chapter Four) that actively challenged the stereotypes by reclaiming them and declaring them as false. Rather than rejecting them, the protesters utilised negative connotations to change them into positive representations of themselves.

Rather than only being an intellectual exercise to change discourse, it becomes a political tool to change actions and behaviours. Obtaining this type of power, and usurping those powers which aim to manipulate sexuality, requires a re-evaluation of knowledge and power and an understanding of who wields that power and why. Discursively, sexuality is used to obtain power by supposedly advancing understanding and discussion, but it fails to include the consequences of these discussions in real life experiences. This one-directional method obscures the possibility of alternative ways of discussing sexuality and their more productive consequences capable of furthering equality.

The old saying 'knowledge is power' becomes applicable in two ways; first, the City Council has the legal power to alter social states and legal policies by forcing a scripted version of sexuality into the mainstream public. Mass consumption of a socio-political ideology is the result with the aid of the media, which for so long, has been the mouthpiece for political

parties and interest groups. We witnessed this in the implementation of Project 1012 and Project Eigenraam. By creating a context catered to a specific goal of eradicating ‘bad sexuality’, City Council is evoking its own version of knowledge is power; knowledge *production* is power. Conversely, PIC and PROUD project what they believe is a more accurate reflection of the lived realities of sexuality as a concept and the individual sexualities of sex workers. Whereas sexuality acts a negative impact on power if used by City Council and other bureaucratic structures when used to restrict movement and resistance, sexuality becomes a positive tool for freedom of movement and liberation when it’s applied to activist ethics. The protest becomes an illustration of the power of a silenced and restricted sexuality when impositions to further denigrate its existence is brought to life without the integration of marginalised voices on which it would have the largest impact. Pollis (1987: 402) asks why sexuality has become the prime indicator and catalyst for power relations, and “what is the relationship of the new knowledges of sexuality to sexual liberation”. At the heart of the answer lies discourse and its inherent ability to describe those who talk about sexuality, what they say, why they say it, and their rootedness in institutions. If we can begin to answer this question, sexuality as a power determinant may be better used to further liberation rather than repression.

5.4.1: Hidden Forms of Sexual Profiling.

As scholars in the human sciences, we are aware that objectivity as a concept is flawed; our supposed objectivity and positionality is directly linked to some manifestation of power and the human sciences which as Victor (as cited in Pollis 1987: 403) argues “seek to improve the human condition through liberal values... are themselves inextricably expressions of domination; they seek to know in order to organize”. Victor’s exact meaning on what he views as “organising” may not be that clear, but it is not difficult to formulate various ideas on its meaning. In the first instance, it can be postulated that one form of organisation takes place according to an overarching definition of power aimed at shaping and constricting behaviours believed to be either appropriate or inappropriate to the reigning regime. This type of organisation becomes a subjective practice exclusively taken part in by those parties with a stake in upholding the preferred status quo and reproducing ‘truth’. Secondly, a new discourse can be opened when we redefine what we mean by ‘domination’ and ‘organise’. Improving the human condition, which should ideally be the goal of those in the human

sciences, is hardly a peaceful, uncomplicated process without risk and rejection. Domination is an important concept when attempting to bring silenced voices and bodies to the centre of importance and meaning. In order for new practices, norms, values, and understandings to be born, the voices of those on the margins, the ones for which standpoint theory advocate, need to become dominant in the discourses surrounding sex work. A critical re-evaluation of dominating forces and their motives needs to occur to realise new and better opportunities for the attainment of equal rights. Once this has been established, structural reorganisation can take place on a level pertaining to the welfare of sex workers. PIC and PROUD are moving towards this critical point in the ongoing struggle for recognition by seeking to dominate discussions on politics and policies which could impact not only their livelihoods, but also their identity as women and citizens. The protest was a show of dominance and solidarity which attempted to take control over their own lives and welfare, with City Council acting not as the one and only voice of law and permission, but acting as members of a cohesive strategy to reduce discrimination, stigmatisation, and to end the constant attacks on the livelihoods of all sex workers. The knowledge to accomplish this exists already within the confines of marginalisation and current ventures to spread this knowledge and ground it as a legitimate source of experience and truth are proving difficult on a socio-political level. More success has been made with customers who enter PIC in order to satiate a curiosity about sex work. I suspect this process moves easier as there are no barriers between the individual and Mariska, with whom they speak. The value of a conversation, becoming part of the process, in such an intimate setting may prove to be the main line of power in order to bring about change. It is no secret what the power of the public can accomplish when faced with questionable laws and policies. This touches on the innate power of PIC to alter perceptions and mobilise change.

This brief discussion of my empirical fieldwork aimed to situate such events within the theory of Foucault and Mahmood, influenced by the authors referenced in Chapters Two and Three. I end this thesis with a brief conclusion where I summarise my main research question and the path that led to this discussion.

CHAPTER SIX:

Conclusion.

It is perhaps the most famous phrase in the history of sex research; contested, affirmed, it has been viewed as the pillar of sexist patriarchal oppression, built upon the foundation of existing structures, but it has also been seen as the *coup de grâce* to radical arguments, arguing that its existing structure is the recognition of liberal empowerment and choice. Indeed, ‘prostitution is the oldest profession on earth’ has been wrung dry of meaning and symbolism; it has become the representation of sex research. But, as Zatz rightly points out:

“Such talk obscures the differences in social and cultural context – differences in economic organization, normative sexual practices, and the relationship between sexual practices and identity, between economic practices and identity, and so on – that shape the significance and structure of prostitution within any particular historical space... it is the product of historical development that, as with any other sociocultural object, results in shifting regions of continuity and discontinuity with past practices and discourses” (Zatz 1997: 278).

This thesis began with the main question being posed as one of power and gender – how do activist organisations, within a space such as the Red Light District, characterised by questions of morality, gender, money, and sexual entitlement, navigate processes of power as observed through the mechanisms of City Council’s tools of repression and silence? I have attempted to show that through a process of ‘gatekeeping concepts’, radical feminists, predominantly from the 2nd wave movement, who identify as anti-sex work have systematically encouraged a rhetoric of patriarchal oppression and inherent violence in the sex industry as the dominant organisation of society. Through the internalisation of concepts and theories, authors such as Catharine MacKinnon and Julie Bindel have appropriated gender binaries and hierarchies to further the radical feminist cause of abolishing the sex industry. In contrast, my focus on liberal feminism, often aligned with 3rd wave feminism in the last three decades, has aimed to illustrate a radical change of thought and perception regarding the sex industry as an institution, and the role of women play in the construction and demise of such structures, exemplified by Rubin (1984) in her insistence on a new radical theory of sex. I have attempted to show the diverging ideological standpoints espoused by different feminist schools, with radical schools embodying practices and beliefs that are being challenged by 3rd wave feminist groups as binary and static.

Through an analysis of theory I hope to have illustrated the fundamental differences which make the issue of sex work a continually contested one. This discontent has not served to further the rights of sex workers which would help ensure the safety of sex workers, but has rather lead to a worrying and critical stance in the international community regarding sex work. One only has to turn to international laws on sex work, current debates on the decriminalisation process, and discourses on human trafficking to locate damaging practices which do not benefit sex workers. Through a positioning of sex workers as dominant producers of knowledge, damaging narratives may be challenged and a revitalisation of saturated debates may occur as a productive antithesis to the current centre-periphery paradigm used to situate various forms of power and the actors involved in the reproduction and dismantling of power structures. I aimed to portray feminist discourse as both advantageous to the process of achieving gender equality through an embracing of liberal discourses focused on the promotion of diverse identities as valid consequences of decision-making. Through a rejection of essentialist practices, liberal practices can achieve a position wherein feminism may become relevant to those sex workers who are involved in activism and politics. Troubling radical discourses which focus on static perceptions of agency, control, and structure, must be an integral part of any social research involving the lives of people. While the achievements of 2nd wave feminism must not be overlooked or discarded, it must be subjected to a critique involving the evolutionary nature of social research and the increased visibility and efficacy of new feminisms. Rubin's (1984) new theory on sex may be viewed as the seminal influential piece of writing in orienting new social research. In addition, I have attempted to position myself as an ally, rather than as a producer, maintaining the academic insight while handing all essential power to those on who it would have the most effect.

The fieldwork I conducted at PIC served two purposes: first, empirical data as means to analyse theory is invaluable in its capacity to reflect theoretical sentiments, but also in its capacity to trouble and debunk theories. Secondly, conducting fieldwork strengthened (and supported) my aim of situating sex workers as central producers of knowledge regarding discourses on their lives, while in many cases, their voices have been met with secondary interest, or have been interpreted as either that of victims, or as a case of internalised misogyny and false consciousness where women objected to the label of victim. My fieldwork has further shown that movement among sex workers is an active process and mobilisations against oppressive structures are productive as they have forced City Council to adopt a more inclusive political arena of debate and decision-making. As a result, sex

workers may reclaim negative stereotypes by challenging their gendered, sexist foundations and asserting themselves as free-willed participants in social processes. Power as a restrictive and shaping force continues to exist, but has been problematised in order to bring about a shift in policies, opinions, and power relations. Transferring power to sex workers is key to realising equality and recognition as primary participants in Amsterdam's socio-cultural space. I have found that both PIC and PROUD have embraced the label of activist organisations capable of influence within the hierarchy of both the Red Light District and the City Council. They have managed to open a space of debate never before possible given the strength of power discourses on sexuality and control. Foucault and Mahmood have illustrated the fallacies of both universalism and essentialist thinking in socio-cultural constructions. Mahmood's work on the fluidity and value of agency is especially useful in the positioning of sex workers at the centre, with Foucault acting as a complementary aid in achieving this goal.

Truth is not an objective goal, and as researchers, we may never attain a position worthy of producing truth. Rather we must strive to fulfil our roles as allies and companions within a sexist world, aware of our reflexivity and positionality as feminist scholars. It has been my aim to portray how a marginalised group had managed to break boundaries and social sanctions to take that what had never been granted them, to reclaim worthy feminine identities, to assert themselves as capable and free women, and most importantly, to reclaim a fundamental right to choose. Through a clear and concise understanding of feminist theory, its internal struggles, in association with the complete inclusivity of those central to our research, we as scholars can help facilitate a radical move towards change. It is imperative to support the decriminalisation of sex work to promote the validity of not only feminism, but the value of acknowledging women as primary agents in the construction of their lives and their position as equal, and citizens worthy of respect, encouragement and support in all avenues of life. Sex work must be one of those crucial avenues of validation and only then can power be equally distributed in productive manners.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Alvarez, M. B. & Alessi, E. J. 2012. Human Trafficking is More Than Sex Trafficking and Prostitution: Implications for Social Work. *Journal of Women and Social Work*. 27(2): 142-152.

Appadurai, A. 1986. Theory in Anthropology: Center and Periphery. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 28(2): 356-361.

Bindel, J. 2005. Andrea Dworkin. *The Guardian*, 12 April 2005. [Online]. Available: <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/apr/12/guardianobituaries.gender> [Accessed 8 June 2015].

Bindel, J. 2015. *Amsterdarnation*. [Online]. Available: < <https://www.byline.com/project/3/article/41>> [Accessed 19 July 2015].

Bernstein, E. 2010. Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism: The Politics of Sex, Rights, and Freedom in Contemporary Antitrafficking Campaigns. *Signs*. 36(1): 45-71.

Bracke, S. & De la Bellacassa, M. P. 2007. The Arena of Knowledge: Antigone and Feminist Standpoint Theory. In: Buikema, R. & Van der Tuin, I. (eds). *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture*. Routledge: New York: 39-53.

Cho, S., Dreher, A. & Neumayer, E. 2013. Does Legalized Prostitution Increase Human Trafficking? *World Development*. (41): 67-82.

Clifford, J. 1983. On Ethnographic Authority. *Representations*. (2): 118-146.

Colburn, K, Jr. 1987. Desire and Discourse in Foucault: The Sign of the Fig Leaf in Michelangelo's "David". *Human Studies*. 10(1): 61-79.

Crowhurst, I., Outshoorn, J. & Skilbrei, M. 2012. Introduction: Prostitution Policies in Europe. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*. (9): 187-191.

Cruz, K. 2013. Unmanageable Work, (Un)liveable Lives: The UK Sex Industry, Labour Rights and the Welfare State. *Social & Legal Studies*. 22(4): 465-488.

Dines, G. 2012. A Feminist Response to Weitzer. *Violence Against Women*. 18(4): 512-517.

Dines, G. 2014. Public Lecture. *Feminism in London Conference*. London.

Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children. (2013). *Trafficking in Human Beings. Ninth Report of the Dutch National Rapporteur*. The Hague.

Ferguson, M. L. 2010. Choice Feminism and the Fear of Politics. *Perspectives on Politics*. 8(1): 247-253.

Foucault, M. 1978. *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1. An Introduction*. Penguin Books: London.

Felicia Anna. *Behind the Red Light District*. [Online]. Available: <http://achterhetraamopdewallen.blogspot.nl/> [Accessed 16 May 2015].

Geertz, C. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture". In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Gibly, J. N. 2012. Safe Sex for Sale: Is Legalizing Sex Work the Answer to Sex Trafficking in the Netherlands? *International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities*. 4(4): 1-9.

Halley, J. *et al.* 2006. From the International to the Local in Feminist Legal Responses to Rape, Prostitution/Sex Work, and Sex Trafficking: Four Studies in Contemporary Governance Feminism. *Harvard Journal of Law & Gender*. (29): 335-423.

Haraway, D. 1988. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*. 14(3): 575-599.

Jana, S. *et al.* 2010. A Tale of Two Cities: Shifting the Paradigm of Anti-trafficking Programmes. *Gender & Development*. 10(1): 69-79.

Jennes, V. 1990. From Sex as Sin to Sex as Work: COYOTE and the Reorganization of Prostitution as a Social Problem. *Social Problems*. 37(3): 403-420.

Kempadoo, K. 2003. Globalizing Sex Workers' Rights. *Canadian Woman Studies*. 22(3-4): 143-150.

Kirby, V. 1993. Feminisms and Postmodernisms: Anthropology and the Management of Difference. *Anthropological Quarterly*. 66(3): 127-133.

- Krølokke, C. & Scott Sørensen, A. 2006. Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls. In: *Gender Communication Theories & Analyses*. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA: 1-25.
- MacKinnon, C. 1991. Reflections on Sex Equality under Law. *The Yale Law Journal*. 100(5): 1281-1328.
- MacKinnon, C. 2005. "X Underrated". *Times Education Supplement*, 20 May, 1-6.
- MacKinnon, C. 2011. Trafficking, Prostitution, and Inequality. *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*. 46(2): 271-309.
- Mahmood, S. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press.
- Marking, H. 2005. The Real Legacy of Andrea Dworkin. *The Guardian*, 15 April 2005. [Online]. Available: <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/15/gender.politicsphilosophyandsociety>> [Accessed 8 June 2015].
- Martin, M. 1993. Geertz and the Interpretive Approach in Anthropology. *Synthese*. 97(2): 269-286.
- Martin, N. K. 2007. Porn Empowerment: Negotiating Sex Work and Third Wave Feminism. *Atlantis*. 31(2): 31-41.
- Moran, R. 2014. Public Lecture. *Feminism in London Conference*. London.
- O'Neill, M. *et al.* 2002. Renewed Methodologies for Social Research: Ethno-mimesis as Performative Praxis. *The Editorial Board of The Sociological Review*. 69-88.
- Orr, C. M. 1997. Charting the Currents of the Third Wave. *Hypathia*. 12(3): 29-45.
- Outshoorn, J. 2012. Policy Change in Prostitution in the Netherlands: from Legalizing to Strict Control. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*. (9): 233-243.
- Overall, C. 1992. What's Wrong with Prostitution? Evaluating Sex Work. *Signs*. 17(4): 705-724.

Phipps, A. 2015. Identity, Experience, Choice and Responsibility. *Genders, Bodies, Politics*. [Online]. Available: <https://genderate.wordpress.com/> [Accessed 19 July 2015].

Pollis, C. A. 1987. The Apparatus of Sexuality: Reflections on Foucault's Contributions to the Study of Sex in History. *The Journal of Sex Research*. 23(3): 401-408.

Prokhovnik, R. 1998. Public and Private Citizenship: From Gender Invisibility to Feminist Inclusiveness. *Feminist Review*. (60): 84-104.

PROUD – Dutch Union For Sex Workers. [Online]. Available: <http://wijzijnproud.nl/>. [Accessed 5 August 2015].

Prostitution Information Centre. [Online]. Available: http://www.pic-amsterdam.com/wordpress/en/?page_id=14. [Accessed 5 August 2015].

Rubin, G.S. [1984]. Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality. In: Aggleton, P. & Parker, R. (eds). 2014. *Culture, Society and Sexuality*. Routledge: New York: 143-178.

Rubin, G. S. 1993. Misguided, Dangerous and Wrong: An Analysis of Anti-pornography Politics. In: Assiter, A. & Avedon, C. (eds). *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures*. Pluto Press: 18-40.

Rubin, G. S. 1994. Sexual Traffic. *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. (6.2 + 3): 62-99.

Schweickart, P. P. 1993. In Defense of Femininity: Commentary on Sandra Bartky's "Femininity and Domination". *Hypathia*. 8(1): 178-191.

Scott, J. W. 1991. The Evidence of Experience. *Critical Inquiry*. 17(4): 773-797.

Snyder, R. C. 2008. What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay. *Signs*. 34(1): 175-196.

Snyder-Hall, R. C. 2010. Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of "Choice". *Perspectives on Politics*. 8(1): 255-261.

Spapens, T. & Rijken, C. 2015. The Fight Against Human Trafficking in the Amsterdam Red Light District. *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*. 39(2): 155-168.

Struening, K. 1996. Privacy and Sexuality in a Society Divided over Moral Culture. *Political Research Quarterly*. 49(3): 505-523.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2009. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2014. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*. (United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.14.V.10). Vienna.

Van der Tuin, I. 2007. The Arena of Feminism: Simone de Beauvoir and the History of Feminism. In: Buikema, R. & Van der Tuin, I. (eds). *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture*. Routledge: New York: 7-23.

Wagenaar, H. & Altink, S. 2012. Prostitution as Morality Politics or Why It Is Exceedingly Difficult To Design and Sustain Effective Prostitution Policy. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*. (9): 279-292.

Weitzer, R. 2007. The Social Construction of Sex Trafficking: Ideology and Institutionalization of a Moral Crusade. *Politics Society*. (35): 447-475.

Weitzer, R. 2009. Sociology of Sex Work. *Annual Review of Sociology*. (35): 213-234.

Weitzer, R. 2010. The Mythology of Prostitution: Advocacy Research and Public Policy. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*. (7): 15-29.

Weitzer, R. 2011. Sex Trafficking and the Sex Industry: The Need for Evidence-Based Theory and Legislation. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*. 101(4): 1337-1369.

Williams, S. 1993. Abjection and Anthropological Praxis. *Anthropological Quarterly*. 66(2): 67-75.

Zatz, N. D. 1997. Sex Work/Sex Act: Law, Labor, and Desire in Constructions of Prostitution. *Signs*. 22(2): 277-308.