Chapter 4

Women Selling Sex

When I approached the association that I would eventually volunteer for in their street sex working women's outreach service, I was fresh from my readings on the Western feminists' 'sex wars'. Against the radical feminist and abolitionist position that women in prostitution are structurally victims of sexual violence and exploitation (see e.g. Dworkin 1993; Farley 2004; MacKinnon 2011; Bindel 2017), I aligned with sex workers and sex radical feminists' position that adults who consensually sell sex are agentic subjects, albeit from within constraining conditions not of their choosing (see e.g. Chapkis 1997; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Doezema 2001; Agustín 2007; Weitzer 2010; Kotiswaran 2011; Grant 2014; Smith and Mac 2018). Nevertheless, my engagement with this debate was exclusively theoretical, and in hindsight, I had to accept that, unexpectedly (to me), my position at that time was quite liberal and contractarian. I used to overemphasize individual agency over structures, and as a result, I could not reconcile my notion of 'choice' with the compellingly hard material constraints under which most people sell sex for a living (Smith and Mac 2018). However, once I got into the field, I could not help but develop a more grounded and nuanced synthesis of these positions.

I met Luisa at 8 PM in the parking lot where the mobile outreach van was stationed. In her sixties, she was a senior volunteer with strong contacts among the sex working cis and trans women. Since the women were overwhelmingly migrants (Chapters 1; 5), our main objective was to share practical information on how to access sexual and reproductive

health services based on their nationality/citizenship (i.e. EU or non-EU) and migration status (i.e. un/documented).[1] Luisa arrived carrying the work tools that we needed for the night – boxes of safer sex items, hot tea and coffee thermoses and the mobile phone that a colleague would call to check in with us at regular intervals to ensure that we were safe. We put the material within easy reach on the back seats. Luisa switched on the phone, I turned on the van engine, and we started our night shift.

While I had never stepped into a night club before undertaking this research (Chapter 3), the streets where people negotiate the sale of sex are public spaces that anyone can potentially walk or drive through at any time of the day or night. In some sense, then, they are accessible, perhaps even familiar spaces. However, they transfigure once we look at them as work sites. As we reached the city's outskirts, the web of arterial roads and secondary streets connecting motorways, industrial zones and agricultural fields that in the daytime was abuzz with factory and agricultural workers had turned into an outdoor sex marketplace. There and then, any cis or trans woman stationing on the side of the street was quite likely at work. The luckiest ones were under or in the proximity of a streetlight – making women more visible to potential customers; allowing them to screen the latter better in the initial approach stage, and more broadly enabling them to practice higher levels of street-savvy. There were, though, more women than streetlights, so some were stationed in the shadows, and their silhouette emerged so late that, at times, we could no longer stop the van safely and had to make a U-turn to reach them. Few enjoyed the privilege of stationing on a pavement – those streets were made to be traversed by motor vehicles only, not to walk along or stand by.

The night was as cold as an ordinary winter night can be, with a looming threat of frost. In some respects, however, it was quite an exceptional one. It was the 23 December – the night before Christmas Eve – and compared to the usual bustle, this semi-urban landscape suddenly looked emptied of women and cars. Perhaps in the festive season men were spending more time at home with their families and more money on gifts to them, rather than going out to buy sex for their only pleasure. If that was the case, many women were likely and purposefully staying at home as well – lest they risked being out all night in that freezing cold to earn hardly the money to pay the taxi back to their accommodation. As we drove in the dark, I noticed longer-than-usual stretches of road between a working woman and the next. Suddenly, I sensed all the dread of standing on those streets and the compelling nature of the needs underpinning such a difficult, hazardous and constrained choice.

We spotted Stefania at the crossroad where she was normally stationed. This consistency, which may have reflected her relatively senior status on the street,

enabled her to nurture relationships with potentially regular customers – as the men would know where to find her if they so wished. On this particular night, Stefania was with a new colleague, Ileana, who was Romanian like her and also seemingly as young (early twenties). Stefania cheered us up with more spark than usual, as if we were friends coming to pay her a visit after a long absence. Excited, she leaned through the car window to show us a picture of her and her husband's new puppy, and we complimented her on its cuteness. Then, Luisa asked whether her husband had found a job 'at last'. Stefania shrugged her shoulders and said that he had not. Evidently, her sex work revenues supported the livelihood of them both, and I knew that Luisa and other volunteers considered such spousal arrangement as evidence that theirs was no 'genuine' marriage and that it somewhat disguised some forms of sexual exploitation. That was both possible and impossible to know from our outsider position.[2] Still, I took note that Stefania's husband was Romanian himself, and in Italy's highly gendered and racialized labour market, there were few jobs that he could realistically aim for, while the construction sector that typically employed many Eastern European male migrants was at a standstill following the 2007–08 crisis.

After the new puppy, Stefania started chatting about the many Christmas gifts she was receiving from her regulars: white gold and yellow gold earrings, necklaces, Swarovski. 'And it is just the beginning!' she giggled. Then she spoke of something else, but I was not really listening, for in my mind I began wondering why Stefania was throwing one conversation starter after another, like on a rushing stream. Perhaps, I thought, we were an entertaining distraction in the emptiness of a slow and cold working night. Meanwhile, Ileana stood silent throughout our chatter, her eyes steady on the street and the few vehicles passing by.

At some point, I saw a car approaching from the rear-view mirror. It stopped just a couple of meters behind our van. Two men sat in the front seats, and that was all I could see. I thought that one of the two women would go and speak with them, but they did not. Instead, Ileana moved closer to Stefania and turned her back on them. Shielded by her colleague, Stefania leaned in the window and asked us to please stay until the car left because they were scared. She explained that she recently got spooked after seeing a man unexpectedly jumping from a car. 'You have to be very careful at Christmas time because people have little money, and we are at risk of robbery', she explained (ICRSE 2020, 16).

I cannot say how much time went by before that car made a U-turn and left, but it felt awfully long. After all, we were four women out at night, in the middle of nowhere, and even if we had called for help, realistically it would have taken too long to arrive to spare us an assault. Throughout, Stefania did not stop one minute chatting with us. However, her tone and

tales had turned gloomy. She lamented that her father kept spending all her remittances on alcohol and said that he was physically abusive with his wife – her mother. Disconsolately, Stefania added that the latter had tried a few times to leave him but eventually stayed, fearing that she would be labelled 'a *puttana*' had she deserted the marital home (Pheterson 1996, 15). I did not know, nor did I ever ask, whether her mother knew that she sold sex (also) to support them. Other scholars, however, observed that there is often a tacit 'do not ask do not tell' agreement between the women and their families (Andrijasevic 2010, 102).

As soon as the sinister car left, the women moved away from our van and regained their street visibility. Stefania retrieved some of her cheerfulness and started teasing Luisa. Since they had become 'like mother and daughter', why not make that tie official? 'So you can then put your inheritance in my name!', she exclaimed. We all laughed loudly, yet there was something in Stefania's joke that did not entirely sound like one. As economic necessity drove her to that dangerous work and place, and a wish to 'help' women in her position drove the associations' volunteers there, what would effective 'help' look like?

Both women kept switching their eyes from us in the van to the street whilst moving sideways to keep warm on that freezing winter night. 'And if I meet a man richer than my husband, I will marry him', Stefania proclaimed, 'for love passes through one's belly, right?' She then told us of a recent conversation she had had with one of her regulars after one of his recurrent professions of love for her. 'Are you rich?' she asked him. He was bewildered. 'He said, "Are you asking it for real?!" and I told him, "Yes, I will not marry you if you are not rich."' Then Stefania gave Luisa and me a frank look, stretched her arms wide open and shrugged her shoulders, as if to say there was nothing left to be said, that it was very much normal to think this way, and she was just being honest in saying it out loud. 'What does marriage consist of, after all?' she added. And as her question worked its way inside me, it shifted shape into belly cramps.

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Stefania and Ileana are two out of an unknown number of Italian and migrant cis and trans women selling sex in Italy – outdoor or indoor, regularly or occasionally, as a primary or side occupation. As such, they embody the archetype of the unchaste woman that most recreational pole dancers and lap dancers dreaded to be identified with. This chapter, then, discusses how women whose sale of sex structurally subjects them to the whore stigma claim value and dignity through or despite their work. Doing so requires delving deeper into the analysis of the relations of power among women, for which this chapter's opening vignette provides an entry point.

Class profoundly shaped the position of the four women in it. As a start, Luisa and I – the two non-sex working women – enjoyed a privileged position affording us to be in the van, rather than outside. Moreover, albeit unpaid volunteers, we still occupied a self-ascribed 'helping' position akin to the 'new employment sphere' that middle-class women created for themselves over two centuries ago 'through the naming of a project to rescue and control working-class women' (Agustín 2007, 8). 'Rescue' coincided with the discipline of women into docile female subjects who would be good servants and, as such, functional to the reproduction of the social order and the prosperity of the family and the nation (Skeggs 1997). Against this background, Stefania's tease that Luisa should adopt her so that she can become her heir puts in stark relief the gap existing between the soft 'help' that we (the women in the van) could offer and the compelling material needs pushing the women to be out on the street.

From a gender perspective, though, the differences between the four of us were less vivid and rather blurred along a continuum of degrees of subjection to the whore stigma and experience of its hazardous effects. In fact, in the particular situation portrayed in this chapter's opening vignette, we were all exposed to the threat of male violence. Moreover, the law would have unlikely been on our side had an incident happened. Under the gaze of the state enforcement apparatus and the media, we would have surely been put on the block for 'having taken it on ourselves', being as we were women out at night 'alone' – that is, without men – and in a remote and deserted place. Victim blaming in Italy is, in fact, recurrent and almost endemic (Zambelli, Mainardi and Hajek 2018; Hajek 2018).[3] Moreover, albeit physically absent, the thought of Stefania's mother was haunting – her resignation to endure life with her abusive husband attesting to the vicious and polymorphous productivity of the whore stigma.

However, there was another way in which class may have shaped the subjectivities of the four women in the vignette, and it lies in the different views that we held on the relationship between intimacy and money. Stefania's tease that Luisa should adopt her reflects how kinship plays an increasingly pivotal role in the intergenerational transmission of wealth or destitution (Piketty 2014). Nevertheless, it was her 'view from the belly' on marriage that struck me the most. Looking back at my intimate relationships with men, I could not recall having ever attributed any importance to their financial assets, nor marriage. So, when Stefania bluntly stated that it was not romance but money that made marriage both possible and desirable to her, I suddenly realized the extent to which my indifference to this contract indexed (also) my economic privilege. In that epiphany, I recognized within me the workings of what Viviana Zelizer famously conceptualized as the Western cultural norm positing that intimacy and

the market belong to two 'separate spheres and hostile worlds' (Zelizer 2005, 20).

As this chapter shows next, this normative, albeit imaginary separation plays a central role in feminist debates on the nature and regulation of prostitution, involving scholars, activists and sex workers (the three being sometimes overlapping categories). Its deconstruction matters, I contend, to find ways to resolve the tension between women's sexuality and status in ways that do not reproduce the patriarchal division of women into 'good' or 'bad', which the whore stigma regulates and reproduces. Subsequently, the chapter discusses these tensions empirically, drawing from the field notes annotated during my nights out on outreach service and the interviews with self-identified current or former sex workers. Against the normative view of work and intimacy as two discreet spheres, it will foreground the meanings and effects of their 'connectedness' (Zelizer 2005) and the role of boundaries in the women's lives.

Separate or Entangled Spheres?

The Western cultural norm juxtaposing love and money, emotions and calculus, intimacy and the market reflects what Viviana Zelizer epitomized as the 'twin ideas of "separate spheres and hostile worlds": distinct arenas for economic activity and intimate relations, with inevitable contamination and disorder resulting when the two spheres come into contact with each other' (Zelizer 2005, 20–21). This view gained strength in the nineteenth century in the context of the dramatic social transformations brought about by rising industrial capitalism (Zelizer 2005, 24). Against the cold, impersonal instrumentality of the market, where men sold their labour, the home was imagined as a space of respite and nurture (Wilson 2012, 41) – a shelter from commodification (O'Connell Davidson 2014, 518), wherein relationships were based on reciprocity rather than self-interest. Hence, intimacy signified both a space (i.e. the home) and the affects producing and involving its subjects through acts, emotions, attachments and orientations. However, as Marxist feminist political theorists (Federici 1975; Bhattacharya 2017) and economists (Folbre 1994; Elson 1998) have amply shown, the imagery of the home as a site of rest and leisure reflected a particularly gendered experience of consumption. It was, in fact, premised on the structural invisibilization of the work that women put into making it available as such. The signification of women's care work as an 'effortless' expression of their 'natural' dispositions rather than a pool of economically significant activities was a keystone in the scaffolding of this normative view.

The home was also discursively constructed as the shell of 'respectable' sexuality, which ought to be heterosexual, reproductive in purpose and gratuitous. Prostitution was intrinsically at odds with this imagined separation, as the sale of sex symbolically and materially transgressed its containment within the sphere of intimacy and the home. The ensuing social disapproval for this trade, however, was unequally distributed. In a context where the cultivation of men's heterosexual orientation clashed with female chastity norms, a class of abject female workers (McClintock 1995) emerged to meet the needs of the former – in times of war and peace alike – without spoiling 'good' women's virtue (Chapter 1). Some men also exchanged sex acts with other men in more or less explicit return for money, gifts and/or other types of rewards, but these 'sexual-economic exchanges'[4] were dangerously dysfunctional in the moral and political economy of heteronormativity. Thus, there lacked the material conditions for the development of a class of male prostitutes. Today, people selling sex are prevalently women (Smith and Mac 2018, 4), and they remain highly stigmatized for their work.

Female prostitution occupies a central position in the Western feminist debates on the role of sexuality in women's oppression and liberation (Chapkis 1997) – that is, the so-called 'feminist sex wars'.[5] At their core ran the juxtaposition of sexuality as fundamentally dangerous due to the patriarchal structures under which women lead their lives and as 'a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency' (Vance 1984b, 1). Pornography and prostitution were the wars' two main battlefields, and the latter became 'a central trope. The prostitute [came] to function as both the most literal of sexual slaves and as the most subversive of sexual agents within a sexist social order' (Chapkis 1997, 12).

Radical feminists and abolitionists conceive the prostitution of women as the 'cornerstone' of 'institutionalized sex [*sic*] inequality' between men and women (MacKinnon 2011, 273). They posit that sex should express mutual desire only (MacKinnon 2011, 281) and conceive its commodification as intrinsically harmful for women, contributing to the material and symbolic reproduction of an oppressive patriarchal order. For Carole Pateman, the social contract that Western political theorists imagine as being the foundational covenant marking the shift from the state of nature to organized societies is a 'sexual contract' sanctioning women's structural subordination to men (Pateman 1988). To be a man in 'modern patriarchy', she argued, means having the right to appropriate women's domestic and sexual labour through contracts of marriage (providing both) and prostitution (providing the latter only). Although Pateman acknowledged both contracts to be sources of livelihood and economic security for women (Pateman 1988, 132; 195), she maintained that the symbolic value of prostitution ought

to override its material significance: 'When women's bodies are on sale as commodities in the capitalist market, the terms of the original [sexual] contract cannot be forgotten; the law of male sex-right is publicly affirmed, and men gain public acknowledgment as women's sexual masters – that is what is wrong with prostitution' (Pateman 1988, 209). The marriage contract, though, is spared similar indictment, notwithstanding its material and symbolic role in the reproduction of the very same oppressive patriarchal order.

From the opposing perspective, sex radical feminists reclaimed the 'whore' as the most powerful symbol of political subversion. Differently from 'domesticated women [who] don't dare put a price on their time', they conceive the 'whore' as fully cognisant and in control of the value of her time and sexuality (Pat Califia quoted in Chapkis 1997, 30). For sex libertarians, the women '*rule*; they are in total control', and men's use of money is 'a confession of weakness [because] they have to buy women's attention' (Camille Paglia quoted in Chapkis 1997, 22).

Hence, although for sex working people prostitution is first and foremost an economic activity, the feminist sex wars pivoted on its symbolic value instead and specifically its impact on the reproduction or subversion of the gender relations of power between men and women. Prostitution was thus mainly discussed 'as a site of metaphor' more than 'an actual workplace' (Smith and Mac 2018, 2). On this abstract plane, notions such as 'choice' and 'coercion' could stand in a relation of mutual opposition. Nevertheless, as foregrounded in this chapter's opening vignette, women's entry into either prostitution or marriage cannot be detached from compelling material concerns – although the latter may be concealed behind a discursively purified intimate sphere (Zelizer 2005). By claiming the primacy of the material over the symbolic, then, sex workers demand that their work is recognized as a form of labour that ought to be performed in safety and dignity (see e.g. NSWP 2013; ICRSE 2020; TAMPEP 2021). The use of the term 'sex work' (versus prostitution) semantically realigns this activity within the totality of 'work' (by which I mean a person's exchange of labour for money); work that most people across the globe undertake under the coercion of need rather than in fulfilment of their 'free choice' (Doezema 1998). Perhaps, in an ideal world of perfect equality people would be able to choose their occupation based on preference and ability (Phillips 2013, 154). However, in the world as it is, the very possibility of this choice is rather often 'a significant class-marker' (Smith and Mac 2018, 40).

The normative, imagined separation between intimacy and the market, therefore, reflects the position of a particular (versus universal) and privileged subject. This trope is also harmful to women, in more than one way. Historically, it is indeed women who have been and largely remain

disproportionately in charge of performing the work that sustains its imagination by providing unpaid care work within their household and paid care work in someone else's (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004).[6] Women also constitute the largest group of people who transgress it by selling sex, and who have borne the brunt of the stigma attached to this trade. As the rest of this chapter and the next (Chapter 5) will show, for the migrant cis and trans women I met on the street, these two spheres were intricately entangled, making their imagination as separate a phenomenological impossibility (Zambelli 2019). Against this backdrop, I now move on to discuss how sex working women and sex workers claimed value through or despite their work.

Bittersweet Fruits

'Work is not going well. Actually, it is not going', commented Stefania, when the colleague in outreach service with me that night asked her how she was doing. 'Every day, I have more and more expenses', she pensively continued, 'I am consumed by this a lot when I have so many things to pay, and I cannot sleep at night.' Her work revenues ought to sustain both her nuclear family in Italy – her unemployed husband – and her family of origin in Romania, where high inflation rates had eroded her family members' salaries and pensions' purchasing power. 'Today, my brother sent me a text that made me cry', she continued, 'he said they have not eaten in the last two days.'

In Stefania's words, the market and intimacy are intensely interconnected spheres that she cannot afford to imagine as separate. Anguish, love and exploitation blended in her account of the burdensome, everyday material and emotional responsibilities she has to endure as the breadwinner for her multilocal and transnational family. Several scholars have highlighted the ambivalent needs, demands and desires informing the relationship between sex working women and their families. Prompted to the job by economic deprivation, their revenues support a large web of dependents (Brennan 2004, 123) but are also a gateway to higher consumption (Oso-Casas 2010, 53; Oso 2018, 113–14) and may engender some family members' abusive expectations (Piscitelli 2020, 289). Livelihood concerns thus interplay with status and social mobility aspirations, deepening the women's reliance on sex work.

Women's emotional and economic ties to their family members ambivalently appeared to be a source of additional strain they had to endure and pride for the fruits that their hard work allowed them all to enjoy. Stagnating unemployment, high inflation and the presence of minor and

adult dependents often constituted the dire backdrop against which women narrated the reasons why they were in Italy selling sex on the street. The forcefulness of the material needs pushing them to that place and position, and the lack of viable *and* financially equivalent alternatives, recurred in the conversations we had while on the mobile unit. For example, when I met Ana, she had just arrived in Italy on a tourist visa. After I presented the mobile unit services, she disclosed fear of contracting a sexual infection and asked whom to approach for a health check. Perhaps it was the sudden intimacy of this conversation between strangers that prompted her to say that she frequently cried at night repeating to herself that she was a prostitute. 'I do not like it here', she said. Then, possibly in anticipation of a question or objection that she thought that we – the privileged women in the van – might have raised, she immediately added that she knew that she 'could try to work as a *badante* (live-in care worker)', but she was 'doing it [selling sex]' for her kids, whom her mother cared for back in Albania (Chapter 5), her home country.

Like Ana, many sex working cis women coming from Eastern European EU countries were engaged in forms of circular migration, akin to Filipina migrant women in Japan's hostess clubs (Parreñas 2010), migrant cabaret dancers in Switzerland (Dahinden 2010) and Brazilian women selling sex in Spain (Oso-Casas 2010, 52). In their narratives, the cycle of work and consumption appeared to be by and large spatially split between 'here', where they sold sex on the street, and 'there', where their remittances sustained the livelihoods of their minor and adult dependents and to where they kept returning, time after time. 'There' was, therefore, the primary place to which they remained affectively oriented and where they projected their social mobility aspirations through the assets that they were working hard to accumulate. This cycle also followed a particular rhythm: women migrated to Italy to earn money *fast* then returned to their home (country) to partake in consuming the fruits of their labour as *slowly* as possible before going back to Italy to work when economic necessity dictated again.[7] And yet, this apparently neat spatial and temporal division of work and the home was never entirely so. Instead, these two spheres were profoundly interconnected through the transnational circulation of money and emotions, responsibilities and rewards, expectations, fulfilments and new demands.

EU and Italian migration laws and the costs of travelling from/to one's home (country) shaped the rhythm of women's movements across borders. Most third country nationals (i.e. non-EU) likely were undocumented migrants, who would refrain from crossing the border as much as possible. Conversely, EU citizens could and did flexibly and cyclically move in and out of Italy as much as they could afford to. This latter mobility pattern appeared to be more accessible to women from an Eastern European EU

country than to women from a Latin American country holding a Spanish (and hence EU) passport, many of whom relayed having been away from their home (country) for several years seeking to accumulate as many assets as possible before making the reverse journey.

Mercedes is a Paraguayan trans woman who left her country amid the 2007–2008 financial crisis, searching for a way out of rising unemployment rates and deteriorating living conditions. She migrated to Spain, where she married a Spanish man, thereby legally obtaining the right to reside in the country and, subsequently, to move freely across the EU (Chapter 5). When we first met, it was already several years since she had left home. 'Because I am here suffering not for … [nothing]: [but] for my children', she vehemently uttered. Like many of her peers, Mercedes looked at her home country as the place where she will eventually return to reap the fruits of her work (Oso 2016). In her case, however, the circularity of her migratory project was not just spatial and temporal but also deeply performative and embodied. Before going back, she gravely stated, she would 'turn back to male. I will remove *everything*', she stressed, pressing her hands down on her breasts. When I asked her why she was planning on doing that, she explained that 'they [her children] would not understand it'. I could not tell in that brief exchange what emotions she projected with regards this prospective bodily transformation that would erase these embodied signifiers of her trans woman identity. Pain and sacrifice nonetheless marked her position both here, in Italy (and in street sex work), and there, in her home country.

Against this backdrop, women's fulfilment of their breadwinning responsibilities for their family members provided them with a dignified position – as it was for their love that they coped with such difficult, hazardous, precarious and stigmatized job. Their attachment to a better life thus constituted a form of 'cruel optimism' – a term expressing 'a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility' and a subject's projection of continuity onto 'an enabling object that is also disabling' (Berlant 2006, 21). For Lauren Berlant, 'the conditions of ordinary life in the contemporary world … are conditions of the attrition or the wearing out of the subject' (Berlant 2006, 23). Women's endurance in sex work, I contend, was an embodied statement of their capacity to bear with the hardships that life threw at them. As such, the fruits borne through their hard work were bittersweet: they were costly but worthy. Arguably, though, the shame that the whore stigma reproduced prevented them from *commanding* respect for their breadwinning role.

I would like to suggest that women's projection of continuity onto these bittersweet fruits of their labour offered them a means to cultivate dignity and self-respect as *workers*, expressing materialist ethics that is self-contained,

as it neither rests upon nor reproduces anyone else's othering. This ethics, therefore transcends the necessity to displace the whore stigma onto any other category of women. I am nevertheless aware that this interpretation is both partial and situated (Haraway 1988; Harding 1992) and contingent upon the specific context, scope and limitations of my research. Hence, it complements rather than refutes other scholars' observations. For example, speaking of non-EU Eastern European migrant women who worked in third-party controlled prostitution in Italy, Rutvika Andrijasevic observed that they 'worked with the "victims/whores" binary, as they identified other women as "whores" and themselves as not-prostitutes' (Andrijasevic 2010, 113). They embedded their engagement in sex work in a narrative of familial sacrifice in the face of economic necessity (Andrijasevic 2010, 119), contextually passing the stigma on to women selling sex for 'economic gain' (Andrijasevic 2010, 114). Andrijasevic's work was based on in-depth interviews with women who were already out of sex work and under some form of social protection and/or assistance based on their status as sex trafficking victims (Andrijasevic 2010, 19). Differently, my suggestion is based on observations and brief conversations with women who were still in (street) sex work. Perhaps in those circumstances the women I met had no interest in claiming 'respectability', as we – the women in the outreach van – were too fleeting a presence in their lives. I like to think, however, that our contingent irrelevance was not the only reason explaining this difference I observed. I want to suggest that some women may have found it futile and eventually counterproductive to seek shelter under the very same patriarchal norms condemning them for being where they were – at work.

The night I first met Aleksandra, a Serbian woman well known to the association, she had just returned to work in Italy after an extended stay at home. She relayed that she had hoped to stay away longer, but as her mother fell sick, part of her savings went to cover this emergency health expenditure. She then shrugged her shoulders and shifted her eyes away from us and back to the street – the workplace enabling her to pay for the medical treatments that restored her mother's health but to where she would have rather postponed returning for a little longer. Her tone and posture betrayed her disappointment, but her deeds attested that she was putting her relational self above her individual self – and there was value in her positioning as a loyal, reliable and accountable family member.

As we spoke, a big car – an SUV – stopped right behind our van. Like Stefania and Ileana in the chapter's opening vignette, Aleksandra gave it a glance and kept talking with us. 'You know the hazards when you start this job', she said pensively as soon as the vehicle left, 'but I do not want to stop before I realize my dreams: buying a house, opening a shop back home.' Another car stopped shortly afterwards, and this time Aleksandra said

goodbye to us, for it was one of her regulars. The choice of which men to work with and which ones to discard is one of the key strategies that women adopt to stay safe at work in any sex market segment (UK Network of Sex Work Projects 2008). Working with men whom women know does not erase the risk that the latter may turn violent against them, but it nonetheless mitigates its likelihood. Regulars are also reliable sources of income and 'help' in difficult times (Piscitelli 2020, 286–87).

Once back on the road, the volunteer on shift with me told me that Aleksandra was first trafficked into Italy and managed to escape. Back in Serbia, however, she could not find any job, so she returned – but this time alone and on her terms.

Pliable Boundaries

Kyla is an Italian woman in her early fifties and a self-identified sex worker. It was her trust in the person vouching for me that opened the doors to her home, which was also her workplace. As I walked up the stairs to her flat, I wondered whether her neighbours knew about her job. They possibly did, I thought, due to the hustle and bustle of unknown men moving in and out of her apartment. I also wondered whether their cognizance was a good or a bad thing; if it made her feel safe; if any of them would step in and help if she required some, or if it was rather a cause of tensions and disputes.

At that time, Kyla worked as an 'escort' – an English term that Italians use to broadly refer to any sex working woman who does not sell sex on the street. A woman's classification under this label may offer shelter from the intersecting stereotypes projected onto the latter (Chapkis 1997, 96; 103). For Kyla, however, her self-identification as an escort did not reflect nor reproduce this othering premise, because it was right on the street that she first started selling sex.

Flash-back thirty years before: Kyla was working at a car factory, she was married to a man with a job that paid more than their bills, and they had three children. One day, when she lay bruised on the floor – like many other days before – she decided that it was time to leave her abusive husband. At that point, however, her wage was insufficient to make ends meet. 'How do you cope when you have three [children]? How can you? They have to go to school!' So, she started moonlighting, combining daytime factory work with night-time street sex work:

> I used to drive one hundred kilometres from my home to avoid any kind of … [possibility to be recognized]. I would go with my rattletrap to the truck parking space near the highway, and I would do anything with them [truck drivers]

> for fifty thousand Liras – or was it fifty euros?[8] I would do whatever. I stood there still, in the car, and they would arrive. There is an unspoken code that says that if a girl is there, she is there because … [she sells sex] and it is very dangerous, because you are surrounded by men.

Prevalently male, long haul truck drivers have a reputation for being frequent sex buyers.[9] For street sex working cis and trans women, they are simultaneously good and bad customers: they are good because many demand their services, but they are also bad because their transience runs against one of the women's key safety measures, which is to work as much as possible with known men. In Italy, male truck drivers are also widely stereotyped as aggressive and dangerous men on the street. Against this backdrop, Kyla's decision to sell sex alone at night in a truck parking space indexes both the compelling nature of the material needs pushing her to that dangerous place and position and her courage and determination to get by against all odds. 'And when you start to understand that this body can give you more than by saying "goodbye, thank you" [as shop assistants do], or by breathing acids in a factory …', she said, narrating her decision to resign from the latter workplace and sell sex only. Nonetheless, acknowledgement of Kyla's agency should not obfuscate the intersecting structural constraints under which she exercised it (Smith and Mac 2018): intimate male partner violence, capitalist exploitation of her labour and lack of appropriate public welfare support for a single working mother.

Over time, Kyla gradually moved indoors, where she could enjoy safer work conditions and higher returns on her labour. Work remained hard nonetheless, as the following attests:

> I used to work in this little house with the *maîtresse* [mistress] and three or four revolving girls. Once, there was this very rich, eighty years old man. I did it. It was only a … [oral sex, as she gestured]. Horrific, horrific! Lowering his trousers; seeing the panty girdle; the colour of his back; these hands that looked like my grandfather's … I cried on that occasion. It was dark, and I cried while doing it. It was shocking, one of the worst things I have ever done in my life. [I got] two hundred euros, of which one hundred went straight to the *maîtresse*. It was fifty-fifty. Always, for every meeting. Quite a lot, right?! And in fact, I resisted only three months there.

Under Italy's prostitution law (Chapter 1), this place where Kyla used to work would be classified as an illegal brothel. Its existence, though, was not at all exceptional. Already in the late 1980s – that is, approximately thirty years after brothels were officially shut down – Carla Corso (one of the two cofounders of *Comitato*) relayed they still existed, albeit under the guise of 'activities of massage, fortune-telling' (Corso 1991, 225). Nevertheless,

their illicit status engenders particular hazards for the women working in them. For example, Kyla had no leverage to negotiate better pay and, more broadly, she and everyone else working there were vulnerable to blackmail (ICRSE 2020, 34). 'We had the police coming', she said, 'Do you think they ever paid? No!'[10]

At the time of the interview, Kyla had been working independently for several years, running her own website and keeping an eye on how customers assessed her work on online escort forums (Serughetti 2013, 289–96). 'You should know that there is a forum where customers meet to judge whether she [the escort] is really whom she claims to be, how she makes it [sex], how is the house …', she explained to me. Then, Kyla went silent. Suddenly upset, she told me of a customer who publicly complained, in this forum, about her 'disquieting house'. 'How can this be disquieting?! As if I had coffins on display! … You can say what you want, but there are ten thousand [men] more who find it *bellissima*', she proclaimed as if addressing him there and then. Then, standing up, she said, 'I show you my bedroom if you want. Do you want to see it? My office?'

The relationship between the spheres of work and intimacy, which Kyla's description of her 'bedroom' as her 'office' touches upon, lies at the core of the feminist sex wars. For radical feminists and abolitionists, sex should only express mutual desire (MacKinnon 2011, 281), and its commodification is considered to be intrinsically harmful to women and a form of rape (Barry 1995; Jeffreys 1997). 'Dissociation' – the splitting of bodies and selves – is thus both a means that women adopt to survive prostitution and the outcome of the sexual violence that is intrinsic to it (Farley 2004, 1106–8; MacKinnon 2011, 286–87). Women's capacity to enjoy sex with a partner of choice is also seen as radically compromised (Farley 2004, 1106).

Conversely, women's capacity to separate their work persona from their selves is key in sex workers' labour and human rights' advocacy (NSWP 2013; Grant 2014; Smith and Mac 2018; ICRSE 2020), which a broad and composite constellation of scholars and international organizations supports.[11] People selling sex are seen as agents who can uphold 'healthy' – that is, functional – boundaries between their work and intimacy spheres. Rather than set in stone, though, these are reimagined as pliable and subject to their ability to craft them in time (e.g. by setting a work routine), space (e.g. by delimiting work to a specific room) and on the body (e.g. by excluding the use of specific body parts) (Chapkis 1997, 77; Day 2007, 42; Robillard 2010, 537; Smith and Mac 2018, 44–45). Therefore, the relationship between prostitution and harm is conceptualized as phenomenological and borne of the risky, exploitative and precarious conditions under which it is often performed.

I followed Kyla to her bedroom. When she opened the door, I was struck by the contrast between its refinement and the humble decor of the kitchen that we had left behind. At the centre lay a king-sized bed with a white mosquito net tied to its sides; the furniture was in thick olive wood, and there were candles everywhere. As both a perfect host wishing to make her guest 'feel at home' and a worker wishing to rebut an unfair performance complaint, Kyla invited me to sit and try her mattress. For a moment, I hesitated to take her up on her offer, as I thought that doing so would have constituted an infringement of her intimacy. But was that space intimate, there and then? Does intimacy belong to a physical space, or does it contingently arise through the practices and imagination of the people who constitute and evoke it?

As I sat on Kyla's bed with these questions buzzing in my head, I suddenly saw the image of myself refracted across the four corners of the room. 'Wow! You have many mirrors', I distractedly observed, disoriented at the meaning of their presence. The woman-with-mirror imagery evoked in me a disturbing association with female narcissism and the male gaze (Mulvey 1975; Bartky 1990; Meyers 2002), which I could not reconcile with the impression that Kyla had left upon me until that moment. In fact, those mirrors had nothing to do with that: 'They [mirrors] accelerate orgasm. When I am naked and on top of one of them [male customers], the only thing I ask is: "Will you let yourself be kissed?" This is something that you always need to ask because a man does not necessarily enjoy kissing; maybe he enjoys everything but the kiss.' 'Yeah, I understand. I likewise do not like kissing somebody if we are having sex only', I conspiratorially uttered, realizing too late that I had taken up her customers' position. Kyla's was my first in-depth interview with a sex worker, and while at it, I often felt naïve in front of the tastes, roles and rules that she was disclosing in front of my eyes. At that very moment, though, I thought I knew perfectly well what she was hinting at. That was *Pretty Woman*'s rule number one:[12] never to kiss a customer, because a kiss is too intimate to be commodified.

In her discussion on whether prostitution and surrogacy should be considered as legitimate economic activities, Anne Phillips conceptualized sex workers' refusal to kiss their customers as a defence in front of what, drawing from Mary Shanley (Shanley 1990; 1993), she described as the risk of 'forfeiture of self' (Phillips 2013, 150). 'Any paid employment sets requirements on the body, but the level of bodily regulation and control associated with prostitution or surrogacy considerably exceeds the norm' (Phillips 2013, 152). This excess thus underpins her judgement of these practices as intrinsically coercive: 'The point about both prostitution and commercial surrogacy is that you have no choice. You have to manage your emotions if you are to survive emotionally intact' (Phillips 2013, 152).

In sex workers' narratives, however, the meaning of kissing emerges as more nuanced. For example, Christina Parreira (2021) observed that it was central in the sex work stigma management strategies of the women working in some Nevada brothels. Women providing the 'girlfriend experience' situated kissing within the framework of their dignified offer of 'a holistic experience of mind and body', while women offering the 'porn star experience' found it to be '"too intimate" to be on the market' and reclaimed their capacity to reserve it for their 'sexual partners outside of work' (Parreira 2021, 181; 182).[13] Kyla's approach to kissing was again different, as it appeared to be quite tactical and situational. 'No, no, my dear', she said smiling whilst shaking head vigorously to signal that I got it all *so* wrong,

> a kiss is a way to accelerate a man's orgasm! Because if you look at him in a certain way, you captivate him … and when you give him a kiss in a certain way (and by the way: I never kiss a customer the way I kiss the one I love) you hear the typical sentence 'no! No! Stop! Stop!' So, instead, you go faster, 'Yes! Yes!' And it is over.

Admittedly, I initially found Kyla's instrumental description of kissing disappointing – as if something precious had been forever lost in this epiphany; as if the same act could not be a sign and vehicle of intimacy with some people and a means to an end with others. But then, I thought, are not cultural productions – movies, theatre plays, etc. – full of people kissing each other because they are paid to do so? Are those kisses not also commodified? Undoubtedly, the social value attached to kissing varies radically when it is performed by lovers, models, actors or sex workers; while the people themselves performing it will also invest it with different meanings based on context, circumstances and social locations. It thus follows that sex acts do not have any intrinsic meaning either: different people performing the same act will attribute it different meanings depending on whom they perform it with, when, where, how and why. Nor does their more or less frequent commodification erase sex workers' capacity to feel pleasure, including while at work (Kontula 2008; Doezema 2013).

Deeply absorbed in Kyla's tales, I suddenly jumped at the puff coming from behind my back (I am easily startled by the tiniest noise when I am concentrating on a task). 'Do not be scared!' she burst out laughing, pointing to an air fresher in a corner plug, 'they are everyone's terror! I have one in each room. They mark the time when I am with a man, each half an hour. It is crafty because you never work with the clock; it is a sign of disdain … .' Concealment of the act of managing the time-bounded nature of her services is a trick of the trade allowing Kyla to command higher

prices than colleagues working in other segments of the sex market, such as the street. There and then, though, this episode brought me back again to the debate on boundaries in sex work.

Did Kyla turn the air fresher on before my arrival to discretely manage her time with me, as she does when she is with her customers? Then, I thought, this might mean that she did not *authentically* enjoy being in my company. Still, commodification and pleasure can and do coexist. Indeed, in contemporary Western late capitalist countries, pleasure *is* the promise projected onto consumption (Appadurai 1996, 82–83).

If, conversely, Kyla did not purposefully put on the air fresher before my arrival and had had it on all the time, then it may have been a clue that she held no boundary between her space and time on and off work. But after all, do we not constantly live keeping an eye on time – that very time that capitalism commodified (Appadurai 1996, 79)?

And how long does it take for a sound to dissolve? This last question came to me later, while reflecting on this episode from the position of a woman born and raised in a flat adjacent to a Catholic parish. Every day, from as far back in time as I can remember, its thunderous bells have been unfailingly ringing every half an hour, from 6 AM until midnight, marking a particular rhythm of work, rest and devotion for its community of piety and everyone else – devotees of other religions, atheists, agnostics. They also ring several times a day over weekends and at least once every weekday to call devotees to Mass; to announce weddings and funerals and to mark religious festivities. One day, though, I must have stopped hearing their sound. I do not know when and how it occurred – I just did. If I want to hear them again, I must intentionally attune myself to retrieving their sound from the midst of my everyday soundscape. The noise of Kyla's air fresher was incomparably lighter than those church bells. Ultimately, whether she did or did not count the puffs spent in my company, she graciously gave my research and me an entire morning, even if I only asked for an hour of her time. In similarly flexible ways, I would imagine she manages her time on and off (sex) work counting or ignoring the puffs and switching the air fresher on or off as she needs.

'How much do you usually work in a week?' I asked Kyla before saying goodbye. 'As much as I need to', she said, 'if I worked based on the requests I receive, I think that I would make [a lot of] money, but I am not bound to it.' It was perhaps out of fear I would not believe her restraint that she carefully explained on which occasion she had been gifted the few expensive items on display in her flat and by whom. 'I have all the time I want, and this is my luxury. Few people have time. I have nobody telling me "No" to any of my life plans.' As she said that, she smiled and stretched her arms wide open as if to say that there were no limits to her freedom. Yet

there were – because any worker knows that one's time off work is not free of charge but is paid for through one's labour.

Of Means and Ends

'When we started to speak out, we were in the aftermath of the battle to obtain [the right to] divorce, abortion; all the key struggles for women's self-determination', recounted Pia Covre as she looked back at the time when she and Carla Corso co-founded *Comitato* (Chapter 1):

> It was very clear to us that our sexuality was ours and that we could use it as we wished: for love, within the family, to make sacrifices if necessary, but also to obtain benefits – something that, anyway, was not so different from marital relations, since back then many women used to get married to improve their social and economic status. … We argued for years that whatever a woman did with her body was a personal, private decision, regardless of whether she wanted to have sex for money, gifts or for free. I thought that this was a very feminist concept of self-determination. Instead, we immediately clashed with feminists supporting the old concept that exchanging sex for money reinforced the patriarchy and was a form of violence against women. Even today, abolitionists repeat this.

In the extract above, Pia foregrounds the different understandings of self-determination characterizing the relationship between women sex workers and feminists in Italy. 'The personal is political' and 'I am mine' were some of the key second wave Western feminists' rallying cries of the time that were forged during the battles to retrieve women's control over their bodies from the patriarchal institutions of the family, the nation state and the Church. Likewise, in its founding manifesto, *Comitato* claimed women's 'right to use and manage our bodies as we wish, in the factory as well as in the street' (Comitato per i diritti civili delle prostitute 1983). Yet, sex workers' early engagement with Italian feminists was fraught with tensions (Corso 1991, 221), reproducing on a local scale the feminist sex wars' debate on the role of sexuality in women's oppression and liberation. As Pia's words suggest, feminists' claims of women's sexual and bodily autonomy stopped short of questioning the hierarchies of value underpinning the normative separation between intimacy and the market. Hence, while women's use of marriage for social mobility purposes is concealed and/or condoned, women negotiating their use of sexuality from without this contract are condemned as accomplices of patriarchy.

If, as I argued throughout this chapter, women's entry into either marriage and/or prostitution cannot be abstracted from livelihood needs

and social mobility aspirations, then understanding a woman's decision to sell sex requires a feminist materialist framework. This ought to consider how women's social location mediates their access to different labour markets and the exchange value of their labour. Before deciding to sell sex on the street for a living, Pia relayed having worked 'as a hairdresser, [and as a waitress] in restaurants and bars', adding that she 'did not mind these jobs'. However, the problem was that

> they paid too little and too badly for too many hours' work. So, one day I calculated how much I earned, how many hours I worked, and how much [free] time I had to enjoy life, to do the things that I liked … and I thought that it did not add up: I was spending all my time working and when I had a day off I had no money to have fun, to buy the things I wanted … to go to the theatre, to the cinema, on holiday … and it did not add up because I was not earning enough.

Pia's words aptly foreground late capitalism's structural tension between its consumerist-fuelled growth and the lack of decent jobs through which access to consumption can be democratized. Her gender implied subjection to another, intersecting axe of oppression, so that even if sex had been by then disconnected from the imperatives of marriage and reproduction, its enjoyment continued to unfold on an unchanged patriarchal terrain. Indeed, Pia recalled that, while working as a waitress, the restaurant's male customers would invite her out, but then 'they would expect to *averla* [to have 'it', i.e. have a vaginal intercourse]' at the end of the dinner. As this expression suggests, Italians commonly portray heterosexual intercourse as an uneven exchange between men and women, resulting in men's appropriation, and arguably destruction, of the women's patriarchal-defined honour. Another example is the expression '*gliela ha data*' (she gave 'it' to him), describing a woman who has vaginal intercourse with a man, where 'it' may refer either to her vulva or her virgin status. This language, then, forcefully suggests that sex acts circulate as gendered symbolic capital that men accumulate, thereby becoming more manly, while women lose, becoming subjected to the whore stigma. 'They thought that I was an easy girl', Pia bitterly continued. At the crossroads between her experience of work exploitation and her stigmatization for using her sexuality on her own terms, Pia thought,

> 'Well, wait a moment: why do I have to *dargliela* [to give 'it' to him, i.e. to have vaginal intercourse] for free? I do not like it. And [to do] that only because he offered me a dinner? No, that is not right.' But when I was offered money, I thought: 'well, if I can turn this into making him pay me the equivalent of a month's salary, well, why not?' And so, I did my math and realized

> that the numbers added up much better because I could earn a month's salary just by going out [on the street] once a week. Why bother working the whole month? So, I balanced myself on my needs. To me, this is a job. I have decided [to do] it; I have chosen it as an occupation – I do not say 'work' because it does not have the canon of traditional work. I have done it freely, by myself, independently, and I have decided what I wanted to earn, how much time I wanted to commit, how much free time I wanted, and what I needed to live.

Akin to Kyla, who left her factory job because the salary she received was not a living wage for a single mother, Pia acknowledged the constraining circumstances under which she decided to sell sex for a living. Against this background, both women claimed value in achieving a better balance in the structurally unequal relationship between capital and labour. Importantly, Pia's materialist ethics implied her cultivation of moderation in the *pleasures of the market* – rather than the pleasures of the flesh, as the ideology of respectability dictated (Foucault 1984; Mosse 1996). The risk is to otherwise succumb to the bondage of consumerism, as Carla Corso aptly described in the extract below from her memoir:

> We [Pia and her] met a woman in Rome … who had two or three of these flats where she kept many young girls coming from the south [of Italy], and she would coerce them, she bonded them to her, by means of the same system of the [pre-Merlin Law] brothels, meaning by getting them into debts; since these girls had never owned anything before, she would first of all have them buy a car and anything else they wished. Then they [the girls] had to work to pay her back in instalments everything they bought, eventually entering into the spiral of consumerism and remaining bonded to her. (Corso 1991, 225–26)

Carla spoke of women selling sex to finance this lifestyle consumption. Nonetheless, her analysis has broader applicability, hinting at the role of loans, mortgages, credit cards and other financial instruments in sustaining the everyday materialities of the social world as we create it. What Pia values, then, is her capacity to find and hold on to a balance between means (work) and ends (consumption) that feels right to her. This materialist ethics thus dignifies the subject in the act of earning the means to access the pleasure that capitalism falsely promises to everybody. Simultaneously, it offers a way for women to claim dignity and value outside of the patriarchal binary dividing them into 'good' and 'bad' based on their use of sexuality.

In 'a world characterised by weak [economic] growth and high return on capital', where income gaps are widening, and the concentration of assets is worsening, long-term inequality in the distribution of wealth is rising' (Piketty 2014, 46). During the interview, Pia spoke passionately about the relationship between work and dignity in the feminist debate on

prostitution. 'I do not understand why using my sexuality for an objective that I consider to be fair or appropriate would not be "respectable,"' she said. Against the backdrop of the burning contradiction between a consumerist-driven capitalism and the unequal distribution of the opportunities to access the promise of pleasure fuelling it, she affirmed:

> So, either they [abolitionists] give us all decent and well-paid jobs … but if [not, and if] I want to enjoy a certain living standard and … some particular commodities – [those] that you constantly put forth in your society – then you also have to put me in the position of being able to obtain them through what you say is decent, and if you cannot, then you have to put me in the position to do my work decently: because eventually, this is what it is.

Pia spoke of sex work specifically, but surely, the inequality bells she rang reverberate loud and travel much further across the world of work.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have discussed how women who are structurally stigmatized as 'whores' due to their sale of sex claim value through or despite their work.

Against the normative Western view that the market and intimacy are and should remain separate and hostile spheres (Zelizer 2005), which underpins the radical feminist and abolitionists' position on prostitution, the chapter foregrounded these spheres' complex entanglement in women's lives (see also Chapter 5). In the narratives of the migrant cis and trans women I met while on the mobile outreach unit, the sale of sex was a difficult way to pursue multiple goals. It enabled them to fulfil their breadwinning responsibilities, nurture their intimate ties with their family members 'here' and 'there', sustain their own and their relatives' social mobility aspirations, and buy for themselves as much time off work as possible. Their (sex) work revenues thus sustained their intimate and familial relations, which, in turn, contributed to keep the women (sex) working.

Interconnectedness (Zelizer 2005), however, does not mean *overlap* – a term conveying the pathologizing assumption that people selling sex can never uphold 'healthy', functional boundaries between their work and intimacy sphere. I have shown that for some migrant sex working women this separation reflected the circularity of their migration, as their move between Italy and their home (country) corresponded to their move in and out of sex work, respectively. For sex workers like Kyla, who regularly turned her home into a workspace, this boundary was temporal and affective, as it

relied both on her time management skills and on the different meanings that she attributed to the same act (e.g. kissing) when performed with a customer or a partner.

I have thus argued that the radical feminist and abolitionist position on prostitution reflects a privileged position that fails to account for the compelling material predicament under which most (but not only) women sell sex. Surely, no sex working woman I have met on the street or sex worker I interviewed worked under 'free choice' conditions. Some women sold sex to rise above the economic stagnation characterizing their home countries. Kyla started doing so due to the economic precarity in which she fell at the crossroads between intimate male partner violence and capitalist exploitation of her labour. For Pia, sex work constituted a means to increase the return on her labour and enjoy more time and money off work.

I have also suggested that the women in this sexscape did not appear to be invested in managing the whore stigma by displacing it onto another category of 'other women'. Some, I have argued, found dignity and value in their projection of continuity onto the bittersweet fruits of their hard and hazardous labour. Others found both in the achievement of a better balance in the structurally unequal relationship between capital and labour. I have thus argued that the women's positioning as workers offered them a dignified subject position – for it was this precarious, hazardous and stigmatized work that gave them the means to pursue the ends which they valued. This materialist ethics, I contend, disallow the resolution of the tension between women's status and sexuality through the whore stigma, feeding into a feminist politics of liberation from intersecting structures of oppression.

Notes

1. The association's volunteers would also be available to accompany women to medical visits and support them with translation (if necessary), thus ensuring that they received fair treatment.
2. In his research in the UK and Italy, Nicola Mai reported that the 'working partnership' and the 'fiancé contract' were the two most recurrent types of arrangements between migrant women selling sex and their male partners (Mai 2013). He described their differences as follows:

> The first foresees a greater degree of autonomy for women, who are usually considered as 'work partners', able to keep half of their earnings and to have a social life with and/or without their male agents. According to the 'fiancé contract', all the money earned by selling sex is handed over to the prospective husband, to save up for a shared future life. When men adhered to one of these two patterns, women did not feel exploited, and vice versa'. (Mai 2013, 115)

3. For example, recently, one of the most influential men in the country posted a video where he ferociously defended his son, who is under investigation over a charge of rape, by undermining the victim's credibility (AP news wire 2021).
4. Paola Tabet coined the concept of the 'sexual-economic exchange' to describe a continuum of social relations between men and women implying an economic transaction, ranging from marriage to prostitution (Tabet 2004; Trachman 2009). This concept reflects a feminist materialist view of gender relations of power as co-constitutive of class relations: women provide services to men, including sexual, and men pay or compensate them in connection to their 'possible sexual use of the woman, to her sexual accessibility' (Tabet 2004, 8). While this formulation appears to sit within a sex/gender binary framework, the concept of the 'continuum' may be applied, as I do here, to an analysis of the economy of value distribution in different intimate and economic arrangements across multiple axis of differentiation, including gender and sexuality.
5. The 'sex wars' started on occasion of the organization of the Scholar and the Feminist conference IX: 'Towards a Politics of Sexuality', which was held in 1982 at Barnard College (New York City). A review of the extensive body of literature produced since on this subject exceeds the scope of this book. In addition to the edited collection *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Vance 1984b), constituting the conference proceedings, some resources for a sex-positive perspective include Rubin (1984; 2010) and Wendy Chapkis (1997); for a recent engagement with the history and legacy of the sex wars, see the Special Issue on the journal *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* curated by Suzanna Danuta Walters (2016).
6. Today, care work remains globally undervalued and underpaid (Zimmerman, Litt and Bose 2006; Razavi and Staab 2010; Boris and Parreñas 2010b; Baines, Charlesworth and Daly 2016; S. Butler 2016).
7. During a public meeting organized within the framework of the VI Congress of the Radical Association *Certi Diritti*, Andrea Morniroli, currently the spokesperson for Italy's National Antitrafficking Platform, spoke of the emergence of a bracket of 'seasonal' migrant sex workers moving across national borders according to their needs. Intervention in the roundtable '*Regolamentare la prostituzione. Come ridare dignità e sicurezza alle persone che scelgono di prostituirsi. Gli interventi locali possibili senza dimenticare la lotta alla criminalità ed alla tratta degli esseri umani*', (Regulating prostitution. How to give dignity and safety back to people who choose to prostitute themselves. Possible local interventions without forgetting the fight against criminality and human trafficking) 5 April 2013, Naples.
8. On 1 January 2002, the euro became the official currency of twelve (now nineteen) European Union member states. Two months afterwards, the Italian Lira ceased to be legal tender. However, it kept circulating for ten years side by side with the euro – hence, Kyla's uncertainty about the currency in which she priced her labour at that time.
9. Across Europe and the US, '[t]he trucking industry is dominated by men' (M. Gibson 2020); in Italy, women are only three percent of the total number of truck drivers (Di Rosa 2020). Research on the connection between male truck drivers and the consumption of commodified sex is extensive, albeit strictly linked to the unfolding of the HIV pandemic outside of Western countries, including the Baltic region (World Bank 2003), Uganda (Gysels, Pool and Bwanika 2001), South Africa (Makhakhe et al. 2017), India (Singh and Malaviya 1994) and Brazil (Malta et al. 2006).
10. Human Rights Watch 'documented that, in criminalized environments, police officers harass sex workers, extort bribes, and physically and verbally abuse sex workers, or

even rape or coerce sex from them' (Human Rights Watch 2019). Kathleen Deering et al. (2014) have undertaken a thorough review of the correlates of sexual or physical violence against sex workers globally, including when perpetrated by the police. Speaking of her research with sex workers in China, Tiantian Zheng has also observed the abuses they are exposed to at the hands of 'corrupt law enforcement officials' due to incarceration fears (Dewey and Zheng 2013, 28).

11. Among the many recent scholarly works, see Nicola Mai et al. (2021) and Lucy Platt et al. (2018). In 2021, on International Sex Worker Rights Day (3 March), a coalition of over two hundred and fifty scholars and researchers from the US and across the globe signed a letter demanding the decriminalization of sex work (Decriminalize Sex Work 2021). Many international organizations also hold a pro-sex workers' rights position. See for example World Health Organization et al. (2013) and Amnesty International (2016).
12. At the beginning of the movie *Pretty Woman* (Marshall 1990), Richard Gere (Edward), a wealthy man, asks Julia Roberts (Vivian), a sex worker, 'What do you do?' – meaning, what sexual services does she offer. Vivian responds that she does 'Everything. But I do not kiss on the mouth.'
13. Elizabeth Bernstein described the 'girlfriend experience' as consisting of the performance and consumption of more than just sex – including foreplay, cuddling and the establishment of a 'reciprocal erotic connection' (Bernstein 2007, 127). The 'porn star experience' is less clearly defined (Parreira 2021, 170). Abbe Horswill and Ronald Weitzer define it as a service in which the 'provider will exhibit certain stereotyped pornographic behaviour, such as talking dirty and displaying a willingness to please her partner' (Horswill and Weitzer 2018, 151).