Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree programme in
Language and Civilisation of Asia
and Mediterranean Africa

Final Thesis

Reclaiming Agency: Understanding the Complexities and Redefining the Narrative of Women's Participation in the Japanese Sex Trade

Supervisor
Prof. Utsumi Hirofumi

Assistant supervisor
Prof. Centonze Katja

Graduand
Gregoris Lucrezia
Matriculation Number 873568

Academic Year
2022 / 2023

Table of Contents

Abstract 4
要旨 5
Introduction 6
Chapter I.. 11
An overview of the history of Japan's sex industry 11
1.1 The system of licensed prostitution and society's perception of it during the Edo period (1603-1868)..12
1.2 Military control over commodified sex during wartimes 14
1.3 Comfort facilities for the Allied occupation forces 17
1.4 Attitudes towards prostitution during the US occupation 19
1.5 The Prostitution Prevention Law and its effects on the sex industry nowadays.....21
Chapter II 26
Aspects that drive women's participation in the sex industry 26
2.1 Working women in a gendered economy... 28
2.1.1 Economic challenges and part-time employment 29
2.1.2 The M-shaped curve and segregated career tracks 30
2.1.3 Cultural ideologies and work expectations... 32
2.1.4 Legislative factors 33
2.1.5 Childcare and work balance... 34
2.2 Sex work as a way to break gender norms 35
2.3 Friendship and curiosity as driving factors 38
2.4 Conclusions.. 39
Chapter III.. 42
Whore Stigma and Coping Strategies 42
3.1 Definition of stigmatization and its roots in the Japanese context 44
3.2 Information management, identity disclosure and spatial distancing 47
3.3 Professional Amateurs 49
3.4 Temporal employment and hierarchical relationships 51
3.5 Work values 53
3.6 Filial duty and unwillingness 54
3.7 Sex work as healing labour...57
Chapter IV 61
Unravelling the obstacles against advocacy 61

4.1 The grey area of the sex work industry and it’s dangers 62
4.2 Internalization of stigmatizing narratives 65
4.3 The dangers of professional identification 66
4.4 Sex workers’ lack of collective identity 68
4.5 Sex work as labour and the case of Covid-19 70
Epilogue 74
Bibliography 76
Sitography 81

Abstract

This master's thesis delves into the intricate contradictions characterizing the cis-heteronormative sex industry in Japan.

The research starts with an overview of the historical evolution of the Japanese sex industry that provides insights into the societal perceptions and the general acceptance of the industry, juxtaposed against the simultaneous stigmatization of the women engaged in this profession. The legal framework governing the industry is further investigated to reveal how contrasting societal perceptions are inscribed within the laws that regulate the sex industry where certain aspects are deemed legal, yet the workers remain trapped in a state of legal ambiguity and stigmatization.

The thesis further investigates the motivations compelling women to enter the sex industry despite its stigmatization and legal uncertainties. A comparative analysis is drawn between the conventional corporate trajectory and the sex industry as an alternative path for women, that serves as a space offering higher incomes, an escape from poverty, opportunities for pursuing personal interests, and flexibility in working hours, in an attempt to move away from diffused ideas of the sex industry as a safety net for desperate women and to highlight the importance of women's agency in employment choice.

Connected to this exploration is an examination of the pervasive stigmatization that sex workers face and how they navigate and internalize this stigma. The study explores how women in the industry often perceive themselves as non-professionals or view their work as a temporary endeavour before reintegrating into mainstream society.

This self-perception, however, inhibits their ability to assert rights and protections, particularly against violence from clients or exploitation by employers. Therefore, the final segment underscores the pressing need for reforms in legislation and societal perceptions to empower sex workers, allowing them the agency to protect themselves and their profession.

要旨

この卒業論文はシスヘテロノーマティブ日本の性風俗産業を特徴づける複雑な矛盾を掘り下げる。

研究は性風俗産業の社会的な認識の洞察と一般的な受け入れを与える性風俗産業の歴史的変遷の概要から始め、性風俗で働いている女性の同時に属性されたスティグマに対する考察が行われる。特定の側面は法的とみなされる性風俗産業を規制する法律の中で、対照的な社会的認識がどのように刻まれているか明らかにするため、産業を支配する法的枠組みが更に調査される。しかし、性風俗女は法的な曖昧さとスティグマの中に閉じ込められる。

卒業論文は、スティグマと法的な不確実性にもかかわらず、女性の性風俗産業に入ろうとする動機を更に調査する。より高い収入、貧困からの脱出、個人的な興味を追求する機会、労働時間の柔軟性などを提供する空間として機能する女性にとっての代替的な道としての性風俗と、従来の企業軌道との比較分析が描かれる。この分析は、性風俗が絶望的な女性のための安全網としての普及された概念から脱却し、雇用の選択における女性の主体性の重要性を強調する試みである。

この探究に接続されるのは、性風俗女が直面する広範なスティグマ化と、彼女たちがこのスティグマをどのように移動し、内在化しているかについての検討である。この研究では、性風俗女たちがよく素人として自分自身と感知したり、自分たちの仕事を主流社会に戻る前の一時的な努力と見なしたりしていることを探究している。

しかし、このような自己認識は、特に顧客からの暴力や雇用者による搾取に対する権利や保護を主張する能力を阻害している。従って、最終章では、性風俗女に権限を与え、彼女たち自身と彼女たちの職業を守ることを可能にするため、法律と社会的認識の改革が急務であることを強調している。

Introduction

"We are the only ones who can know what we ourselves need."[1]

Momoka Momoko

Sex work has always been part of the Japanese society, from the first appearance of *yūjo*, women who during the 700-1400 A.D. travelled around the country and sold sex, songs, and dances to their clients, to the bustling and diversified range of businesses that characterize today's sex industry, via the system of licensed prostitution that started in the Edo period and defined governmental approaches during wartimes.

Throughout history women working as prostitutes have been perceived by society in very different ways sometimes more positively, other times through stigmatizing lenses and have always had to cope with the moral conflicts associated with their profession, sometimes voluntarily chosen, other times forced upon them.

History has strongly shaped the way the sex industry works nowadays, how legal frameworks govern it, and how women working in it navigate everyday struggles and perceive their involvement in advocating for rights and protection. However, the focus has always been on talking *about* sex workers rather than *with* sex workers resulting in a series of contradictions representing the intricate interactions between economic realities, legal frameworks, societal norms, and personal agency that shape Japanese women's participation in an industry that represents a great opportunity and at the same time an immense challenge in terms of stigma, safety, lack of labour rights and social isolation.

The aim of this dissertation is therefore to focus on how sex workers themselves think and talk about their profession in order to highlight both the opportunities and the challenges they have to face on a daily basis, in hopes of providing the grounds for changes in societal perceptions that will therefore drive reforms for better and safer working conditions.

The first chapter of this work will focus on an overview on the history of the Japanese sex work industry. Attention will be put on historical periods that have helped in shaping what we now understand to be the sex industry in Japan. Changes in societal perceptions of sex workers throughout history will also be a focus of the chapter and moral

---

[1] Momoka Momoko, "Sekkusu Wākā kara Mita Piru" (The Pill as seen by a Sex Worker), *Impaction*, vol. 105, 1997, p. 61.
桃河 モモコ、「セックスワーカーから見たピル」、インパクション出版会 編、第 105 巻、1997 年、p. 61.

rethorics used to justify women's participation in the sex trade, that will be introduced in this chapter, will have a relevant role in discussions of coping strategies against stigmatization further on in the dissertation.

Lastly, the chapter will embark on an analysis of the legal framework that regulates the industry nowadays, a direct consequence of past discourses and perceptions on the commodification of sex that shapes the basis for some of the biggest paradoxes that characterize the Japanese sex work industry today, positioning women in a liminal area characterized by legal uncertainty.

The second chapter will focus on factors that drive women to choose sex work despite its stigmatizing nature and legal ambiguity. As will be discussed later sex work in Japan can be read as a great opportunity for women both financially and in terms of personal enrichment, but the positive aspects of the industry are generally overshadowed by media representations and academical discourse that construct it as an environment that attracts criminality and translates in violence and exploitation, working as a safety net and last resource for desperate women who want to escape poverty. To overcome these negative perceptions that disregard women's agency and awareness in employment choices the chapter will delve into an analysis of the gendered nature of the Japanese economy. Through comparisons of the sex trade to the normative corporate trajectory light will be shed on women's awareness of the position that society attributes them, connected to gender norms and labour behavioural paths considered normative for women. Moreover, attention will be put on what sex workers themselves find appealing of the job, to underscore once again the importance of focusing on what sex workers directly think about their profession.

The third chapter will center around an analysis of coping strategies used by sex workers in order to make sense of the stigmatization connected to the profession they engage with and to understand how they position themselves within societal perceptions of their occupation. Starting from a definition of stigma that will help in understanding where stigma comes from connected to the commodification of sex in Japan, coping strategies that assist women in putting distance between their professional identity and their perceived true one will be analysed to comprehend how societal perceptions of sex work shape how women build their occupational identity and present themselves to society. Moreover, coping strategies will be analysed to shed light on how women try to navigate the moral conflicts that arise from their engagement with a stigmatizing profession, how they make sense of their participation in said work and how they construct value and meaning to attribute to the services they offer.

In the fourth and last chapter, discourses from the previous ones will be problematized to shed light on how structural elements of the sex work industry and societal perceptions of sex workers, together with constructed identities women engaged in the commodification of sex build for themselves hinder women's safety in the industry and their willingness to politicise their professional identity to advocate for working rights. In particular, attention will be given to the legal uncertainty that the laws regulating the sex industry create to show how this ambiguity in the law prevents women from seeking help from people that should be dedicated to safeguard citizens' lives and health. Moreover, the construction of separated and hidden professional identities help sex workers in giving meaning to their job and present its authenticity, however since these identities are inscribed in gender norms, it will be examined how efforts to avoid identification with the professional identity undermine possible advocacy actions. Lastly, to provide a different approach to advocacy an analysis of the situation of the sex industry during the Covid-19 pandemic will be presented to demonstrate that efforts in advocating for better working conditions and recognition of sex work as work are ongoing in Japan.

Before starting the dissertation, however, I think it is necessary to justify and provide an explanation regarding the choice of the subjects selected as principal focus of the study.

It is essential to clarify that the focus of my research will be limited to the cis-heteronormative side of the sex industry and in particular on how Japanese women engage with this industry. It is important to keep in mind who the actors involved in this study are because, as will be shown throughout the dissertation, legal frameworks, driving factors, and coping strategies analysed are specific to the situation Japanese women engaged in the sex industry experience.

The sex trade in Japan involves a number of very different people, from men to women and transgender both Japanese and from foreign countries. General perceptions believe that the commodification of sex in Japan involves trafficking[2] and that the majority of the women working there are foreigners. This perception shapes actions that both the

---

[2] In 2004 Japan was listed in the "Tier 2 watchlist", and in danger of ending up in "Tier 3" of the Trafficking in Person Report released annually by the US State's Department Office, a report that lists countries based on their actions to fight trafficking, where trafficking is indirectly associated with sex work. After the publication of the report the Japanese government released an action plan to fight trafficking, and Japan has been steadily listed from the year after in "Tier 2".
US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report June* 2004, in "US Department of State, 2004, https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/34158.pdf, accessed 06 February 2024.
US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report June* 2005, in "US Department of State, 2005, https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/47255.pdf, accessed 06 February 2024.

government and anti-trafficking advocacy groups take in defining who can be a victim of trafficking and how to help said victims.

However, because legal frameworks, the state of the economy, gender norms, and societal perceptions of feminine behaviour are connected to cis-heteronormativity and have had a relevant role in shaping the contemporary structure of the sex industry, I decided to focus my attention on Japanese women for this study, in an attempt to shed some light on how the sex trade is inscribed in a more general gendered economy. Consequently, coping strategies, risks and advocacy efforts are intrinsically connected to Japanese women's experience in the industry, and probably greatly differ from strategies, risks and needs of other actors involved in the industry, such as men or foreigners. Therefore, hereafter when I will refer to sex work and sex workers, unless specified, I will be talking about Japanese women's experience of the commodification of sex.

Secondly, I would like to justify my choice in the use of the term "sex worker" to identify those women involved in the sex trade in Japan. As it will be analysed in chapters III and IV women in Japan prefer to put some distance between themselves and their profession, therefore choosing other terms to name their professional identity, one being *fuzokujō*, which translates to "woman working in the sex industry". This is because the term sex worker is perceived as too strong and full of political implications and works against the effort of detaching from a stigmatizing occupation. However, through her essay on the birth control pill in 1997, Momoka Momoko introduced to Japan the term sex worker and, since then, advocacy groups have started to use it together with the term *fuzokujō*. Criticism against the term *fuzokujō* from Momoka was, amongst others, that it limited inclusion to the sex trade only to women disregarding the participation of men and transgender people in the commodification of sex.[3] Although my research will indeed focus only on Japanese women the choice of using sex worker instead of *fuzokujō*, or the more derogatory name of prostitute, is driven by my desire to give meaning to the labour aspect of this job, particularly in a society where sex work is not recognised as labour and sex workers don't have working rights because of it, and to help in constructing the identity of those involved in the industry as working people.[4]

Lastly, I deem important to acknowledge the inherent limitations of this research. The choice to include an analysis only on the experience of cisgender Japanese women engaged in the sex industry, although driven by the desire to analyse how the gendered

---

[3] Momoka Momoko, "Sekkusu Wākā…", cit., p. 54.

[4] Kamala KEMPADOO, Jo DOZEMA, (edited by), *Global Sex Workers Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, New York, Routledge, 1998, p. 3.

nature of society shapes experiences of women involved in the commodification of sex, excludes the perspective of other actors whose experiences may differ drastically from the ones presented in this dissertation, therefore the analysis hereafter presented is a limited piece of a bigger spectrum of experiences that all together compose the Japanese sex work industry as a whole.

Secondly the research is based on existing research and data provided by other researchers. Because of my interest in giving sex workers a voice to speak and to present their experience from their point of view I have tried my best to reference as much as possible articles and studies that integrated direct interviews with sex workers and people involved in the industry, however, the lack of first-hand interviews and informations might restrict the depth of my analysis.

Despite these limitations, however, the dissertation seeks to amplify the voices of Japanese sex workers and to contribute to a more informed dialogue surrounding the industry to ultimately advocate for meaningful changes in societal perceptions and working conditions.

Chapter I

An overview of the history of Japan’s sex industry

Today's sex industry in Japan accounts for 2-3% of the annual GDP of the country.[1] Despite being subject to laws that prohibit sexual intercourse and forbid persons to engage in prostitution, thanks to a series of loopholes and lose interpretations of the law, the industry has prospered throughout the years and is estimated to earn approximately 2.3 trillion yen (€24 billion) per year.[2] Not only it is one of the largest and most diversified heteronormative sex industries in the world, it is also believed to be somehow necessary in order to maintain social order.

To understand both its significance as a believed basic social necessity in contemporary society and its role in the Japanese economy it is important to analyse Japan's history of women trading their bodies for money and to trace the relationship that the sex industry has had with the government in the past. This can shed some light on how attitudes towards the cis-heteronormative sex industry and its workers changed in different moments in the history of Japan and will help interpret the current trends and regulations of this industry.

Elements of the contemporary cis-heteronormative sex industry in Japan can be found in its construction and development, particularly starting from the sixteenth century and throughout the pre and post war periods.

1.1 The system of licensed prostitution and society's perception of it during the Edo period (1603-1868)

1589 marked the year when the first government licensed pleasure district quarter was established in the country.[3] From this moment up until 1617, when brothels and sex related business were restricted to specific areas of the city, brothels firstly in Kyoto and afterwards in Edo (present-day Tokyo), the new capital of the country, were erected and thrived everywhere around the city. Already in the early modern period prostitution as a profession was regarded in somehow a favourable manner by the government. From its

[1] HAVOCSCOPE, *Prostitution: Prices and Statistics of the Global Sex Trade*, 2015.

[2] Michael HOFFMAN, "Japan's love affairs with sex", *The Japan Times Online*, 2007, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2007/04/29/general/japans-love-affairs-with-sex/, accessed 8 November 2023.

[3] It is believed that during the Heian period (794-1185) prostitution was introduced to Japan from China as a form of entertainment under the government's entertainment sector. In the sixteenth century, then, a bureau of prostitution was created that taxed prostitutes to raise funds for the government. These two acts can be considered the first two steps towards the system of licensed prostitution that came to be towards the end of the sixteenth century and therefore the first demonstrations of the government's recognition of prostitution as a legitimate business.

institution as a legal profession in 1598 through the establishment of a government-controlled pleasure district in Kyoto, the profession of prostitute was constructed as a necessary means to maintain social order by providing men a safe way to channel their sexual desire. Male sexual needs were considered 'natural instincts' that, if not controlled, could potentially become dangerous and disruptive. Therefore, prostitutes and prostitution were accepted both by the government and by society in general because they would help maintain male sexual needs satisfied and in check. Nevertheless prostitutes, even if their existence was accepted as necessary, were not seen in a positive light, since their job was often associated with criminality and disease. Therefore, not long after the institution of the first licensed pleasure district; in 1617 the government passed a law to restrict the presence of brothels to specific areas of the city, generally far away from the busy centre, in hopes of preventing or restricting to those areas, more easily controlled by the police, possible forms of social disorder such as men's excessive indulgence, dissipation of resources, violent conflicts and criminality commonly associated with the sex industry. The Yoshiwara pleasure district was then built in Edo following the strict regulations established by the new law. Brothels and sex related businesses could keep operating as long as they remained inside the premises of the district. The area was surrounded by walls that visually represented the effort of the government to put a distance between the proper moral side of the society, outside the walls, and the necessary but potentially antisocial side confined inside the walls. Moreover, the area had only one entrance, patrons could not enter carrying their weapons and could not extend their stay longer than twenty-four hours.

Despite the initial efforts of the government to maintain a strong control over the pleasure districts, soon businesses started to expand outside of the legal premises of such districts. Local authorities, however, often did not enforce the law because prostitution came to be understood as a very lucrative business that helped the growth of economies, especially in rural areas, and gave families who lived in poor conditions employment for their daughters through indentured contracts. These contracts benefitted the business owners who could control the women bound by the contracts until they paid their debts, and the impoverished families that got an anticipated payment for selling their daughters to brothel owners.

The concept of filial duty[4], derived from indentured contracts that daughters from poor rural families felt upon entering the sex industry in the past, is a rhetorical framework that women who work in the sex industry nowadays use to give meaning to their labour. It

[4] Here the concept of filial duty is conceptualized as the duty to work an unpleasant job such as the one of a prostitute in order to provide for the family.

is important to understand that the ideas of entering the sex work industry unwillingly because of indentured contracts, and of women's' labour constructed as a duty directed towards the well-being of the family, despite one's own well-being, helped shape how women made sense of a job that from the start was perceived as highly stigmatizing. Over the centuries with societal and economical changes, the motives for women to enter the sex industry changed as well. However, the stigmatization attributed to the profession and the social isolation experienced by sex workers did not. Therefore, the concepts of unwillingness and filial duty were adapted once again in present days to legitimize one's own perception of their job and shape the way sex workers present themselves to society to be accepted. On these concepts I will come back later when addressing the ways in which sex workers give meaning to their job at the same time as trying to avoid stigmatization connected to their profession.

1.2 Military control over commodified sex during wartimes

With the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry in Japan, that caused the forced opening of the country to foreign forces in 1854 after almost 220 years of isolation, the state started a period of major political, economic, and social changes motivated by the desire to appear like a civilized country worthy of respect from the USA and European countries and with the hope to revisit the conditions of the Unequal Treaties signed in 1854.

Modernization also brought along nationalistic ideals that led to a massive military mobilization and the birth of a colonial project, that would be put into action in 1895, following the victory in the First Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895), and would end with the surrender of Japan in 1945 at the end of World War II.

In the context of military mobilization and connected to the concepts of 'national body' and health regime that started to circulate in the same period, the government once again started to focus its efforts on controlling brothels and sex commodification.

The ideal of 'national body' drew a connection between one's own body and the social body that in this period of nationalism and imperialism was thus translated as the imperial body.[5] Particularly the male body, and more specifically the soldier's body, was linked to notions of nation and empire and was believed to be the key element that could

[5] Sabine FRÜHSTÜCK, *Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan*, Berkley, University of California Press, 2003, pp. 17-18.

secure the expansion of Japan.[6] It was believed, then, that to achieve a strong nation a strong army was necessary and therefore the physical and mental health of soldiers were considered a major priority. In this context once again, the discourse on male sexual needs constructed as natural instincts that needed a means to be satisfied played a central role in the development of the system of licensed prostitution during the Meiji restoration (1868-1912) and the Taishō period (1912-1926).

To enter the army men had to go through thorough physical examinations, and only if they were deemed healthy enough could they become soldiers. Therefore, members of the army were considered to be the healthiest, most vigorous young men of the country, thought to be at the height of their sexual energy and in need of a way to release it, as a way to also release stress. Men's worth as soldiers was believed to be directly connected to their sexual organs and sexual release.[7] Soon, then, the State started to promote the building of brothels in the vicinity of military bases to cater for male sexual needs. Having a direct control over the access the army had to commodified sex functioned as a way to strengthen command and discipline among soldiers and to secure power systems between the military and over the empire.[8] The idea that prostitution was a necessity therefore remained untouched in this period and the fact that the government had direct control over the commodification of sex and the soldier's access to it, was accepted without too much debate. Some abolitionists and women's right's movements tried to oppose to the system but without much success.

The presence of state-regulated military brothels was justified by concerns over the widespread diffusion of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) through the army and, at a later time, among commoners. Since the soldier's body was tightly connected to the expansion of the Japanese empire, sick soldiers were perceived as sings of moral and disciplinary weaknesses for the army and seen as potential threats to national security.[9] State-regulated military brothels were then institutionalized to limit the risks connected to infection. With the aim to avoid as much as possible the diffusion of venereal diseases especially among armed forces, the state also established new regulations to have access to military brothels, such as mandatory use of condoms, that were distributed to all soldiers, and regular health checks for the women working at these establishments. Inspections for registered prostitutes were compulsory, yet they had to pay the fees for said inspections. If

---

[6] Robert KRAMM, "Haunted by Defeat: Imperial Sexualities, Prostitution, and the Emergence of Postwar Japan." *Journal of World History*, vol. 28, no. 3-4, 2017, p. 601.
[7] Nils Johan RINGDAL, *Love for Sale: A World History of Prostitution*, Grove, Atlantic, 2003, p.322.
[8] FRÜHSTÜCK, *Colonizing Sex…*, cit., p. 37.
[9] KRAMM, "Haunted by Defeat…", cit., p. 601.

they didn't show up for the chek-ups they would get fined and if they resulted infected, they had to undergo treatment and couldn't go back to work until they had completely recovered, otherwise they would be fined.

The attention put on dangers connected to venereal diseases drew a strong connection between infected soldiers and the sources of infection. Responsibility was put on prostitutes who, throughout all this period were considered the only ones to blame for the diffusion of STDs and therefore stigmatized as potential threats to men's health, which as previously stated was central in the construction of the new Japanese Empire.[10] Laws that enforced health checks for prostitutes like the Law for the Prevention of Venereal Diseases of 1927, were enforced based on the conviction that if women employed in brothels could be kept under strict control STDs would not be as diffused as they were. Although health checks were conducted both on prostitutes and soldiers, it was clear that men's health mattered way more that women's health. This is demonstrated by the fact that health checks on women focused solely on identification of potential venereal diseases and didn't consider bruises, scars or broken bones inflicted by soldiers to prostitutes.[11]

Concerns over the diffusion of STDs also drove the establishment of comfort stations, as they were known as, in occupied territories upon the arrival of the Japanese army. The idea was that, since soldiers needed to visit prostitutes especially because they were far from home and wouldn't be able to see their wives, the state had to order the organization of a system of brothels in colonies were soldiers could safely go without the preoccupation of incurring in potentially infected local women. Throughout the Japanese Empire these establishments initially employed *karayuki-san*, young Japanese women from impoverished families that were sent abroad to work in these brothels.[12] Soon however, the demand for prostitutes exceeded the supply, therefore women coming from colonized territories were forced into sexual slavery in the military brothels and regulations applied in Japan for the containment of the diffusion of venereal diseases were enforced outside of Japan as well.

Justifications for the creation of a system of comfort stations throughout the Empire didn't only focus on the prevention of STDs but emphasized the idea of preventing mass civilian rapes. In fact, after incidents such as the mass rapes and murdering in Shanghai in 1932 and in Nanking in 1937, caused by military authorities losing control over parts of the

[10] FRÜHSTÜCK, *Colonizing Sex…*, cit., p. 39.
[11] Ibid, p. 38.
[12] Gabriele KOCH, *Healing Labor: Japanese Sex Work in the Gendered Economy*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2020, p.27.

Japanese army, in an attempt to minimize the negative impact that these war crimes had on the international image other countries had of Japan, the system of military comfort stations abroad was enforced and systematized.

Throughout the whole war period, then, women working in state-regulated military brothels were highly stigmatized and deemed responsible for the great diffusion of STDs among soldiers and therefore looked at as threats to the 'national body' and the state's imperialistic dreams but, at the same time, state-regulated prostitution was also seen as a 'necessary evil' that helped keeping high spirits among soldiers and control over military forces therefore granting the growth of the empire. It was also believed to help maintain social order, especially preventing mass rape and the diffusion of illegal prostitution that would be followed by an even greater diffusion of venereal diseases. [13] The dichotomy between women's stigmatization for the prostitution job they were often forced to partake in and the perceived societal necessity of said job was thus taken from the Edo period and adapted in the context of Japanese colonialism.

1.3 Comfort facilities for the Allied occupation forces

Fears of mass rapes, caused by the actions of the Japanese army during World War II, were the initial factors that drove government's measures concerning the commodification of sex after Japanese surrender in 1945 and the subsequent occupation by the USA army.

In fact, fear and anxiety for the arrival of the Allied occupation forces started to circulate right after Japanese's surrender on August 15, 1945. Agitations about supposed mass rapes that the American soldiers would execute on common Japanese women upon their arrival were fuelled by memories of the mass civilian rapes in Shanghai and Nanking perpetuated by the Japanese army during World War II. Concerns about the future occupation of Japan by the Allied forces were then strictly linked to physical violence and especially translated in fears of sexual violence against women. The powerlessness against gendered sexual assault and the perceived inability to protect Japanese women can be read as the "anxiety about their loss of manhood following military defeat"[14] felt by bureaucrats and politicians in Japan. Discourses on the 'national body' typical of wartimes shaped the fears that spread in the weeks immediately before the arrival of the Allied forces.

[13] FRÜHSTÜCK, *Colonizing Sex…*, cit., p. 47.
[14] KRAMM, "Haunted by Defeat…", cit., p. 592.

Specifically, the idea that the Japanese army which was constructed around ideals of male sexual energy and had been interpreted as the driving force of the colonialist efforts, had lost against the USA forces made prostitution a central element for Japanese authorities in the effort to regain control over the situation. Prostitution was once more perceived as a societal necessity, this time framed by the idea of preventing rape, violence and protecting respectable Japanese women.

Three days after Emperor Hirohito's radio broadcast; on August 18, 1945, a message was sent by the Home Ministry to all regional police officials instructing them to organize special comfort facilities for the occupation army, that had to be built all over Japan in proximity of USA army bases and were to be off-limits for Japanese citizens.[15] The government's involvement right from the start was only marginal and consisted in endorsing the project, providing money and police support, while the responsibility of staffing said facilities was put on private entrepreneurs that saw in the business of the commodification of sex a lucrative opportunity. To facilitate these duties the Recreation and Amusement Association (RAA) was founded on August 20, 1945, as a semi-governmental association that would aid financial support and grant police's participation in maintaining social order in the new comfort stations.[16]

During warfare, especially as a direct consequence of the notion of male sexual needs as natural instincts potentially dangerous if not tamed, the female body had been conceptualized as "always penetrable and endangered by rape"[17] as Ruth Seifert explains. This concept justified the presence of prostitutes as means to protect respectable women from violence and, more broadly, to protect the concept of family in general.[18] Therefore during the occupation desires to preserve the national body were kept but the attention was moved to the USA soldiers that were now identified as the possible threat to women's purity. The establishment of the RAA and of comfort facilities for the Allied forces were therefore promoted as a "human sacrifice [...], helping to defend and nurture the purity of our race, thereby becoming an invisible base for the postwar social order"[19] as stated by

[15] W. John DOWER, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co./New Press, 2000, pp. 124-125.
[16] KRAMM, "Haunted by Defeat…", cit., p. 602.
[17] Ruth SEIFERT, "Der weibliche Körper als Symbol und Zeichen. Geschlechtsspezifische Gewalt und die kulturelle Konstruktion des Krieges.", *Gewalt imKrieg: Ausübungen, Erfahrungen und Verweigerung von Gewalt in Kriegen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Münster, LIT Verlag, 1996, p. 23.
[18] Sheldon GARON, "The World's Oldest Debate? Prostitution and the State in Imperial Japan, 1900-1945.", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 98, no. 3, 1993, p. 721.
[19] RAA, "Tokushu ianshisestu kyōkai seimeisho", *Nihon fujin monda ishiryō shūsei*, Tokyo, Domesu Shuppan, vol. 1, 1978, pp. 536-537.

Miyazawa Hamajirō, president of the RAA, in the inaugural speech for the foundation of the association. The purity of the Japanese race, that depended on the protection of middle- and upper-class women's chastity, was endangered by the presence of American soldiers therefore prostitution was seen as a necessary sacrifice. Nationalist discourses about loyalty to the emperor and patriotic self-sacrifice for the well-being of the nation, commonly propagated during warfare among soldiers, were now used to lure women to accept jobs as prostitutes.

Advertisements for the recruitment of women to be employed in these facilities then started to appear in newspapers and posters, calling for the help and cooperation of the 'new Japanese women' in a situation of state emergency, as it was perceived to be the one that Japan was living at that moment.[20]

However, reasons for women to enter the prostitution business were often less centred on nationalistic ideals and more practical, often driven by poverty and hunger. Indentured contracts and plain violence or kidnapping were also systems employed to find women to forcibly put into comfort stations.

The trajectory that the recruitment of women for comfort facilities catered to the Allied occupation forces, and the theoretical approach on which the project was based and promoted highlight not only a gendered exploitation but also a class-based exploitation in which the government used low class women to protect upper class women's sexuality and reproductive systems in order to safeguard the purity of the race.[21]

1.4 Attitudes towards prostitution during the US occupation

Upon their arrival soldiers of the USA army patronized in large numbers the comfort facilities that had been set up for them, yet both the RAA that supervised the organization of these new comfort stations and the overall system of licensed prostitution, still in place in Japan, were short-lived. In 1946 the General Headquarters of the US Occupation forces (GHQ) ordered the abolition not only of the RAA but also of public prostitution, claiming it was an undemocratic practice that violated women's human rights.[22] This however was a façade justification. The truth was that Japan hadn't been able, in the previous years, to control the diffusion of STDs, especially among unlicensed prostitutes that did not fulfil their duty to undergo regular health checks. Therefore, when

[20] KRAMM, "Haunted by Defeat…", cit., p. 609.
[21] Ibid., p. 612.
[22] DOWER, *Embracing Defeat…*, cit., p. 130.

women from all over Japan started willingly or forcibly to work in comfort stations for American soldiers, many were infected with venereal diseases, and it was mainly due to the alarming rate at which infections for STDs among troops were spreading that the GHQ instructed for the elimination of the licensed prostitution system.

The abolition of such system ordered by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) General Mc Arthur, however, didn't translate in the complete cessation of all forms of prostitution. Women who were once employed by the RAA poured onto the streets and many became streetwalkers, making the abolition of the licensed system in an effort to control the spread of STDs unsuccessful. Moreover, in December of the same year the Japanese "Home Ministry declared that women had the right to become prostitutes"[23] thus maintaining the legal basis for allowing the existence of prostitution districts as long as the sale of sexual services was initiated of one's own free will. In fact, in 1946 "special eating and drinking districts" (red-light districts), where prostitutes could continue to work were approved by the Yoshida cabinet.[24] Women working in these districts, that were under the direct supervision of the local police, continued to have the obligation to receive regular health checks. Moreover, to prevent the diffusion of venereal diseases due to the high number of illegal prostitutes working outside red-light districts, local authorities with the help of allied forces started to stop and arrest women on the streets who were suspected to be prostitutes and then forcibly subject them to STDs examinations and treatments.[25]

Since the measures taken to prevent STDs didn't have a meaningful impact on the limitation of the diffusion of venereal diseases, in 1948 a first attempt to abolish once and for all prostitution was presented to the Diet in the form of the Prostitution Punishment Bill which, however, failed to pass. The pressure exerted by the occupation forces on the government to pass a law against prostitution resulted in many local governments establishing regulations prohibiting prostitution[26] even if the national law had failed to pass.[27] All these regulations must not be seen as an attempt to eliminate the

---

[23] DOWER, *Embracing Defeat…*, cit., p. 132.
[24] YUKI Shiga-Fujime, Findlay-Kaneko BEVERLY L., "The Prostitutes' Union and the Impact of the 1956 Anti-Prostitution Law in Japan.", *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*, no.5, 1993, p. 8.
[25] YUKI Fujime, "Japanese Feminism and Commercialized Sex: The Union of Militarism and Prohibitionism.", *Social Science Japan Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2006, p. 38.
[26] Ibid., p. 39.
[27] This was the case especially for localities where US bases were located. The main aim for the US army was to limit the spread of STDs, therefore they often put pressure on local authorities to establish some kind of regulation against prostitution. Usually, American authorities threatened to declare areas off-limits to US troops, unless measures to regulate prostitution were put into place. American soldiers were often central to the economy of these localities and therefore local governments complied with such requests.

commodification of sex but rather they must be interpreted as the intention of the US army to control the spread of STDs. In fact, putting a ban on prostitution allowed the police to arrest and therefore forcibly subject suspected prostitutes to STD examinations and treatments, and overall, it put women working as prostitutes in weaker positions before the law.[28] Therefore, in the years before the establishment of the Prostitution Prevention Law, while outlawing and harshly prosecuting Japanese women who sold sex services, US and Japanese officials continued to allow US military members to purchase sex services, reiterating the idea of the societal necessity of such business.[29]

However, sentiments towards prostitutes and the commodification of sex changed in the years leading to the promulgation of the Prostitution Prevention Law, when many abolitionist women's groups pressured the government to crack down on prostitution. These groups generally looked at prostitutes in a very negative way, they did not criticize the purchase of sexual services by military men but instead blamed prostitutes for disgracing the honour and chastity of respectable Japanese women with their shameful occupation.[30] The blame put on prostitutes instead of soldiers promoted by these groups perfectly followed the narration advanced by officials in the previous years but the values called upon and the goals of the two sides were very different. The first wanted the abolition of prostitution once and for all because, as previously stated, they found it an occupation that endangered the honour of the empire, the latter instead had always accepted prostitution as necessary and applied regulations only with the final aim to limit the spread of STDs. In the end, however, the moral and educational values promoted by the abolitionist groups were the ones that ended up structuring the Prostitution Prevention Law passed in 1956.

1.5 The Prostitution Prevention Law and its effects on the sex industry nowadays

The process that led to the promulgation of the Prostitution Prevention Law in 1956 is connected to the creation in 1952 of the Committee for the Promotion of the Establishment of Legislation Banning Prostitution (Promotion Committee), which mainly comprised members of women's abolitionist groups, Christian groups, and social welfare

---

[28] YUKI, "Japanese Feminism…", cit., p. 39.
[29] Ibid., p. 40.
[30] Ibid., p. 41.

organizations.[31] The vision promoted by all these contributors focused on the punishment of prostitutes because they saw the choice of engaging in prostitution as a clear sign of lack of sense of morality and a strong need for moral and sexual education.

The result of many debates within the Promotion Committee over whether it was necessary to focus on prevention and rehabilitation rather than punishment, produced the Prostitution Prevention Law that keeps regulating the sex industry nowadays, and that is a compromise between the morally embedded opinions of religious and abolitionist groups and the societal and governmental attitudes towards prostitution that had shaped the Japanese sex industry in the previous centuries.

The focus on morality, education, and rehabilitation advanced by abolitionist groups can be clearly seen from the opening article of the law which states that:

> "In view of the fact that prostitution is offensive to human dignity, contrary to sexual morality and contrary to the good morals of society, this Act aims to prevent prostitution by punishing acts that encourage prostitution, and by providing guidance and protective rehabilitation measures for girls who are likely to engage in prostitution in the light of their sexual behaviour or environment."[32]

While prioritizing the rhetoric around public morality and clearly stating in article three that "No person shall engage in prostitution or be a party to prostitution"[33], therefore explicitly proscribing both the engagement in prostitution and the act of becoming a client of a prostitute, the bill notably refrains from delineating specific punitive measures for these forbidden activities. Instead, the legal framework focalizes its enforcement efforts on the criminalization of acts that facilitate or help make profits from prostitution such as solicitation, coercion or making a location available for prostitution.[34] Here it is important to understand that the law delineates solicitation as a criminal act but not the transaction of sex itself, thereby underscoring a conceptualization of solicitation as an inherently criminal act intrinsically tied to moral transgressions because it is seen as something that could alter and endanger public morality.

---

[31] Ibid.

[32] "Baishun Bōshi Hō" 売春防止法 (Prostitution Prevention Law), 1956, https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=331AC0000000118_20230606_505AC0000000028, accessed 21 November 2023.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Gabriele KOCH, "Twenty-Four Ways to Have Sex within the Law. Regulation and Moral Subjectivity in the Japanese Sex Industry.", *Journal of Legal Anthropology*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2021, p. 34.

The governmental attitudes towards prostitution can be observed in the different stances employed in the law to deal with prostitutes and clients. In fact, the legislative discourse embedded within the Prostitution Prevention Law perpetuates a societal narrative wherein prostitution is viewed through a lens of danger and therefore prostitutes are designated as subjects in need of moral, sexual, and social correction, while there is no focus on the problematization of the "male pursuit of sexual gratification in itself".[35] This is further underscored by the absence of explicit penalties for engaging in prostitution or seeking the services of a sex worker. These different approaches towards subjects involved in the commodification of sex were perpetuated and served to reinforce societal norms surrounding the stigmatization of those working within the sex industry, supporting the historical dichotomy between the perceived societal necessity of prostitution, connected to ideals of male sexuality, and the prevailing moral judgments associated with the idea that prostitution could endanger female virtues of chastity and that sex workers with their job "transgress widespread norms of feminine behaviour"[36] .

Another relevant aspect of the Prostitution Prevention Law and its effects on the contemporary sex industry in Japan can be found in article two of the legislation where the definition of prostitution is given as "sexual intercourse with an unspecified other person for compensation or with the promise to receive compensation".[37] This article as it is written gives space to free interpretations and loopholes, therefore it needs a further problematization. Although the article doesn't give any deeper definition of what is meant by sexual intercourse, since the enactment of the law authorities have always identified and limited their definition of sexual intercourse as penile-vaginal copulation. This interpretation reflected the mid-century normative perception of prostitution. The service offered by prostitutes at the time the law was passed was intercourse (defined as penile-vaginal copulation), therefore lawmakers when faced with the challenge to trace a definition of commercial sex into the law, logically separated this conduct as the focal point of their legislative framework.[38] The very limited interpretation given by authorities of sexual intercourse has had significant impacts on the sex industry that has developed and flourished form the emanation of the law to the present day. Specifically, since intercourse has always been seen as penile-vaginal copulation, not long after the emanation of the

[35] Ibid.

[36] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 3.

[37] "Baishun Bōshi Hō" 売春防止法 (Prostitution Prevention Law), 1956, https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=331AC0000000118_20230606_505AC0000000028, accessed 21 November 2023.

[38] KOCH, "Twenty-Four Ways…", cit., p. 34.

Prostitution Prevention Law new businesses offering any type of sexual service that didn't include intercourse started to appear. This was made possible because they were not infringing any law per se, they were rather using legal interpretations of the law in their favour. Moreover, given the cis-heteronormative framing of sex provided by the law, the same reasoning was applied to all the businesses that started offering same-sex or non-cis-heteronormative sexual services.

Furthermore, although the law specifically proscribed sexual intercourse, it doesn't mean that this type of service completely disappeared. In fact, sexual intercourse remained a service available for purchase sometimes illegally but other times, once again thanks to lose interpretations of the law within legal frameworks, and that is the case of Turkish baths (nowadays known as soaplands).[39] As previously stated article two of the Prostitution Prevention Law defines prostitution as sexual intercourse with an unspecified other person. Soapland owners exploit a loophole created by this definition, specifically where it states that intercourse is forbidden between unspecified persons. Therefore, when a customer enters a soapland they are asked to pay a fee that represents charges for using the facilities, then they pay a massage fee directly to the women working at the soapland. In addition to creating the impression that the owner of the soapland is not a brothel owner and that the woman is working independently, this process allows the worker and the customer to become acquainted therefore if intercourse eventually occurs it is not between two unspecified people but between two consenting adults that are acquainted.[40]

Lastly, although after the emanation of the Prostitution Prevention Law entrepreneurs focused on starting businesses that, to avoid breaking the law offered non-intercourse sexual services, lawmakers decided not to modify the anti-prostitution law to incorporate new definitions of sex that would include the broad variety of sexual services offered on the market. Rather, they incorporated in 1966 the new businesses such as Turkish baths and strip theatres in the legislation of the Law Regulating Entertainment Business enacted in 1948 whose function was to control all potentially subversive forms of entertainment.[41] In this law as well the focus is once again put on the importance of protecting good morals and youth from potentially coming in contact with the sex industry as stated in article one:

---

[39] Soaplands are bathhouse brothels where customers can pay for various services including erotic massages, scrubs, and fellatio in bathtubs. They are commonly known for including intercourse in the services offered.
[40] JUN Hongo, "Law bends over backward to allow 'fuzoku'". *The Japan Times Online*, 2008, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2008/05/27/reference/law-bends-over-backward-to-allow-fuzoku/, accessed 22 November 2023.
[41] KOCH, "Twenty-Four Ways...", cit., p. 35.

> "The purpose of this Act is to preserve good morals and a clean adult entertainment environment, and to prevent acts that impede the sound upbringing of juveniles, by restricting the hours of operation, business areas, etc., and the entry of juveniles into adult entertainment businesses and sexually oriented businesses, etc., and by taking measures such as promoting proper business practices in order to contribute to the sound development of the adult entertainment business."[42]

Through the enactment of this law measurements, to limit contacts between the morally deviated part of society represented by the sex industry and the rest of society perceived as morally good and respectable, strict regulations were put into place such as the obligation for sex business to maintain a minimum of 200 meters of distance from every public building such as schools, a type of spatial limitation that draws from the spatial separation and containment typical of the Edo period red-light districts.

In conclusion, both the Prostitution Prevention Law of 1956 and the Law Regulating Entertainment Business of 1948 are characterized by overarching concerns with the moral dimensions of prostitution. Through the selective criminalization, rehabilitation focus, and ambiguous definition of sexual intercourse, the legislations play a pivotal role in shaping societal perceptions, attitudes, and the regulatory frameworks surrounding prostitution in contemporary Japan. The aim of both these legislations is to define the parameters (such as location and operating hours specified in the Law Regulating Entertainment Business) that govern the commodification of sex rather than to prevent it. They are still the "basis by which the content of sexual commerce is regulated today"[43] and the enduring impact of these legislative choices underscores the complex interplay between moral ideals, societal norms, and the legal regulation of the sex industry in the country.

[42] "Fūzoku Eigyōtō no Kisei oyobi Gyōmu no Tekiseikatō ni kansuru Hōritsu" 風俗営業等の規制及び業務の適正化等に関する法律 (Law Regulating Enterteinment Business), 1948, https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=323AC0000000122, accessed 22 November 2023.
[43] KOCH, "Twenty-Four Ways…", cit., p. 35.

Chapter II

Aspects that drive women's participation in the sex industry

The first chapter has tried to demonstrate that the approach historically taken by Japanese officials and, for a short period of time, by US occupational forces in collaboration with the Japanese government, towards the sex industry has mostly been one of acceptance of its existence. This still applies to the industry today, where laws such as the Prostitution Prevention Law and the Law Regulating Entertainment Business make the existence of businesses that offer any kind of sexual services legally possible.[1]

Discourses on the sex industry and its social significance have always focused on the consumer's side of the trade, generally identified as male, and on the allegedly 'natural' male sexual need used to justify the presence of the sex industry. Therefore, contemporary legislative approaches, which are the result of past discourses, still focus on the significance of providing men with access to sexual fulfilment in order to maintain social order. Although this approach structures perceptions of the sex industry as a societal necessity, it also keeps the role of the providers of sexual services mostly hidden and their position before the law insecure. The ambivalence in different approaches for different actors in the sex trade reflects the ambivalence in societal perceptions of sex workers, that is the importance sex workers have in this type of economy as the providers of sexual services versus the stigmatization they suffer from choosing sex work as their job. Still, although sex work is a highly stigmatized job, one that women involved in avoid sharing not only with the public but also with close friends and family, the number of sex workers in Japan is estimated to be around 222,000.[2]

The academic discourse has tried to analyse the reasons that drive women to sex work, but mainstream explanations fluctuate between poverty, debts, addiction, trauma and therefore exploitation and trafficking, or on the other hand materialism, selfishness, and consumerism. There is often the conviction that women are forced to enter this industry and therefore get exploited or work there unwillingly because they have no other viable option. However, these explanations are reductive and don't take into consideration sex workers' agency, societal and economic expectations, and the status of the gendered economy in Japan, all factor that make motives for entering the sex industry way more multifaceted and complex to explain.

---

[1]As stated in chapter I, the only sexual service proscribed by the law is sexual intercourse which has always been interpreted as cis-heteronormative intercourse, making the flourishing of every other type of business offering sexual services that don't incorporate sexual intercourse formally legal and accepted.

[2] According to the most recent statistics published by the National Police Agency there are currently 22,200 legal sex industry businesses operating throughout Japan. Based on the assumption that each legally registered business employs approximately ten women, the number of sex workers then is believed to be around 222,000. This number however doesn't take into consideration all the women employed in unregistered businesses, making it a clear underestimate of the real number of sex workers in Japan.

The focus of this chapter is, therefore, to understand and analyse some of the reasons that drive women to turn to the industry despite the stigmatization they know they will face upon entering it, and the dangers connected to working in an industry that considers the existence of sex businesses legal but provides little protection and rights to its workers.

2.1 Working women in a gendered economy

Economic factors are the first ones usually brought into play when analysing reasons that drive women into working in the sex industry. The picture depicted often involves women that live in extreme poverty and therefore have no choice but to sell themselves to survive. This then leads to the assumption that not only these women have serious economic issues but are also probably exploited and therefore their human rights are violated. This type of explanation makes sex workers' position more socially acceptable by the general public[3] and is often endorsed by business owners when they instruct newcomers on how to act if a police raid was to happen.[4] While the idea that these women do sex work to survive makes it easier for the public to understand and accept their position, it completely disregards women's own agency.

On the other end interpretations can involve materialistic selfish women that in order to satisfy their desire for expensive products use sex work as a way to make fast money and buy branded goods.[5] Both these visions are often supported by very negative media representations of the industry, despite its accepted societal presence, and are shared even by women before they actually enter the sex industry as workers.

I argue that economic factors such as high and fast earnings, although not the only agents, do have a relevant role in driving women to the sex industry. However, to understand why women are drawn towards this industry the focus should not be on the materialistic aspect of earning money either because of poverty or because of selfishness

[3] KUROSAWA Aki, "Beyond 'Sex Work': Japanese Night Work and 'Shakai-Keiken'", *Asian Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2020, p. 213.
[4] KOCH, *Healing Labor*..., cit., p. 84.
[5] General discourse used this interpretation, for example, to explain the phenomenon of *enjo kōsai*, compensated dating in English, a phenomenon that appeared in the early 1990s in Japan. It involved young women, generally high school students, that in exchange for money or luxury gifts spent time with older men, went on dates with them and sometimes offered sexual favours. Before an actual debate on the analysis of the reasons that brought these young, often well educated, women to participate in *enjo kōsai* started, the preferred justification for the phenomenon was to portray these girls as materialists that only cared about obtaining luxury goods.

and whim, but on analysing how the gendered economy and societal expectations shape women's perception of ordinary work as opposed to sex work and how these perceptions can make sex work appealing compared to other types of feminized work.

Sex workers themselves, when asked, confirm that this is a "lucrative economic opportunity for many women".[6] Therefore we should ask ourselves: What are women's working opportunities in the Japanese economy? Do these opportunities give them the financial means to provide for themselves and their families? How do women relate to working opportunities and socio-cultural expectations? To answer these questions and understand what women might find appealing of the sex industry we have to analyse how the Japanese economy works and how it favours men over women in certain aspects of it.

2.1.1 Economic challenges and part-time employment

When we look at how women are distributed in the workforce, we see that the majority of them, regardless of their age are employed in part-time jobs. This is a result of historical developments, particularly those that took place between the 1960s and early 1970s, when Japan experienced a period of high economic growth and therefore the general demand for labour increased. During this period industries needed cheap unskilled labour that men could not provide anymore because a rising number of young men continued through high school and then university. Industries therefore turned to women, especially married women who had already had children, who were generally less educated than men and had less working experience and could therefore be paid less.[7] Once the economic bubble burst in the 1980s women who were employed as part-time workers were the first ones to be cut off because of the nature of instability of their employment status. Still nowadays women in their thirties to forties, who have already married and given birth to their children, constitute a group of workers that industries can turn to when, in response to fluctuations in the economy, they are in need of cheap labour for short amounts of time, that they can also dismiss when not needed anymore.[8] Women themselves might be the first ones to turn to part-time work due to the fact that, on the

[6] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 58.

[7] Mary C. BRINTON, *Women and the Economic Miracle: Gender and Work in Postwar Japan*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993, p. 10.

[8] In Japan men are usually employed in a firm after graduation from university and remain there without changing place of employment for the rest of their working lives. This is because in wage determination for employees, seniority plays a major role, therefore it is very rare for male workers to either change firm or to be dismissed. Women have a different work participation trajectory that will be analysed shortly after and that makes it easier for them to be non-regular workers.

paper, it allows more flexibility in terms of work schedule. This allows women, who are generally the ones considered responsible for house and childcare, to balance their other responsibilities with their working life. However, wages for part-time workers are substantially lower than the ones for full-time workers, despite the fact that part-time work doesn't always mean that the number of working hours is significantly inferior to that of full-time[9], thus rendering flexibility, considered an attractive aspect of part-time employment, formally meaningless. Furthermore, workers employed in part-time jobs don't enjoy a series of benefits, such as retirement benefits, that full-time workers have.[10]

2.1.2 The M-shaped curve and segregated career tracks

While it is true that the position of women as part-time workers is an historical development connected to economic changes dating back to the 1960s, high economic growth in the two decades before the 1980s is not the only reason why women find themselves mostly segregated in part-time jobs. Looking at the trajectory of female labour force participation can help us shed some light on how women engage with work and how societal expectations shape the way they relate to it.

The vast majority of women and men enter the workforce right after graduating from college, however there are some differences in how they then progress in their career paths. Societal expectations on how women will participate in the labour force condition the opportunities they are given once they start working.

Japanese firms generally offer a two-track system that workers can choose to pursue: *sōgōshoku*, the career track, and *ippanshoku*, the noncareer track.[11] The career track brings with it the probability for a worker to be transferred to different branches of the same firm, which might become difficult for women who are expected to take care of the house and children, but it also grants promotion opportunities for said workers. The noncareer track does not include the option of possible transfer to other branches but it also precludes the possibility to get promoted.

Articles 5 and 6 of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, passed in 1985 and implemented in the following year, state that employers when recruiting should not promote jobs for specific genders[12] and therefore should offer the same opportunities for

---

[9] FUJIWARA Chisa, "Single Mothers and Welfare Restructuring in Japan: Gender and Class Dimensions of Income and Employment.", *The Asia-Pacific Journal, Japan Focus*, vol. 6, no.1, 2008, p. 9.
[10] BRINTON, *Women and the Economic Miracle…*, cit., p. 138.
[11] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 9.
[12] Before the promulgation of the law, it was common to promote jobs as specifically male or female jobs.

men and women when selecting them.[13] Translated this means that when recruited, both men and women should be offered the same possibility to choose either the career track or the noncareer track. However, since the law doesn't prescribe explicit penalties for employers who do not conform with the provisions stated in it, what happens is that men and women are offered different opportunities when recruited. Women are generally pressured to take noncareer jobs and this is caused by the widespread belief that they will follow the so-called M-shaped curve that represents the typical trajectory of female labour participation in Japan.

Throughout the years female participation to the workforce has assumed the shape of an 'M' that resembles the lifecycle expected from a woman. Women enter the workforce after graduation, but they will likely leave either when they get married or when they have their first child in their late twenties, to then come back to work after they finish raising their children in their thirties and forties.[14] Societal perceptions see motherhood as the most suitable job for women[15], hence women themselves are pushed into believing that realization as a person comes with motherhood and therefore follow the expected lifecycle society promotes for them. These perceptions however not only have an impact on women's behaviour but at the same time shape how employers relate to women and how they will perform in a working environment. Since the general understanding is for women to work for a few years and then leave to prioritize children and household care, employers pressure women to take noncareer jobs because they see it as a worthless investment to give women career track jobs that entail on-the-job training and opportunities to get promoted if they will eventually leave. Some women, however, decide to re-enter the labour force in their late thirties and forties, after they feel they have carried out their role as mothers, but again segregated in part-time jobs because compared to men in their same age group they have less working experience, having worked less years. This makes it more difficult to find firms that will be willing to offer them full-time employment.

---

[13] "Koyō no bunya niokeru danjo no kintō na kikai oyobi taigū no kakuho tō nikansuru hōritsu shikō kisoku" 雇用の分野における男女の均等な機会及び待遇の確保 等に関する法律施行規則 (Ordinance for the Enforcement of the Act on Ensuring Equal Opportunities for and Treatment of Men and Women in Employment), 1985, https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=347AC0000000113, accessed 29 December 2023.

[14] BRINTON, *Women and the Economic Miracle…*, cit., p. 54

[15] FUJITA Mariko, "'It's All Mother's Fault': Childcare and the Socialization of Working Mothers in Japan", *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1989, p. 72.

2.1.3 Cultural ideologies and work expectations

Societal expectations on women's behavioural trajectories related to marriage and childcare duties are not the only ones that shape female labour participation. Traditional roles attributed to both men and women in Japan also play an important part, because they define a strong gendered division of labour that attributes the public working realm to men and the private household one to women. In particular, since the 1960s the male breadwinner model of the family, which promotes the idea that men should be the primary earners of the family and women should prioritize their role first as wives and then as mothers, has been accepted and defended as a desirable system for the growth of the economy.[16] This system, that implies a gendered division of labour however, makes it difficult for women to balance their role as mothers with their role as workers because the workplace and the expectations connected to it are not shaped to accommodate women's needs. Japanese society expects men to devote themselves to work[17], this means that many jobs come with the requirement of long hours of overtime and frequent after-work gatherings. These expectations are built on the belief that men can focus all their efforts on work because they have someone else, namely their wives, that takes care of the house, the children, and of them when they come home exhausted because of overtime. Women, on the other hand, if they were to undertake a full-time employment and meet corporate culture expectations such as overtime and frequent gatherings, would have to address the so called second shift as conceptualized by Arlie Hochschild.[18] This term refers to a particular consequence of the traditional gendered division of labour inscribed in contemporary economy. Traditional expectations attribute household responsibilities to women, however from the 20th century onwards a rising number of women started to work as a response to economic changes in society. Nonetheless, their role as sole responsible for housework didn't falter. This resulted in what Hochschild defines as the second shift, which is women's responsibility to fulfil their role as housewives who perform unpaid housework (the second shift), in addition to the paid work they perform in the labour market (the first shift). As we have seen, Japanese society still firmly holds the assumption that women are the ones responsible for domestic duties. Societal expectations such as these ones align with Hochschild's theoretical framework and help us understand how,

[16] ENDO Kimitsugu, "Rōdō ni okeru kakusa to kōsei: '1960 nendaigata nihon shisutemu' kara atarashii shakai shisutemu he no tankan wo mezashite" (Inequality and fairness in labour: towards a shift from the '1960s' style Japanese system' to a new social system), *Shakai Seisaku*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2014, p. 11.
[17] KOCH, *Healing Labor...*, cit., p. 72.
[18] Arlie Russell HOCHSCHILD, Anne MACHUNG, *The Second Shift*, New York, Penguin, 2012, p. 4.

when women in Japan decide to enter the labour market, either as full-time or part-time employees, they are expected to take care of the house and the children alongside their responsibility as workers and therefore have no way to escape the second shift.[19]

Another problem for women associated with corporate work in Japan is the common practice for career track employees to be transferred to different branches of the same firm, often far away from their original place of employment. Once again women are put in a difficult position because since they are seen as the ones responsible for the household management, their relocation would mean that not only them but the whole family would have to move to a new city, and they would have to find new schools for their children and a new support system in an unknown environment. This is why women are usually pushed into noncareer tracks, which however as we have already seen preclude them the possibility to advance their career.

2.1.4 Legislative factors

Part- time job and career track segregation for women is, as we have seen, a result of normative behavioural trajectories, traditional roles that create a gendered division of labour and societal and corporate expectations. There are, however, legislative factors that also contribute to women's choice to either turn to part-time employment or sex work.

Tax and social insurance systems are based on the 1960s' male breadwinner model of the family. In this legislative framework the spouse with the lowest income of the two is considered dependent on the other.[20] As explained before traditional gender norms attribute the role of the breadwinner of the family to the husband, rendering the wife economically dependent on him in front of the law. Therefore, since 1961 the spouse with the highest income, generally a man, has been able to demand a tax reduction as long as the other spouse's income is lower than ¥1.03m. This has led many women to willingly choose part-time employment or reduce their working hours to make their husbands eligible for the tax reduction.[21] Companies also have an interest in keeping women segregated to part-time employment and maintaining their wages low. This is because women who are not under their husband's social insurance allowance, because they earn too much, must apply for a personal social insurance allowance that the company hiring

[19] Catherine ROTTENBERG, *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 39-40.
[20] Uma RANI, "Economic Growth, Labour Markets and Gender in Japan", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 41, 2006, p. 4375.
[21] Caroline CRIADO-PEREZ, *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, United States, Abrams, 2019, p. 260.

them has to contribute for, and companies wouldn't want to increase their expanses especially for workers that with high probability will leave the job after a few years to dedicate themselves to motherhood.[22]

2.1.5 Childcare and work balance

Childcare facilities' structural characteristics and availability, together with cultural ideas of the role a woman should assume regarding childbearing, hinder yet again chances to pursue a career in the corporate working environment, therefore opening the possibility to work in the sex industry.

Most childcare facilities open between 7:30 AM and 8:30 AM, and close between 5:30 PM and 6:00 PM.[23] As I previously analysed, a core aspect of corporate work is the expectation that workers will do overtime and after-work gatherings. These expectations make it difficult for working mothers to balance the working schedule to the opening and closing times of childcare facilities. Opening and closing times of day care centres endorse the gendered division of labour diffused in Japanese society. They don't match the corporate worker's schedule because the general perception is that in a couple of parents the men will be the one working and doing overtime while the woman will be the one taking care of the children at home, or at best will be working part-time and will have time to drop children off and pick them up from school, hence the opening and closing times.

Problems arise also when children get sick because they are not allowed to attend day care if they have a fever or some type of illness.[24] This puts working women, who don't have relatives to rely on to take care of the children, in a very difficult position. Since women are the ones expected to take care of children, even if they work, they are also the ones expected to take time off from work to stay with their children when they are sick. However, the time that a worker can take off from work is limited and can put women in the position of choosing either to keep working or to take care of their children, precluding the possibility to balance both.

Lastly the cultural role of mother attributed to women influences their willingness to enrol their children to childcare facilities. From famous writers to articles in newspapers, the idea that a woman should dedicate her life to her children is so widespread and prevalent that a woman who chooses to not devote all her time to children but tries to

---

[22] RANI, "Economic Growth…", cit., p. 4375.
[23] FUJITA, "'It's All Mother's Fault'…", cit., p. 81.
[24] Ibid, p. 87.

balance work and household duties is deemed selfish even by teachers of childcare facilities who should pose as allies, since they themselves are working mothers.[25]

2.2 Sex work as a way to break gender norms

The gendered nature of the Japanese economy, as we have seen, can be regarded as an important driving factor for women to turn to the sex industry as the most viable employment option. Studies often focus on this aspect to explain reasons that bring women to the sex industry. In fact, women working in the sex industry can earn much more than women employed in ordinary part-time jobs[26], although the earnings vary depending on numerous factors and are based on services rendered rather than sex work being waged work, so if a woman doesn't have customers, she will not make money.

However, focusing solely on the financial framework that drives women to the sex industry disregards women's agency, their ability to choose and their awareness of the environment surrounding them. When turning the research focus on sex workers' agency we can understand how women directly interpret their entrance in this industry and what they find appealing of the job.

As Fujita Mariko states in her research: "From a Japanese cultural point of view, a Japanese mother is expected neither to be economically independent nor to create time for her own activities. […] To do so for her own growth or career development is seen as a sign of selfishness."[27] Here Fujita refers specifically to mothers who choose to go against cultural norms and instead of focusing all their attention on childcare, decide to pursue a career and try to balance both aspects of their lives. This concept, however, can be extended to all women. Society attributes to women firstly the roles of wives and mothers and only secondly the role of workers, therefore even when women are not yet married or don't have children, they are expected to follow a certain lifecycle and eventually fulfil the role they have been attributed because of their gender. Therefore, even when a woman is unmarried and childfree, since the expectation is that at some point both statuses will have to change, if she decides to dedicate her time to pursue work or personal growth, she is considered selfish.

---

[25] Ibid, pp. 75-78

[26] As previously explained part-time employment is the working status of the majority of women in Japan, therefore it can be useful to compare its attributes to the ones of sex work as it can be considered the ordinary respectable alternative to working in the sex industry.

[27] FUJITA, "'It's All Mother's Fault'…", cit., p. 90.

However, through her fieldwork research based on interviews with Japanese women employed in the sex industry, Gabriel Koch has tried to highlight that the elements Fujita cites as those that lead to the identification of a woman as selfish, namely economic independence and autonomy to participate freely in the economy, are also the elements that sex workers themselves cite when they are asked what is attractive about sex work.[28] In fact, "Many women find sex work attractive out of a desire for a particular kind of autonomy."[29]Through this autonomy women exercise agency within the framework of institutional and traditional limitations and are able to break free from gender norms.[30] Namely through choosing sex work as their job they don't have to comply with corporate expectations, nor traditional ones that expect them to fulfil their roles as mothers, leave work when they get married or have children, be economically dependent from their husbands and dedicate themselves solely on raising their children disregarding their personal wishes and expectations.

Koch stresses the importance of understanding that the elements that differentiate sex work from ordinary employment are those that most attract women to the industry and can make us understand how sex workers perceive their job. These elements can be gathered under the definitions of autonomy and flexibility as provided by sex workers themselves.

As we have previously seen, ordinary employment sets very tight schedules that require total dedication to the company through the observance of hierarchies, the demand for many hours of overtime and frequent after-work gatherings. This type of dedication, as we have already analysed, can become stringent, especially for women who are expected to balance their work life with their household duties. This can also take away time to pursue any other activity unrelated to work and chores. Part-time work, which is considered the most respectable option for women who want to work, is not always the best solution to avoid corporate work's rigidity. Part-time employment's working hours in Japan generally don't differ much from full-time working hours, therefore the lack of free time and the difficulty to balance work and private life remain a problem. Moreover, part-time jobs provide low wages that make it difficult to make ends meet and since recent statistics demonstrate that Japan is a society where a growing number of families are led by a single

[28] KOCH, *Healing Labor*..., cit., p. 50.
[29] Ibid., p. 60.
[30] KUROSAWA, "Beyond 'Sex Work'...", cit., p. 210.

parent[31] who is the only breadwinner of the family[32] it becomes clear how sex work can become appealing both in economic terms and in flexibility and autonomy.

Sex work grants women the flexibility to choose for how many days and hours a week they want to work. For example, women who in the normal corporate field are pressured to retire when they become mothers to dedicate themselves to their children, through the sex work industry can find employment and work on those hours when their children are at school and their presence is not required at home.[33] Through sex work women can therefore set a schedule that matches their lifestyles, get days off when needed and at the same time be economically independent: whether they are mothers who need to take care of children, wives who have the responsibility of elderly, students who want to pay their student loans but at the same time participate in the leisure economy and enjoy social activities or women who want to pursue study experiences abroad and therefore need to save money. The sex industry provides women with a place of employment that, differently from the corporate industry doesn't ask them to adapt their behaviour to the male working standard but can be adjusted to their own personal needs and expectations.

As analysed in previous paragraphs economic independence is not common for Japanese women, and institutional frameworks together with traditional gender norms promote female economic dependency on relatives or husbands. The sex industry stands out in this regard as well. Through it, women earn more money than they would through normal part-time jobs in less time. The financial aspect makes it possible for them to "expand their sense of possibility and participate in activities that otherwise would be inaccessible to them."[34] For women who work in this industry the desire to be autonomous, especially in terms of financial independence, and therefore to be able to participate in the economy freely plays a central role for their entrance in the industry and their perception of it. They take pride in the autonomy, flexibility, and financial independence that the sex industry offers them and have a positive view of their employment because they are aware of the privileged position, they occupy within the female labour market.[35]

---

[31] As Endo Kimitsugu explains generally the single breadwinner of the family is a single mother working as a non-regular low-wage earner.

[32] ENDO, Kimitsugu, "Rōdō ni okeru…", cit., pp. 13-14.

[33] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 62.

[34] Ibid.

[35] By privileged position I refer to the structural factors that make sex work a more appealing job than other female employment options in the society. For this analysis I am not taking into consideration the cultural aspect of stigmatization that characterizes societal perceptions of sex workers, that will be addressed in the next chapters.

2.3 Friendship and curiosity as driving factors

The complex landscape of women engaging in sex work in Japan is shaped by a multitude of socio-cultural and economic factors. Aside from the gendered division of labour in society and the structural elements that characterise sex work and make it stand out compared to other types of feminized labour, women choose the sex industry for reasons that might seem more simplistic but that nonetheless highlight the importance of women's agency and awareness regarding the options they have within the labour market. Two of these reasons, analysed by Aki Kurosawa, are friendship and curiosity.

Friendship plays a major role especially in making women, commonly first timers who have no experience of the industry but what the media represent it as, feel safe about the job. Generally, media portray a very bleak picture of the sex industry as a place of exploitation and criminality filled with desperate women who must work there because they have no other option than to sell themselves to survive. Therefore, when considering job opportunities knowing someone that already works in the field can help reassure about the safety of the job and make it easier for women to enter the industry.[36] However, because of the deep-rooted stigmatization associated with the job, knowing someone that is a sex worker is very difficult. Women generally avoid talking about their profession out of fear of being judged, losing their respectability, losing other working opportunities or to protect their children from the fallout if their identities were to be outed.

There are, nonetheless, other ways to gain knowledge about the sex industry. First timers especially can find informations through employment magazines specialized in sex work offers that are handed out in busy areas of the city like any other employment magazine, said magazines' respective websites, or billboards promoting high paying working opportunities for women, an underlying allusion to sex work jobs. While it is true that these types of media generally strongly rely on the financial aspect to attract women, they also include many elements that make it up for the lack of connections with women who are already employed in the sex industry and replace them in reassuring newcomers on the ordinariness of the job. Magazines often include interviews with sex workers that reassure readers about safety, pay and working conditions, confirm that you don't need experience and explain that there are offers for women of every age. The seemingly easy availability of all these materials and positive, reassuring attitudes promoted by them can influence women into pursuing sex work. Since the sex industry is seen as "a topic outside

[36] KUROSAWA, "Beyond 'Sex Work'…", cit., pp. 218-219.

of the realm of acceptable female curiosity”[37], many women have very little knowledge about it, therefore coming across magazines and billboards that promote the ordinariness and safety of the sex industry can heighten women’s curiosity and interest. Interviews conducted by Kurosawa demonstrated that thanks to friends who already work in the industry, the openness and ordinariness of recruiting magazines and the natural integration of sex industry businesses to the city landscape where women can go as customers, potential sex work candidates gain knowledge about this field and “are genuinely curious to explore night work, undermining the hegemonic assumption that women are *unwillingly* to do night work unless struggling with poverty.”[38]

2.4 Conclusions

Through this chapter I have tried to analyse the complex set of reasons that might drive women to the sex industry, underscoring the importance to interpret them as a continuum rather than monolithic motives that are mutually exclusive.

Economic factors and the gendered nature of the Japanese economy and workforce are driving factors in shaping women’s work opportunities. Societal expectations connected to female labour force participation condition women’s entrance in the workforce. In particular: shared beliefs that women will prioritize their families over their career, that men should be the sole breadwinners of a couple, rigid corporate work expectations that imply long overtime hours and after-work gatherings which are not compatible with women’s necessities, legislative factors that promote female economic dependence on a male relative, childcare structural characteristics that don’t match corporate work expectations and traditional gender roles attributed to both men and women construct a strongly gendered division of labour in the Japanese society which limits women’s working opportunities, precludes them from pursuing full-time employment and segregates them to part-time work. However, even though part-time employment may appear a viable option, low wages and working hours that are very similar to the ones of full-time employment render it a difficult path to follow. This is especially true for single mothers, generally divorced women, who receive little to no help from the government[39] since they can’t benefit from tax reductions granted to workers who

---

[37] KOCH, *Healing Labor*…, cit., p. 51
[38] KUROSAWA, “Beyond ‘Sex Work’…”, cit., p. 220.
[39] KOCH, *Healing Labor*…, cit., p. 61.

have a low-income spouse to support, nor there is a law that prescribes joint custody therefore the parent without custody[40] is not required to pay for child support.

All the elements that create a gendered division of labour and women's job segregation are also the structural characteristics that set sex work apart from other types of feminized labour and make it appealing. The sex work industry allows women to build a working environment that accommodates their specific needs and desires through flexibility and autonomy in establishing the working schedule. The lack of rigid corporate norms and the high earning possibilities based solely on one's own ability to attract clients also cater to women's interest in the industry. Economic independence, that can hardly be reached through other working opportunities, together with autonomy and flexibility create a positive environment that can put sex work under a better light than part-time employment and can help women affirm themselves as women before mothers and break free from stringent gender norms that see them as economically dependent subjects who are expected to devote themselves to house and childcare, disregarding their personal desires and growth.

Ultimately it is important to analyse determining factors that drive women's entrance to the sex industry through women's own agency. Agency is particularly evident if we explore more nuanced reasons behind women's entrance into the sex industry, including the role of friendship and curiosity, and we start to embrace the idea that women might enter the industry willingly and not out of exploitation and desperation.

While financial considerations are relevant factors, reasons for entering the sex industry extend beyond economic necessity and are also shaped by the societal perception of the industry. Media representations significantly shape impressions of the sex industry and promote a very negative image of it. Friendship and curiosity can assist in overcoming the deep-rooted stigmatization associated with the job and promote a different understanding of it. In particular, friendship and connections with women who are already employed in the industry play a crucial role, especially for first-time sex workers, by providing a sense of safety and reassurance. However, due to the stigmatization that makes it difficult to know someone already working in the industry, women may seek information about sex work from alternative sources such as specialized employment magazines, websites, and billboards. These sources provide insights into the ordinary aspects of the

[40] In the majority of divorce cases in Japan custody is granted to the mother, who however is also generally the low earner of the couple. This is also a result of traditional roles that attribute to the mother the sole responsibility for the growth and development of children, disregarding completely the father's role in the process as Fujita Mariko explains in her study.
FUJITA, "'It's All Mother's Fault'…", cit., p. 74.

job and may counteract the negative stereotypes. Easy exposure to materials that promote the ordinariness and safety of the sex industry can heighten women's curiosity, often suppressed due to societal norms that see it as a topic out of the realm of female respectability and make them genuinely curious about exploring sex work. Therefore, it is important to understand women as subjects that, despite stigmatization associated with sex work, are aware of socio-cultural and economic factors and make choices based on their understanding of available options in the labour market challenging not only gender norms but also the assumption that they are unwilling to engage in sex work unless in dire financial straits.

In summary, the chapter underscores the complex interplay of societal, economic, and personal factors that contribute to women entering the sex industry in Japan. It challenges simplistic narratives surrounding sex work, emphasizing the agency of women in making choices within a socio-cultural and economic landscape that often limits their options and highlights the role that social networks, media, and curiosity play in shaping women's decisions within this industry.

Chapter III

Whore Stigma and Coping Strategies

Women, as we have seen at length in the previous chapter, voluntarily choose sex work over ordinary employment for a number of different reasons ranging from economic aspects to cultural expectations. Regardless of the driving factors, women's choice of employment in the sex industry often highlights their high sense of awareness regarding the state of the gendered economy they live in, and the collective expectations that society places on them. This high sense of awareness, however, makes them also prone to understand that the same reasons that make sex work an appealing option correspond with the motives that also make it a marginalized profession that generates stigmatization.

Sex workers benefit from the marginalization attached to the sex work industry, which makes it a lucrative opportunity for women of different socio-economic backgrounds and allows them to break free from gender norms and achieve a certain degree of freedom that ordinary employment denies them. Nevertheless, this same marginalization negatively affects workers by rendering them stigmatized subjects who work in a legally libidinal environment that makes it difficult for them to protect themselves from violence or to ask and enforce their rights before the law. Women entering this industry are acutely aware that their line of work is viewed as demeaning and low status and is therefore not given respect. Nonetheless, they choose to deal with stigmatization, through the development of coping strategies, because of the financial and social opportunities sex work offers them.

Throughout this chapter I will therefore try to discuss the roots of stigmatization associated with sex work in Japan to understand how women address the moral conflict that it generates and which coping strategies they adopt to face it. The importance of this analysis lays on the fact that it highlights sex workers' agency in their employment choice, and it challenges popular visions that render sex workers passive subjects in need of protection and rescue. The fact that they process and develop coping strategies to address what Pheterson defines as 'whore stigma' [1] demonstrates that sex workers have an understanding of the position they hold in the public's eye. At the same time coping strategies help these women construct the way they want to present themselves to society, how they manoeuvre around social perceptions of them and what meaning they give to their own job.

Lastly this discussion is particularly important because as much as coping strategies help sex workers in giving meaning to their job and build an acceptable identity for themselves, in the Japanese context those same strategies are also the ones that prevent

[1] Gail PHETERSON, "The Whore Stigma: Female Dishonor and Male Unworthiness.", *Social Text*, no. 37, 1993, pp. 39–64.

them from participating in activism and ask for basic rights and recognition before the law, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

3.1 Definition of stigmatization and its roots in the Japanese context

Sex workers' identity not only in Japan but in most countries around the world, is generally constructed as an "evil" "sick" or "deviant" other who, because of the negatively perceived elements imbedded in the constructed identity is denied basic social and working rights.[2] Despite the stigmatization, men and women all over the world choose to engage in sex work and, based on the socio-economic and cultural environment they are employed in, sex workers develop different coping strategies to manage the othering identity they are attributed because of their job. To understand the various coping strategies adopted by sex workers and to overcome and change the negative perception society has of them, it is therefore necessary to understand what the term stigma implies and where does stigmatization come from.

Goffman defines stigma in these terms:

> "While the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind – in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our mind from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma."[3]

Goffman also adds that "The term stigma, then, will be used to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting"[4] highlighting that the "stranger before us" is stigmatized because the attribute that makes him or her different from us is perceived by us as discrediting. What is also important of this definition is that stigma is constructed as a negative judgment that an agent attaches to a second subject who passively receives it.[5] Therefore, perceptions of stigma and levels of stigmatization are deeply tied with the actors

---

[2] Ine VANWESENBEECK, "Another Decade of Social Scientific Work on Sex Work: A Review of Research 1990-2000", *Annual Review of Sex Research*, vol. 12, 2001, pp. 242-289.
[3] Erving GOFFMAN, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1963, p. 25.
[4] Ibid.
[5] KUMADA Yoko, "The historical and current stigma of sex workers in Japan", in Jeanett Bjønness, Lorraine Nencel, May-Len Skilbrei (edited by), *Reconfiguring Stigma in Studies of Sex for Sale*, New York, Routledge, 2022, p. 186.

involved and depend on the hierarchical relationships that those actors have with each other.

Sex workers in Japan throughout history have, indeed, experienced different levels of stigmatization based on the hierarchical relationships they have had with their clientele and society as a whole. For instance, studies of what are believed to be the oldest figures involved in the sex industry indicate that women who commodified themselves and had intimate relationships with members of the upper classes in ancient times (c. 700-1400 A.D.) enjoyed some level of power and could obtain relevant positions in society. This however is true only for a small number of *yūjo*[6] who are the ones whose stories were recounted in books and poems, while most of them who lived in poverty were left unwritten and were probably treated and perceived differently by society.

Once indentured prostitution became a common practice, and women started to enter the industry compelled by contracts, societal perceptions switched to sympathy, pity and a degree of respect for the devoutness of these daughters that in order to help their impoverished families worked as prostitutes. "Society did not respect what they did but rather appreciated the reason they had become a *yūjo*: to help their families"[7]. The concept of filial duty that moved families to sell their daughters to brothel owners and women to unwillingly accept their fate was what in the past made society sympathise whit them. Unwillingness, as we have already seen, is a concept that still today shapes societal perceptions of sex workers and is promoted by sex businesses' owners as a medium that helps the public accept women's choice to work in the sex industry. In fact, as we will analyse in this chapter, filial duty and therefore unwillingness are amongst the coping strategies which sex workers today use to manage their social identities.

In the past as well as today society did not appreciate sex workers' job, but the reasons that pushed women to it have helped mitigate the negative public opinions of them. Perceptions, however, changed upon the disappearance of indentured contracts which meant that women were now free to choose their own path and in the public's eye if they chose sex work, they were doing it freely, no longer constrained by a contract or compelled by filial duty, and therefore they came to be viewed negatively.

The "whore stigma", as Pheterson calls the stigma specifically attributed to sex workers because of their job, stems from specific notions of female sexuality. In Japan, as

[6] The term refers to women who travelled around offering sex to their clients as well as songs and dances for religious rituals in exchange for goods as payment.
KUMADA, "The historical and current stigma...", cit., pp. 186-187.
[7] Ibid., p.189.

in other countries, sex for women is conceptualised as something that should be reserved to intimate, monogamous and domestic relationships, therefore the sole existence of women who sell sex to multiple clients in the sex industry threatens the ethic and value system of society.[8] The law itself mirrors this perception and defines the commodification of sex as contrary to sexual morality and a violation of the good morals of society[9], yet the commodification of sex short of intercourse is, as previously analysed at length, accepted by the same law. This seeming contradiction can be understood through the analysis of the double standard regarding blame put on men and women in sexual transactions and violation of society's good moral, connected to the traditional idea of male sexual need as something natural that requires satisfaction.

As Goffman highlighted, hierarchical relationships play a central role in stigmatized subjects' perception. Therefore, it is the gender power bias present in Japanese society that makes the commodification of sex a problem in contemporary society. In particular women's appearance and sexuality are valued as objects that men as clients can buy, but that women should not sell because they are expected to adhere to sexual norms that assign sex for female subjects to the intimate private sphere and not the public one.[10] Sex work is then stigmatised because it is viewed as an occupation considered to be sinful and anti-moral[11], a profession where women are "using the body that their parents gave them in an immoral way"[12]. Stigmatization against sex workers can then tell us much about ideas of sexuality and of moral norms inscribed on women's bodies.

Stigmatization centred on the belief that sex workers are voluntarily violating moral norms through the commodification of sex results in other discriminatory statements ranging from sex workers seen as people who don't pay taxes and therefore don't

---

[8] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 74.

[9]"Baishun Bōshi Hō" 売春防止法 (Prostitution Prevention Law), 1956, https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=331AC0000000118_20230606_505AC0000000028, accessed 10 January 2024.

[10] KAMISE Yumiko, "Sei no shōhin ka to shokugyō sutiguma: kyabakura nitaisuru seijin danjo no ishiki chōsa kara" (Sexual Commodification and Occupational Stigma: From the Awareness Survey of Adult Men and Women on Kyaba-Cula), *GEMC Journal*, vol. 5, 2011, p. 33.
上瀬由美子、「性の商品化と職業スティグマ：キャバクラに対する成人男女の意識調査から」、*GEMC Journal*、第 5 巻、2011 年、pp. 32-33.

[11] Ibid.

[12] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 75.

contribute to society, as carriers of diseases[13], and as people who are ready to do anything for money including selling their bodies.[14]

Based on this analysis it is easy to understand that having one's involvement in the sex industry made public might bring very negative consequences, high levels of stress, and alienation. The next question that needs answering is then: How do sex workers deal with the moral conflicts and the potentially negative consequences that arise from their choice of employment?

3.2 Information management, identity disclosure and spatial distancing

Consequences of the possible disclosing of one’s own career in the sex industry to the public are what drive sex workers, not only in Japan, to hide from people their involvement in the industry. Information management is probably the first and most used strategy to avoid unwanted attention to one’s working life and serves as a critical coping strategy within the Japanese sex industry, enabling workers to navigate the challenges and stigma associated with their profession.

Since negative consequences of outing can range from rejection by friends, family and loved ones to social isolation, harassment and can also limit possibilities of finding future employment sex workers have to assess the risks of disclosing their occupation on a case-by-case basis, deciding whether or not to talk to friends and family about their career and how much to tell, especially because consequences of the stigmatization attributed to them could also affect people close to them.[15]

Therefore, information management, a coping strategy based on the premise that a person working in a stigmatized occupation can decide if, when, how and to whom reveal informations about their profession, allows workers to control the narrative surrounding their involvement in the industry, mitigating potential negative consequences in their personal and social lives. Moreover, managing personal information and concealing one’s own true identity help sex workers create a separation between their professional and personal socially acceptable lives. The construction of two different identities then helps

[13] This discriminatory statement is the one that conditioned much of the legal interventions around the management of the sex industry during the US occupation in Japan.
[14] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 75.
[15] Cecilia BENOIT, S. MIKAEL JANSSON, Michaela SMITH, Jackson FLAGG, “Prostitution Stigma and Its Effect on the Working Conditions, Personal Lives, and Health of Sex Workers”, *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 55, 2018, p. 465.

sex workers separate what they believe to be themselves, or the identity that is socially acceptable, from the one associated to the stigmatized occupation.[16]

In her book "The Managed Heart" Hochschild highlights different stances that workers can take towards their job, one of them being the process to completely detach oneself form the job and be aware of when one is acting as the worker persona and when as one's own self.[17] Hochschild's discourse refers to the approach workers involved in some kind of emotional labour have with their job. With emotional labour Hochschild defines the process of controlling and expressing one's emotions when performing a task or fulfilling a professional role. She argues that this process is particularly prevalent in service-oriented professions where interpersonal interactions, creating a positive emotional atmosphere and enhancing customer satisfaction are influential factors for the creation of capital. Controlling the level of involvement with the emotional labour connected to the job then helps workers detach themselves from it and, in particular, from stress inducing situations and burnouts that might arise when dealing with customers. Although Hochschild uses as a case study flight attendants I argue that the researcher's approach can help to understand how sex workers in Japan create a different working persona for themselves.

Sex work, as I will analyse further below, can be considered a type of emotional labour, one that Koch defines as healing labour[18]. Sex workers themselves conceptualize the acts they perform at work as emotional labour in order to give meaning to their job. However, both because of its nature as a form of emotional labour and because of the stigmatization attached to the profession sex workers, as previously stated, feel the need to detach themselves from it. To do so they use information management and all related techniques to construct what Gabriele Koch defines as "day and night faces" [19], the day face disclosed to family, friends and the public, while the night face hidden from everybody but clients. Building a sex worker's identity generally implies the use of a stage name by which to be known by customers, a fake age on the sex worker's profile and photoshopped or partial pictures of one's face and body parts in the shop's website.[20] Detaching from the stigmatised identity can also take shape in physical distancing, for example by having two

---

[16] KAMISE Yumiko, "Occupational Stigma and Coping Strategies of Women Engaged in the Commercial Sex Industry: A Study on the Perception of 'Kyaba-Cula Hostesses' in Japan", *Sex Roles*, vol. 69, 2013, p. 45.
[17] Arlie Russell HOCHSCHILD, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012, p. 187.
[18] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 100.
[19] Ibid., p. 76.
[20] KUMADA, "The historical and current stigma…", cit., p. 192.

phones, one dedicated solely to sex work related communications in order to avoid contact and contamination between the two realties. Another very common information management's technique is spatial distancing. Most of the women, for fear of outing choose to work far away from the areas they live in or frequent often so to reduce the chances to run into acquaintances.

While the fear of being outed, which is the one that drives women to hide part of their lives from the people they know, can cause stress and anxiety because of its consequences; the same constant and thorough management of information, to the point of creating a whole another identity, in order to put as much space as possible between the socially accepted identity and the stigmatized one can be likewise cause of stress and alienation. Sex workers' need to lie to loved ones, to hide from them a central part of their life, to fabricate cover up stories to justify their earnings and to shift between two different identities each time hiding some parts of themselves, is not always easy to accept. To escape the sense of isolation caused by information management sex workers find comfort in creating relationships with people with whom they can be open and honest about this part of their lives such as coworkers or hosts in host clubs, people who share the same experiences with them and know the same stigmatization they do.

3.3 Professional Amateurs

Drawing boundaries between one's ordinary identity and the stigmatized one can be achieved not only through the creation of a professional alter ego different from the identity that one presents to the world, but also by defining the same profession as a casuality and the worker as an ordinary person that happens to be involved in a stigmatized occupation. This in Japan is achieved through the usage of the term amateur, *shirōto*[21] in Japanese, that many sex workers use to define themselves and that discloses the way women in the sex industry engage with their job.

Women in Japan enter the sex industry for multiple reasons, this also means that they often come from very different backgrounds and as previously seen, sex work

[21] The term amateur, in kanji 素人, will be hereafter referred to with its romanized version *shirōto*. It is significant to highlight that in Japanese the term refers to people with no professional skills or knowledge on a subject. However, it can also refer to highly experienced and trained individuals. Therefore, through the usage of the term individuals can achieve identification with a person that, although highly experienced still manages to convey the authenticity of their work, which is something that sex workers as we will see deeply treasure.
KOCH, *Healing Labor*..., cit., p. 81.

specialized magazines advertise job positions for women of every age. Indeed students, housewives, mothers, women working simultaneously in other part-time jobs can easily enter the industry[22], and the term *shirōto* also highlights the lack of professionalism required and easiness with which women can enter the industry. In fact, identifying as amateur helps reduce the amount of stigma one feels because, in contrast with the term *puro* (professional), *shirōto* underscores the fact that these women firstly had no knowledge about the industry before entering it and secondly haven't developed specific skills on the job that would make them professionals at it, even when this is not true, and women do develop skills. The term also underlines the idea that the job will be a short-term employment that women will leave once they have reached their financial goal and before they have had time to develop skills.[23]

All these elements are evoked through the usage of the term amateur to identify the position a sex worker holds in the industry, but they don't necessarily call forth the real length of time a woman has worked in the industry and the skills and techniques she has acquired in that time. Long-term employment and development of professional skills are what would bring forth higher levels of stigmatization and therefore are hidden behind the usage of the term *shirōto*, even if in reality women don't always have a clear idea of when they will stop working in the sex industry, and they also develop a large set of skills to deal with customers.

The term is not only used by women to distance themselves from the stigmatizing occupation they engage with but also to build upon the night face they use with customers. Because of social norms that see sex as a topic that should stay outside of women's interest, the sex industry in Japan, as well as customers, stress the importance and the preference for workers who offer a non-professional image [24] which can be once again achieved through the identification as s*hirōto*. *Shirōto* and the customers' desire for *shirōto*-like workers, demonstrate the importance for these women to convey the idea that they are new to the industry, inexperienced and therefore showing genuine feelings without looking too mechanical, as if they were professionals. This process reveals how sex workers must constantly manage the commercialization not only of their body but also of their feelings rendering sex work, as I previously affirmed, a form of emotional labour where through the

---

[22] Momocca Momocco, "Japanese Sex Workers. Encourage, Empower, Trust and Love Yourselves!", in Kamala KEMPADOO, Jo DOZEMA, (edited by), *Global Sex Workers Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, New York, Routledge, 1998, p. 180.

[23] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 80.

[24] Momocca Momocco, "Japanese Sex Workers…", cit., p. 180.

usage of the term s*hirōto*, that allows an aware shaping of one's feelings, workers can create economic value.

By doing this sex workers use gender norms to avoid stigmatization and at the same time create an identity that makes them look more appealing to customers, thus highlighting once more how women in the sex industry are aware of the perception society has of them and how they can use the same perception in a positive, liberating way.

The term *shirōto* and its connection with the idea of authenticity are also linked to the broader societal perception of feminized care work[25]. As I will analyse later in this chapter women through sex work perform a particular type of care work. However, despite the demand for emotional labour management and skill development, care work is generally interpreted as "unskilled work that allegedly any woman could perform" [26] therefore it is traditionally undervalued and often underpaid, perpetuating the gendered notion that women's labour is inherently less valuable because it is a form of innate feminine sensibility that doesn't require skills and that any woman could perform. [27] In the context of the sex industry, this contrast becomes apparent. While sex work allows women to earn comparatively higher incomes, the use of the term *shirōto* undermines the recognition of their work as legitimate labour, an aspect that will be analysed more in depth in the next chapter. This underscores how despite the financial compensation; sex workers may still grapple with societal associations that limit their ability to recognize themselves as workers deserving of respect and fair compensation. This intricate interplay of gendered ideas surrounding femininity and labour inscribes sex work in the gendered economy and undervalues a profession that simultaneously stigmatizes and offers great opportunities.

3.4 Temporal employment and hierarchical relationships

As previously stated, the term *shirōto*, is used by sex workers to distance themselves from their profession. The term is also used to emphasize the temporary nature of workers'

[25] Care work refers to the provision of physical, emotional, and social support. It encompasses a wide range of activities, including but not limited to healthcare, childcare, eldercare, and support for individuals with disabilities, and is generally associated with ideas of it being a type of feminized labour.

[26] Eileen BORIS, Jennifer KLEIN, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State*, Oxford Academic, 2012, p. 8.

[27] Jennifer BREEN, "Caring Work, Women's Work, Essential Work: Reconsidering Comparable Worth as an Approach to Pay Equity for Care Workers", *Berkeley Journal of Employment and Labor Law*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2022, p. 346.

commitment. In fact, this word highlights the little engagement women want to convey in a job they know is stigmatized, and therefore they interpret as a short-term employment. The temporariness that sex workers inscribe in the job perception trough the usage of this term shows their commitment to present it as a position they could leave whenever they wanted with ease without feeling locked to it.[28] The feeling of temporariness in this sense is not as important for societal perceptions of sex workers as it is for the workers themselves. Through it they try to construct their own job as short-term occupation in order to avoid higher levels of stigmatization.

Precisely because of the importance put on inexperience, genuineness, and youth in the industry the idea of amateur sex workers, who will only work in the industry for a short amount of time, perfectly fits with the customers' demand and the job expectations. This is one of the reasons why women conceptualize their work as short-term even if they have no concrete idea to leave the industry soon. The identification with the *shirōto* image, indeed, makes them feel good about the job and simultaneously gives them financial opportunities.

Moreover, there is a strong connection between the association of a sex worker's identity to the term s*hirōto*, the economic value of characteristics linked to the term and the stigmatization connected to sex work. In fact, because of the clients' demand for authenticity, the more a sex worker can present herself as amateur despite her actual experience in the field, and therefore conceptualize her work as temporal, the more she will be able to earn in whatever type of business she works at. However, since the amateur identity is also connected to appearance the older a woman gets and the longer she works in the industry the lesser chances she will have to easily earn money; therefore she will most likely have to turn to businesses that offer illegal services, which are generally more stigmatized. Consequently, conceptualizing sex work as a temporal occupation strengthens women's belief that they will not have to follow the downward path that sometimes sex workers are forced to take if they don't make enough money, it helps them dissociate themselves from their job through the idea that they will be able to quit whenever they want and shields them from higher levels of stigmatization.

In this context it is important to understand that within the sex industry, there exists a hierarchy among different businesses, each carrying varying degrees of societal stigma. "Kyaba-cula[29] hostesses are generally regarded as 'less serious' sex workers

[28] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 80.

[29] Kyaba-cula, or hostess clubs, are establishments within the sex work industry where women who work there as hostesses rather than selling physical sexual services offer communication and companionship while serving food and drinks.

because they do not engage in direct sexual acts"[30] therefore the perceived occupational stigma is smaller than for example soaplands where intercourse is sold as one of the standard services, although illegally, and thus creating a higher occupational stigma for women who choose to work there. Sex workers are not immune to the internal stratification within their profession, rather they are aware of its existence and try to avoid the more stigmatized occupations. Some businesses offer more legal and socially accepted services, while others, often due to the nature of their services, face more significant societal disapproval. In this hierarchical landscape, sex workers may engage in a subtle form of coping strategy. By identifying and distancing themselves from workers who are more stigmatized, women create a comparative narrative that shields them from higher levels of societal judgment, and by associating with businesses that offer less socially disapproved services, they are able to create a separation that protects their social standing within the industry.[31] This distancing not only helps alleviate the negative perceptions and judgments they may face, but it also allows them to maintain a certain level of respect and acceptance from society and from peers.[32]

Therefore, both identifying as *shirōto*, conceptualizing sex work as a short- term profession and distancing oneself from other workers who face greater societal disapproval are coping strategies that help women navigate and perform agency within the nuanced landscape of stigmatization inscribed in the hierarchical dynamics of the sex industry.

3.5 Work values

While a number of coping strategies conceived by sex workers aim at distancing one's perceived real acceptable identity from the stigmatized one associated to the profession one engages with, another set of strategies tries to present the same occupation as a more morally acceptable one. The process is fundamental in the effort to make a stigmatized occupation more understandable for society, but especially for sex workers to give value to their job. This can be achieved through the attribution of ordinary employment's expectations and values to sex work.

As previously analysed, one of the great attributes of sex work is the flexibility that it offers women to build their own schedule, work when and how many hours they want and take days off whenever they need. However, some sex workers feel the need to approach

[30] KAMISE, "Occupational Stigma…", cit., pp. 51-52.
[31] KUMADA, "The historical and current stigma…", cit.
[32] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 95.

sex work through the corporate lens and partially disregard flexibility. This translates in a work ethic that stresses the importance of being on time, consistently going to work and not showing up only when in need of money, respecting hierarchical relationships with the owner of the business and other managerial staff and expressing dissatisfaction towards those coworkers who approach the job whit a less dedicated attitude.[33]

Precisely because women are aware of the stigma attached to the commodification of sex, they deem important the attribution of value and dignity to sex work, which can be achieved through the ascription of corporate work ethics to the stigmatized occupation. This also highlights how women, even if they haven't actively participated in the 'ordinary' work environment, have internalized certain notions of how socially acceptable labour should be constructed in the context of a gendered economy and attribute to their job those same notions to give meaning to it.

Another point of concern is the preoccupation that women feel about potentially losing or distorting one's sense of values and money through one's employment in the sex industry. The concern derives from the shared belief, as we have seen, that sex work is a temporary occupation and therefore one day sex workers will feel the desire to engage in ordinary employment. However, they are also concerned that if they will work in the industry for too long, not only might they end up working in more stigmatized positions, but they might also distort their perception of normative working values, threatening a potential re-entry to the ordinary working field. Hence approaching sex work with corporate work ethic and dedication not only alleviates stigma and gives meaning to the job, but it also eases women's concern on negatively affecting work values and future employment opportunities.

3.6 Filial duty and unwillingness

Shaping women's participation in sex work through corporate work ethic is helpful in adding value to a stigmatized profession, therefore it is important for sex workers themselves to accept the stigmatization they suffer more easily. However, there exist instances where coping strategies are used to reduce the perceived occupational stigma from a societal perspective. As previously seen, throughout history society has interpreted sex work as a negative experience for women but has also pitied and sympathized with sex workers coerced by external forces to take the job. Still today drawing from historical and

[33] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 65.

moral perceptions of sex work to shield oneself from stigma is a coping strategy often used by women and endorsed by business owners.

This coping strategy is based on societal perceptions of female sexuality as not directly connected to women's lust but rather as a tool for reproduction[34], and the idea that sexual activity on women's side should be restricted to marital intercourse as the only legitimate form of intercourse between male and female.[35] As a result women should not experience the desire to sell sex, especially if framed as a means to enrich oneself, since sexual activity should be limited for private relationships. However, articulating engagement with the sex industry through unwillingness, in the past drawing from narrations of indentured contracts, and in contemporary Japan shaping one's entrance as a last resource against poverty or because of violent exploitative situations is deemed as a socially acceptable reason to enter the industry. Through this narrative framework women avoid breaking perceptions of acceptable female sexuality and successfully present their participation in sex work through an historical lens that enables them to give themselves a morally acceptable position within society. Women and business owners alike are aware of these narrative frameworks and use them to their advantage. The recount of Tomoko, a sex worker's rights advocate interviewed by Gabriele Koch, clearly illustrates this stance:

> "'Of course, it's best if women themselves say to the police that they're victims. I've heard lots of people say that, and when I used to work at a [brick-and mortar] store, the manager told us that, too.' She raised her voice, mimicking how the male manager had told his female employees to act in the event that the police showed up: 'I didn't want to work in the sex industry, but I didn't have a choice. It's so horrible, I want to get out of here as quickly as possible.' [...] If someone, anyone, asks you why you're in the sex industry and you say, 'I wanted to do it and decided to give it a try,' no one will understand you. But if you say, 'I didn't have a choice, I had to do it for the money, I had to do it to help my family,' then people will feel for you and tell you they admire your strength."[36]

[34] Sabine FRÜHSTÜCK, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Japan*, "New Approaches to Asian History", Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022, p.174.
[35] Robert J. SMITH, "Gender Inequality in Contemporary Japan", *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 ,1987, p. 21.
[36] Gabriele KOCH, "Willing Daughters: The Moral Rhetoric of Filial Sacrifice and Financial Autonomy in Tokyo's Sex Industry.", *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2016, pp. 220-221.

Through these few words, Tomoko highlights how societal perceptions can fluctuate from a negative judgment to a positive one based on motives that drive women to the sex work industry.

As examined previously women in Japan are not expected to have time off to dedicate to their enrichment through the cultivation of other activities outside of motherhood and house care, nor they are expected to be economically independent.[37] Therefore should they want to work "women's labor should always be directed toward the family and not the self".[38] Hence, using unwillingness and filial duty as narrative frameworks help in justifying women's participation in the sex industry. In fact, there are women who associate their participation in the commodification of sex with experiences of women who in the past were sold through indentured contracts by their impoverished families. Such cases have multiple layers of narration, each one of them helping to reduce the perceived occupational stigma from different actors' perspectives.

Firstly, using the comparison to indentured contracts and therefore presenting oneself as a woman sold by her family to the sex industry, although not true, helps society interpret said woman's participation in the commodification of sex in terms of sacrifice and love for her family, hence aligning her actions with acceptable female behaviour that sees women's labour participation as familial sacrifice dictated by the necessity to provide for close kins dependent on them.[39]

Secondly, because society perceives sex work as a stigmatized profession that women should not engage in unless in desperate situations, shaping one's participation through the filial duty narrative can help workers in giving value to their labour and in asserting they are contributing to a greater cause, namely working to sustain their families, rather than using sex work as a means of personal support or self-improvement which would draw higher levels of stigmatization.

Lastly, because sex work can lead to a very lonely alienating existence which condemns women to hide part of their life, using the moral rhetoric of filial duty assists women in sharing their professional experience with their families. This coping strategy is effective in creating in family members a sense of admiration towards the woman that sacrifices herself for her family's sake, and it also strengthens the affective ties with loved ones, once again attributing a greater meaning to the stigmatized profession.[40]

---

[37] FUJITA, "'It's All Mother's Fault'…", cit., p. 90.
[38] KOCH, "Willing Daughters …", cit., p. 221.
[39] Ibid., p. 203.
[40] Ibid., p. 220.

Although filial duty and unwillingness are great coping strategies that effectively help mitigate the perceived occupational stigma and promote a more positive societal perception through a narration that draws from historical perceptions of sex work and gendered expectations connected to female sexual behaviour, it is noteworthy to understand that both narratives disregard and overall hide from society's eyes women's agency in choosing a profession that is ultimately enriching for them. In fact, these coping strategies are effective in mitigating stigma precisely because they assist women in shaping their profession in a morally acceptable way that however doesn't conceive the idea that women might want to work in the sex industry for reasons other than poverty or desperation.

3.7 Sex work as healing labour

Kamise et al. in their study on perceived occupational stigma and coping strategies in contemporary Japan analyse a set of coping strategies to improve the self-esteem of workers employed in stigmatized occupations. One of them, Social Value Added, is particularly significant in relation to the stigma associated to sex work. Social Value Added is theorised as a coping strategy arising on the cognitive side of an individual that consist in finding new values, different from the probably negative ones attributed by society, to the job in order to construct a positive social identity to the occupation.[41] On these premises Kamise has further conducted a study on perceived occupational stigma related to sex work and how coping strategies in this specific field can boost workers' self-esteem. Results have shown that, in this context specifically, Social Value Added is the most effective coping strategy in maintaining both high occupational self-esteem and general self-esteem.[42]

Coping strategies that help add value to the stigmatized occupation of a sex worker like attributing ordinary work values to sex work or conceptualizing it through the filial duty narrative, have already been analysed. However, I argue that the most effective

[41] KAMISE Yumiko, HORI Hiromoto, OKAMOTO Koichi, "hi shokugyō sutiguma suteiguma ishiki to taisho hōryaku" (Perceived Occupational Stigma and Coping Strategies), *Japanese Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2010, pp. 32-33.
上瀬由美子、堀 洋 元、岡 本 浩一、「被職業スティグマ意識と対処方略」、社会心理学研究、第 26 巻、1 号、2010 年、pp. 32-33.

[42] KAMISE, "Occupational Stigma…", cit., p. 53.

translation of Social Value Added is the conceptualization of sex work as healing labour, as elaborated by Koch in her research.

Iyashi[43], or healing labour, is a particular form of emotional labour that sex workers in Japan use to conceptualize the service they offer to their clients. It is constructed as an intimate performance that "commingles maternal care with sexual gratification and the sensation of 'being a man'"[44] and it evokes feelings of comfort and relaxation making it "a form of deep psychological or mental relief".[45] *Iyashi* can be conceptualized through Hochschild's emotional labour framework, which involves the regulation and management of emotions to meet the expectations and demands of clients. Through this management sex workers provide comfort, understanding and positive experiences to their clients presenting their care work as an intimate connection that can be perceived by their clients as authentic and at the same time allows sex workers to maintain a certain distance from their professional identity and therefore from the stigmatization attached to it.

The conceptualization of sex work as a form of healing labour is a particularly important form of Social Value Added because it enables women to interpret their work as fundamental to the successful functioning of society. Drawing back from past narratives that saw the sex industry as necessary in order to give a space where natural male sexual instincts could find release, the sex industry nowadays through the conceptual framework of *iyashi* is interpreted by women who work in it as an essential place for working men to find escape from the exhausting corporate work realm. Thus, women who work in the sex industry become the fundamental subjects to help the excessively productive white-collar working male recharge and be able to work again through the achievement of his sexual release.[46]

Because of its nature healing labour can therefore be interpreted as a form of reproductive labour. Reproductive labour is theorized in the Marxist sense as all those works such as housework and care work generally performed by women, that because usually unpaid but essential for the proper functioning of society create capital in the form

---

[43] The term 癒し, hereafter referred to either with its romanized version *iyashi*, or its translation as healing labour as theorized by Gabriele Koch, refers to a particular discourse that developed from the mid 1990's, and still has relevance in post bubble Japan. It invokes images of stress, loneliness, alienation, exhaustion, and overall negative feelings caused by the alienating nature of Japanese society and denotes a series of activities and services aimed at healing and giving relief from said negative feelings.
KOCH, *Healing Labor*..., cit., p. 103.

[44] Ibid., p. 101.

[45] Ibid., p. 108.

[46] Ibid., p. 101.

of surplus value.[47] However, due to economic changes in the past decades reproductive labour such as housework and care work have increasingly been moved to the market and become commodified.[48] These types of reproductive labour have always been associated with feminized work, thus, even when they became commodified goods and women started to perform them in the labour market women's wages for said jobs have always been low because of the common idea of feminized work as less valuable[49], a concept already examined in chapter II.

Iyashi, as analysed, can be interpreted as a form of reproductive labour because it lies on the premise that through this effective form of care that stems from intrinsic femininity, connected with maternal care and sexual gratification, men can go back to be capable productive workers. Thus, this form of care work operates in the same way housework operates, meaning that as male employees can generate capital because they can dedicate themselves solely to their job since the wife takes care of household duties, in the same way they can go back to be productive because sex workers through sexual gratification heal them from exhaustion. Following this conceptualization that inscribes sex work in the gendered economy this occupation should be, as other forms of commodified reproductive labour, underpaid yet in the Japanese context it poses as a lucrative opportunity for women. I argue that the economic benefits that derive from such occupation are undermined by the devaluation that workers are subject to because of stigmatization and because of the intrinsic characteristics of the job that reiterate gender norms. In particular, this undervaluation arises from the amalgamation of two distinctive processes. The first one is the association of sex work to a form of human sensibility that is typically feminine and therefore the assumption that every woman could potentially perform well in this occupation.[50]

Connected to this idea arises the second one that highlights as the effective aspects of *iyashi*, the authenticity and empathy with which women perform their services. Here once again the association with the term *shirōto* underscores the economic value attributed to feminized sensibility but at the same time undermines the professionalism and skill development fundamental to perform well in the sex industry.[51]

---

[47] Gayle RUBIN, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex", *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, New York and London, Monthly Review Press, 1975, p. 158.
[48] Saskia SASSEN, "Global Cities and Global Survival Circuits", *Cities in a World Economy*, Thousand Oaks, SAGE Publications, 2019, p. 259.
[49] BREEN, "Caring Work...", cit., p. 346.
[50] KOCH, *Healing Labor...*, cit., p. 110.
[51] Ibid., pp. 114-115.

Ultimately this dual association perpetuates the perception that the emotional and psychological labour undertaken by sex workers is inherent. Therefore, because it is conceptualized as feminized labour that every woman precisely because she is a woman can effortlessly perform, it is in turn not deserving of the same recognition afforded to other forms of labour. As sex workers strategically embrace *iyashi* and identify as *shirōto* to give meaning to their job, they inadvertently perpetuate societal expectations of emotional labour as a natural extension of femininity and obscure their role as legitimate labourers which in the end is one of the elements that prevent sex workers to engage in advocacy and ask for working rights.

Chapter IV

Unravelling the obstacles against advocacy

To talk about the sex work industry means to talk about the women who work in it. Therefore, in the previous chapters I have analysed the complexities of the Japanese sex trade through recounts of its history and legal frameworks. I have also examined in depth reasons that drive women to the sex industry despite stigmatization, and coping strategies to face the moral conflict that arises when working in a deeply stigmatizing occupation. All these elements have helped in reshaping narratives surrounding women's participation in the commodification of sex through a more positive approach that highlights women's awareness and agency. However, because of its structural elements many of the characteristics that render sex work a lucrative opportunity and help women give meaning to their participation in the sex trade are also the ones that impede advocacy efforts to obtain safer working conditions and recognition as labourers.

In this chapter I will problematise discourses from the previous chapters to highlight the complex aspects of certain rhetorical narratives that hinder women's perception of a group identity and their willingness to participate in advocacy. This final analysis hopes to underscore the pressing need for reforms in legislation and societal perceptions that will ultimately allow society to listen to sex workers' voices and give them the tools to empower themselves.

4.1 The grey area of the sex work industry and it's dangers

As we have seen societal perceptions of legitimate female sexuality construct women's participation in the sex industry as a deviation from morally acceptable feminine behaviour and thus generate part of the stigma attached to sex work as an occupational choice. Another consequence of this moral rhetoric is that, even if the sex trade exists in Japan as an industry accepted for its necessity, women are not supposed to have any knowledge about its functioning, because being knowledgeable about it would lead to the assumption that one is working in such industry and therefore higher levels of stigma would be attributed to said individual.

Nonetheless once a woman enters the sex work industry, she starts to get a grasp on how things work. However, since in order to avoid stigmatization women build the idea of their participation in the commodification of sex as a short-term occupation, understanding precisely the legal framework that regulates the sex work industry is not deemed a first priority. In fact, if a woman conceptualizes her participation in the sex trade as a short-term endeavour, when faced with poor working conditions, missing wage

payments or problems with customers the easiest way to solve these problems is to change workplace[1] rather than spending time trying to understand how the law applies to the industry.

These narratives that are used by women to make sense of their participation in the industry at the same time as trying to avoid higher levels of stigmatization, in turn end up endangering their position within it. As stated in the first chapter of this dissertation, the sex work industry in Japan is currently regulated by two major laws, namely the Prostitution Prevention Law and the Law Regulating Entertainment Business, whose purpose is not to punish, nor eliminate the commodification of sex per se, but to protect the public morals of society[2], hence why the laws are void of specific punitive measures for forbidden activities. The focus on moral rethorics and the ambiguity with which regulations are written however leave law enforcement to the interpretation of police officers on a case-by-case basis[3], creating a grey area in which sex workers have to operate without knowing if they are committing any illegal actions. Problems related to this ambiguity arise especially when workers face cases of abuse or physical violence against their persona. In these situations, even if they experience dangerous situations, because of stigma and uncertainty about the legal status of their workplace many women prefer to not seek police's help in fear of being prosecuted for breaking the law.[4] Since sex businesses operate under the Law Regulating Entertainment Business either on an authorization or a notification system[5] if they wanted women could acquire information about the lawfulness of their workplace by going to the police. Stigma, fear of outing and the strongly gendered nature of a police station however hinder women's willingness to do so. If a woman goes to a police station to ask about the place she is employed in she might discover it is running illegally and therefore compromise her own position. Moreover, because of stigma and social marginalization women fear that going to the police might lead to harassment and abuses rather than help[6] or that police officers might make their identity as sex workers public. This ends up in a general distrust and scepticism in what the police can actually do

[1] KOCH, *Healing Labor*..., cit., p. 154.
[2] AOYAMA Kaoru, "The sex Industry in Japan: The Danger of Invisibility.", in Mark McLelland, Vera Mackie (edited by), *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 282.
[3] Ibid., p. 283.
[4] Ibid., p. 288.
[5] "Fūzoku Eigyōtō no Kisei oyobi Gyōmu no Tekiseikatō ni kansuru Hōritsu" 風俗営業等の規制及び業務の適正化等に関する法律 (Law Regulating Entertainment Business), 1948, https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=323AC0000000122, accessed 31 January 2024.
[6] KOCH, *Healing Labor*..., cit., p. 147.

to help sex workers, and therefore women tend to prefer to take care of difficult situations on their own rather than report them to justice.

Newcomers are especially subject to this ambiguity[7] because, as seen, ordinary women are not supposed to express any interest in the sex work industry. Therefore, first timers base their knowledge of the industry firstly on managers' brief orientations on services workers are expected to provide once they start working, and secondly on first-hand experience.[8] This however demonstrates that the law is not perceived "as relevant enough to communicate to sex workers"[9], hence if they want to understand the legal framework they work within they have to seek informations by themselves, which is something that, as already stated, women tend to avoid.

The same fear of stigmatization, negative judgment and outing are directed to the health care system, making it difficult for sex workers to consult clinics regarding their health and making their working conditions overall less safe. Sex workers have to undertake monthly STD checks, however since the Japanese health care system is not based on a prevention model but on a treatment one, health insurance covers the cost of such tests only when patients complain symptoms, therefore in most cases sex workers have to bear all costs for such inspections.[10] Going to clinics and asking for STD testing when not showing symptoms generally translates in negative judgment based on the assumption that "testing is only for individuals who have been engaging in so-called abnormal behaviours, meaning same-sex contact, promiscuity, or sex work."[11] Moreover, medical staff could lecture sex workers on their employment choice, ask them for reasons why they chose sex work or turn them away.[12] Fear of attracting unwanted attention on their employment choice and possible outing limits women's options and make them turn

[7] KOCH, *Healing Labor…*, cit., p. 153.
[8] KOCH, "Twenty-Four Ways…", cit., p. 39.
[9] Ibid.
[10] It is noteworthy to underscore that the practice of compulsory STD examinations whose costs were entirely on sex workers' side was introduced with the system of state regulated prostitution during the Meiji restoration, analysed in chapter I. During that period great attention was given to limiting the spread of STDs among soldiers because a central concern was on soldiers' health as the national body's health. Still, in contemporary Japan, compulsory testing is legitimated by concerns over the customers health rather than sex workers' health.
KOCH, *Healing Labour…*, cit., p. 152.
[11] Ibid., p. 151.
[12] KANAME Yukiko, NOZOMI Mizushima, "Fūzokujō ishiki chōsa: 126nin no shokugyō ishiki" (A Survey of Sex Workers: Attitudes of 126 Sex Workers Toward their Work), Tōkyō, Potto Shuppan, 2005, pp. 103-104. 要友紀子、水島希、「風俗嬢意識調査 : 126 人の職業意識」、東京、ポット出版、2005, pp. 103-104.

mainly to clinics which operate close to sex work districts, whose staff is more used to dealing with sex workers.

Ultimately, it is evident how the grey area created by the law together with stigmatization, fear of outing and conceptualization of sex work as a short-term employment limit women's ability to legally move within the industry, turn to justice when they face dangerous situations and easily take care of their health, marginalizing and alienating their experience once more.

4.2 Internalization of stigmatizing narratives

The legal framework together with negative societal perceptions hinder women's position before the law. Even though general discourses portray sex workers as women who were forced by poverty to enter a stigmatizing occupation as their last chance of survival, when it comes to law enforcement this narrative framework is discarded in favour of one that attributes more agency to sex workers. This approach that takes into account women's agency could appear to be a positive attitude towards sex work in general. In fact, however, through narratives of victim blaming, it places women outside of the law's protection.[13]

When cases that involve sex workers are brought to court, judges tend to interpret women's engagement with the sex work industry as a choice made on their own free will, however the acknowledgment of women's agency goes hand in hand with the notion that when a woman enters a prostitution contract she automatically relinquishes "her right to sexual and physical freedom"[14] thus giving space to the conclusion that any type of service is legitimate, that the sex worker has no boundaries surrounding services provided and therefore makes any claim for compensation against violence void of legitimacy. This process of victim blaming is based on the assumption that situations that lead to rape or any type of violence against sex workers are crimes that women bring to themselves upon entering a dangerous occupation such as sex work and that because of their employment choice they are "not subject to the same protections as 'ordinary women and children'"[15].

[13] TSUNODA Yukiko, *Seisabetsu to Bōryoku* (Sexism and Violence), Tokyo, Yuhikaku, 2005, pp. 133-134. 角田由紀子、『性差別と暴力』、東京、有斐閣、2005 年、pp.133-134.

[14] Catherine BURNS, *Sexual Violence and the Law in Japan*, London, Routledge, 2005, p. xvi.

[15] TSUNODA, *Seisabetsu* ..., cit., p. 133.

Since legal cases where these narrative frameworks have been adopted, such as the Ikebukuro Case[16], are frequent in the Japanese juridical system, women's attempts to get protection from the law are rendered futile if not self-defeating. This in turn adds to the general lack of trust towards the police and urges sex workers even more to deal with dangerous situations on their own. Furthermore, it shapes how women perceive the legitimacy of their claims. Public trends towards victim blaming in cases of rape, assault and even murder induce the same sex workers to internalize stigma and believe that they have no right to complain about the conditions they find themselves in, even when they are dangerous, because they chose to engage in a potentially dangerous job.[17] Fear of being blamed for the situation a worker finds herself in, however, doesn't apply only on cases brought to court. Women often find it difficult to assert their position with clients not only when it comes to, for example, secret recordings of their meetings, but also in setting boundaries on services that each worker is willing to offer. In these cases, sex workers fear possibly violent reactions from their clients, which would put them in dangerous positions. Therefore, to limit risks women surrender and silently accept what they are asked for. This behaviour is legitimised on the internalized idea that upon engaging in the commodification of sex, workers have given up their sexual freedom.

Moreover, women are reluctant to turn to management in fear of what could be the consequences of their complaints, rather they prefer to simply change workplace if they find the working conditions to not fit their needs instead of pushing for better working conditions.[18]

4.3 The dangers of professional identification

Thus far I have analysed structural and rhetorical elements of the sex trade in Japan that interfere with women's willingness to turn to third parties be it justice, health care staff or managers to ask for help in building better and safer working conditions and in enforcing their rights. However, sex worker's interest in personally participating in labour

[16] The *Ikebukuro Jiken*, or Ikebukuro Case is a 1987 case where a woman working in the sex industry was charged of murdering her client after he bound, filmed, and assaulted her. Charges were made on the assumption that since she was a sex worker, she had implicitly given her consent to whatever the client would have wanted and therefore she was convicted of excessive self-defence when, in an attempt to protect herself she ended up murdering the client.
BURNS, *Sexual violence* ..., cit., pp. xiv-xviii.
[17] TSUNODA, *Seisabetsu* ..., cit., p. 131.
[18] KOCH, *Healing Labour*..., cit., p. 167.

rights advocacy is deeply shaped by women's perception of their own engagement with their work, which often creates narratives that discourage workers to fight for their rights.

In fact, as analysed in chapter III of this dissertation, to avoid high levels of stigma and distance themselves from a professional identity sex workers in Japan use a multitude of coping strategies that ultimately undermine their perception of themselves as workers. In this sense it is important to take into account women's identification with the s*hirōto* rhetoric that constructs them as ordinary women who happen to engage in a stigmatizing occupation interpreted as a short-term employment. Women who identify their working persona within the s*hirōto* framework effectively avoid stigma but, because they construct their working identity in terms of amateurism and lack of professional skills this narrative completely disregards the existence of a working persona.

Engagement in advocacy is inscribed in a labour rights framework which in turn is based on the assumption that individuals involved feel a sense of identification with their work[19], which as we have seen is not the case for sex workers in Japan. Instead, they go at great length to put as much space between their perceived true identity and their constructed working one with which they prefer not to identify. Moreover, to feel the need to advocate for better working conditions one should have some long-term commitment to the workplace[20], and once again this is not true for women working in the sex industry in Japan. In fact, sex workers tend to construct their participation in the commodification of sex as short-term, as a way to avoid stigma even if they have been working in the industry for years.

In Japan "women in the sex industry don't have an identity as sex workers"[21], because having one would mean accepting stigmatization, therefore their lack of identification with their job and temporal commitment to it make involvement with political issues feel meaningless and unnecessary.

Problems arising from professional identification are not limited to higher levels of stigmatization but involve risks for future prospects and concerns about offering proper care work.

As previously seen one of the ways women in the sex trade give meaning to their labour is through the attribution of corporate work values to their job. This strategy is used to also avoid losing ones' sense of values concerning what is considered proper employment. In fact, many women conceptualize sex work as short-term because their

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

intention is to eventually turn back to ordinary employment or to follow the behavioural path considered normal for women and embrace the role they have been attributed by society because of their gender. Many sex workers, no differently from other women employed in non-stigmatizing occupations, want to get married and embark on motherhood at some point in their life. However, differently from other women, because their occupation is a stigmatized one, they have to avoid high levels of stigmatization in order not to hinder their future employment options and marriage prospects. Therefore, engaging in advocacy and embracing a politicized identity as a professional sex worker is something they cannot afford.[22]

Additionally, one of the elements that distinguish the services provided by sex workers in Japan is what Koch identifies with *iyashi*, or healing labour. This specific kind of care work, as examined in chapter III of this dissertation, is based on a particular form of feminized care that emphasises the importance of spontaneity and authenticity to cater a service that the customer will perceive as intimate and genuine. The construction of services offered through this framework however bring forth ideas connected to the privileged identification with amateurism in contrast with professionalism, seen as a more mechanical approach void of feelings. Therefore, identification with a professionalized working identity is seen by sex workers as undermining the effectiveness of the service they provide[23], and ultimately hinders their willingness to politicize their role as care workers.

4.4 Sex workers' lack of collective identity

In academical discourse it is believed that a way social movements "generate and sustain commitment and cohesion between actors over time"[24] is the creation of a collective identity that the actors involved identify with. Collective identity is defined by Snow as:

> "a shared sense of 'one-ness' or 'we-ness' anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity [...] Embedded within the shared sense of 'we' is a corresponding sense of 'collective agency.' This latter sense, which is the action component of collective identity, not only suggests the

[22] Ibid., p. 169.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Cristina FLESHER FOMINAYA, "Collective Identity in Social Movements: Central Concepts and Debates", *Sociology Compass*, vol. 4, no. 6, 2010, pp. 393.

possibility of collective action in pursuit of common interests, but even invites such action."[25]

Therefore, what drives a social movement is individuals who, because they share experiences and needs and thus identify with the collective identity of the group, are driven to take action together to achieve mutual objectives.

As seen at length sex workers in Japan are often not interested in advocating for the achievement of shared interests such as better and safer working conditions or labour rights. Reasons for this are varied and range from legal framework that put sex workers to operate in a grey area to disinterest driven by individual perceptions of a stigmatizing occupation. Another significant reason however is the lack of identification with a collective identity as conceptualized by Snow. In fact, structural elements of the Japanese sex industry discourage women to engage with each other and form a solid network with their peers, threatening the creation of a collective identity. Flexibility in determining one's own schedule is a driving factor in isolating workers from each other together with the frequency with which women change workplace in hopes of finding better working conditions. Moreover, cases where managerial staff discourages women to socialize are frequent[26] and the recent turn of the sex trade from brick-and-mortar shops to a delivery model where workers are sent to hotels or rental apartments to meet with their clients[27], have made chances for women to associate with each other scarcer. Lastly hierarchical divisions among sex work businesses that lead to different levels of stigma also jeopardize the creation of a collective identity. In particular, Aoyama explains that "criminalisation works to divide sex workers into different groups"[28] and that "workers in the legal parts of the industry then vehemently disclaim any association with prostitution, preventing them from forming solidarity networks."[29], thus drawing from the coping strategy commonly used by sex workers to distance themselves from more stigmatized individuals within the industry to protect themselves and present their profession as more respectable.

However, ultimately all these elements work to separate and isolate workers even deeper in an industry that is already highly alienating. This separation leads to a lack of

[25] David SNOW, *Collective Identity and Expressive Forms*, in "UC Irvine: Center for the Study of Democracy", 2001, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2zn1t7bj#main, accessed 02 February 2024.
[26] KOCH, *Healing Labour*..., cit., p. 168.
[27] Ibid., p. 40.
[28] AOYAMA, "The sex Industry...", cit., p. 290.
[29] Ibid.

group identification between sex workers that undermines women's willingness to engage in advocacy.

4.5 Sex work as labour and the case of Covid-19

Lastly, and probably most importantly, sex work in Japan is not recognised as labour, and sex workers are not recognised as labourers. Under the law sex workers are not considered employees of their workplace but rather independent contractors who are given a place to perform their work and their wage is based on the time they spend with a client. This results in them not having to pay taxes, but at the same time in not benefiting from any labour right a normal worker enjoys such as a minimum guaranteed wage, paid leave, or worker's compensation. Moreover, they don't make pension contribution and the workplace bears little responsibility over them since they are not considered employees.[30] This lack of labour recognition aligns with shared perceptions of many sex workers who, as previously stated, have little to no interest in advocating for their rights and their recognition as labourers which would ultimately translate in better working conditions.

While it is true that sex work is not recognised under the law as labour and that most sex workers are unwilling to fight for their rights there exist groups of sex work advocates comprised of lawyers, sex workers and former sex workers who advocate to improve working conditions of women engaged in the commodification of sex.

The case study of how the sex work industry was treated during the pandemic of Covid-19 is emblematic in this sense, because it articulates the government's rhetoric of lack of recognition in favour of protection of the good morals of society and the sex workers' advocacy groups' efforts in trying to overrule these narrative frameworks.

Over the summer of 2020, to limit the spread of infection caused by close contact, businesses operating in the sex work industry had to shut down and this resulted in many women losing their source of income.[31] Soon after the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) launched a subsidy scheme for all those workers who, affected by the pandemic had to stay home to care for children and those who had lost income because of

[30] KOCH, *Healing Labour…*, cit., p. 158.

[31] Caroline NORMA, *Japan's Sex Industry in the Year of Corona, 2020*, in "FiLiA", 2020, https://www.filia.org.uk/latest-news/2020/11/19/japans-sex-industry-in-the-year-of-corona-2020, accessed 03 February 2024.

the pandemic.[32] Sex workers, then, were suitable for receiving the relief package since they fell into the aforementioned description, instead they were excluded from those eligible.[33] However, thanks to criticism and letters sent to the government by opposition members and advocacy groups such as Sex Work and Sexual Health (SWASH), that declared the exclusion of sex workers from subsidy packages an ‘occupational discrimination’ women working in the legal side of the sex trade were eventually included, even though sex workers have lamented over the limited efficacy of said provision because of its small amount of money granted and the unclear rules for eligibility application.[34]

In the same period the government, through the Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry (METI), also launched a subsidy package for small and medium-sized enterprises and for individual entrepreneurs which once again excluded, together with religious and political organizations[35], sex work businesses.[36]

In September of the same year a sex work business operating in the region of Kansai, after applying for the subsidy and being refused, filed a lawsuit with the Tokyo District Court.[37] Claims made to the government in order to obtain the full payment of the negated subsidy package were based on alleged violation of article 14 of the Constitution which stipulates equality under the law and article 22 that concerns freedom of choice of

[32] In both these cases the most affected were thought to be women. In fact, in the first instance because of normative values attributed to the role women have to fulfil in society, as seen in Chapter III, mothers are the ones who generally stay home to take care of children. In the second case, the sector mostly affected by the pandemic was the service-oriented one, which is particularly connected to close contact situations with clients, and that studies demonstrate is generally dominated by female employees because it usually involves some form of care work which once again is believed to be an intrinsic form of feminine sensitivity. Because women were the ones that suffered the worst income losses, the public in Japan also started to believe that a higher number of women would then turn to sex work as a last resource.
Donika LIMANI, Marie-Claire SODERGREN, *Where Women Work. Female-Dominated Occupations and Sectors*, 2023, in “International Labour Organization ILOSTAT”, https://ilostat.ilo.org/where-women-work-female-dominated-occupations-and-sectors/, accessed 05 February 2024.
NORMA, *Japan’s Sex Industry …*, cit., accessed 05 February 2024.
[33] YEUNG Jessie, OGURA Junko, Will RIPLEY, *Japan is offering sex workers financial aid. But they say it’s not enough to survive the coronavirus pandemic*, in “CNN”, 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/19/asia/japan-sex-workers-coronavirus-intl-hnk/index.html, accessed 03 February 2024.
[34] Ibid.
[35] It is noteworthy to remember that under article 89 of the Japanese Constitution no money can be used to benefit or maintain any religious institution.
[36] *Shingata korona to fūzoku eigyō toyuu shōchō* (The New Corona and the Symbolism of the Sex Trade), in “cocolog nifty”, 2020, http://eulabourlaw.cocolog-nifty.com/blog/2020/04/post-b631f8.html, accessed 03 February 2024.
「新型コロナと風俗営業という象徴」、2020 年、最終確認 2024 年 2 月 3 日
[37] TATSUMI Kenji, ENDO Koji, *Exclusion of sex industry from COVID subsidy programs 'constitutional': Tokyo High Court*, in “The Mainichi”, 2023, https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20231006/p2a/00m/0na/027, accessed 03 February 2024.

occupation.[38] The judge of the Tokyo District Court, however, dismissed the case stating that the eligibility to certain public benefits offered through limited resources is under the discretion of the administration and that since sex work industry businesses are contrary to the moral consciousness of the public, there was a rational basis to treat them differently, and therefore their exclusion wouldn't be violating the constitution and couldn't be labelled discrimination.[39] During the appeal trial at the Tokyo High Court in 2023 the district court's decision was upheld on the premise that exclusion was deemed 'constitutional' and that, even though public opinions towards the sex trade were changing and getting more positive, "the government judged that it would be difficult to gain the understanding of taxpayers"[40] if they were to pay subsidies to sex work industry businesses with public money.

While the case is still in the country's courts and might be brought to the Supreme Court, it is significant to highlight the two stances taken by the actors involved. On one side the plaintiffs, together with the representing lawyers, are trying to bring sex workers' rights to the attention of the public asking for better working conditions and advocating for the recognition of sex work as work, as demonstrated by banners held in press conferences that followed the case where slogans like 'sex work is work' were held[41], or the viral hashtag #NightWorkIsAlsoWork that trended on Twitter in the same period.[42]

On the other side the government through court's decisions on different levels has once again sustained rethorics that perceive the sex work industry as morally deviating and therefore not worth sustaining. What is striking is the fact that this can be considered the first case where the government has clearly taken a position towards the sex work industry. The decision to exclude sex work industry businesses based on the premise that they are against moral integrity gives the message to the public that it is ok to discriminate against the commodification of sex and as a result against sex workers, accentuating the

[38] HARAGUCHI Yuko, *'sekkusu wāku is wāku' wo meguru soshō ni itaru made(zenpen)* (Leading up to the Lawsuit over 'Sex Work is Work' (Part One)), in "Oasis", 2021, https://www.keiben-oasis.com/call4/015, accessed 03 February 2024.
原口侑子、「『セックスワーク is ワーク』をめぐる訴訟に至るまで（前編）」、2021 年、最終確認 2024 年 2 月 3 日

[39] *Sei fūzoku gyō e no korona kyūfu kin fu shikyū wa"gōken" tōkyō chisai* (Corona Benefits for Sex Industry Non-issuance deemed "constitutional" by Tokyo District Court), in "NHK", 2022, https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20220630/k10013696201000.html, accessed 02 February 2024.
「性風俗業へのコロナ給付金 不支給は"合憲" 東京地裁」、2022 年、 最終確認 2024 年 2 月 2 日

[40] TATSUMI et al., *Exclusion of sex …*, cit., accessed 03 February 2024.
[41] NORMA, *Japan's Sex Industry …*, cit., accesseda 03 February 2024.
[42] YEUNG et al., *Japan is offering …*, cit., accessed 03 February 2024.

stigmatization they already suffer[43], and thus discouraging women's willingness to engage in advocacy.

[43] *Sei fūzoku gyō e no korona* ..., cit., accessed 03 February 2024.

Epilogue

Throughout this dissertation I have tried to highlight how women engaged in the commodification of sex in Japan interpret and navigate the many contradictions that characterise the Japanese sex work industry. All of these inconsistences, that range from ambiguous legal statuses to contrasting societal perceptions, can be gathered under a single interpretation: the sex trade and its workers are generally considered necessary for society's proper functioning, and this is also how sex workers themselves construct their work as a type of feminized care that males need in order to be productive, but since their existence is considered a necessary evil they must work under dangerous conditions, without proper legal protection and recognition and have to navigate the stigma associated to their profession.

The dichotomy between society's perception of the industry as necessary and of sex workers as deviant others who deserve to be stigmatized can be explained if we insert the sex trade within the landscape of the gendered economy and understand workers' services as a form of feminized care work. In fact, through the study of sex workers' experience of their profession, this research has helped studying and underscoring general trends in Japanese society associated to women's lives. The analysis of women's driving factors to engage in the sex industry together with the coping strategies used by workers have exposed how the commodification of sex is inscribed in a gendered economy that attributes certain norms and values to women's general participation in society, how these norms shape women's perceived proper behavioural paths and the roles they are expected to perform within society. Gender norms and values, as seen, are also internalized by sex workers who through their profession both break perceptions of feminine respectability and at the same time inscribe their performance and future expectations within them.

Moreover, the inscription of sex work within the gendered economy as a form of feminine care have helped explaining both the devaluation of sex work as care work, because of its perceived innate nature based on gender norms, and the limited interest of sex workers to participate in human and labour rights movements to obtain better working conditions, in favour of authenticity of the services they provide and the future roles they envision for themselves.

Lastly, tracing back to the citation used to open this research, the dissertation has tried to focus its efforts on giving Japanese sex workers a voice to talk about their experience, through the recognition of women's awareness of the reality they live in and their agency in employment choices, because as expressed by Momoka Momoko in the

introduction sex workers, as the ones experiencing the industry, are the only ones that really know what they need. The importance given to Japanese women's experience of the sex trade and the role they perceive having in it was brought to attention hoping that in the future actions taken both by advocacy groups and governmental representatives will not be based on external third parties' experiences of the industry but will instead be based on listening to what the women engaged in the industry have to say about it and what they perceive their needs to be.

Bibliography

ABE, Aya K., “Poverty and Social Exclusion of Women”, *Japanese Journal of Social Security Policy*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2012, pp. 61-82.

ALLISON, Anne, *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

AOYAMA, Kaoru, “The sex Industry in Japan: The Danger of Invisibility.”, in Mark McLelland, Vera Mackie (edited by), *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, London, Routledge, 2014, pp. 281-293.

BENOIT, Cecilia, MIKAEL JANSSON, S., SMITH, Michaela, FLAGG, Jackson, “Prostitution Stigma and Its Effect on the Working Conditions, Personal Lives, and Health of Sex Workers”, *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 55, 2018, pp. 457 - 471.

BORIS, Eileen, KLEIN, Jennifer, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State*, Oxford Academic, 2012.

BREEN, Jennifer, “Caring Work, Women’s Work, Essential Work: Reconsidering Comparable Worth as an Approach to Pay Equity for Care Workers”, *Berkeley Journal of Employment and Labor Law*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2022, pp. 311-359.

BRINTON, Mary C., *Women and the Economic Miracle: Gender and Work in Postwar Japan*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993.

BURNS, Catherine, *Sexual Violence and the Law in Japan*, London, Routledge, 2005.

CRIADO-PEREZ, Caroline, *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, United States, Abrams, 2019.

DOWER, W. John, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co./New Press, 2000, pp. 121-167.

DOYLE, Jude Ellison Sady, *Il Mostruoso Femminile: Il Patriarcato e la Paura delle Donne*, Roma, Tlon, 2021 (ed. or. *Dead Blondes and Bad Mothers: Monstrosity, Patriarchy, and the Fear of Female Power*, 2019.

ENDO, Kimitsugu, “Rōdō ni okeru kakusa to kōsei: ‘1960 nendaigata nihon shisutemu’ kara atarashii shakai shisutemu he no tankan wo mezashite” (Inequality and fairness in labour: towards a shift from the ‘1960s’ style Japanese system’ to a new social system), *Shakai Seisaku*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2014, pp. 11-24.
遠藤　公嗣、「労働における格差と公正：『1960 年代型日本システム』から新しい社会システムへの転換をめざして」、 社会政策、 第 5 巻 3 号、2014 年、pp. 11-24.

FLESHER, FOMINAYA, Cristina, “Collective Identity in Social Movements: Central Concepts and Debates”, *Sociology Compass*, vol. 4, no. 6, 2010, pp. 393-404.

FRÜHSTÜCK, Sabine, *Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan*, Berkley, University of California Press, 2003.

FRÜHSTÜCK, Sabine, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Japan*, “New Approaches to Asian History”, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022.

FUJIME, Yuki, “Japanese Feminism and Commercialized Sex: The Union of Militarism and Prohibitionism”, *Social Science Japan Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2006, pp. 33–50.

FUJITA, Mariko, “‘It’s All Mother’s Fault’: Childcare and the Socialization of Working Mothers in Japan”, *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1989, pp. 67–91.

FUJIWARA, Chisa, “Single Mothers and Welfare Restructuring in Japan: Gender and Class Dimensions of Income and Employment.”, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, *Japan Focus*, vol. 6, no.1, 2008, pp. 1-14.

GARON, Sheldon, “The World’s Oldest Debate? Prostitution and the State in Imperial Japan, 1900-1945.”, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 98, no. 3, 1993, pp. 710-732.

GOFFMAN, Erving, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1963.

GRAY, Gavan Patrick, “The Commodification of Sex in Modern Japan: Outdated Attitudes and Overdue Reforms.”, in Susanne M. Schotanus (edited by), *Gender Violence, the Law, and Society*, Bingley, Emerald Publishing Limited, 2022, pp.35-50.

HARTMANN, I. Heidi, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more Progressive Union”, *Capital & Class*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1979, pp. 1-33.

HOCHSCHILD, Arlie Russell, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012.

HOCHSCHILD, Arlie Russell, MACHUNG, Anne, *The Second Shift*, New York, Penguin, 2012.

IGA, Mamoru, “Sociocultural Factors in Japanese Prostitution and the ‘Prostitution Prevention Law.’”, *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1968, pp. 127–146.

KAMISE, Yumiko, HORI, Hiromoto, OKAMOTO, Koichi, “hi shokugyō sutiguma suteiguma ishiki to taisho hōryaku” (Perceived Occupational Stigma and Coping Strategies), *Japanese Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2010, pp.25-35.
上瀬由美子、堀 洋 元、岡 本 浩一、「被職業ステイグマ意識と対処方略」、社会心理学研究、第 26 巻、1 号、2010 年、pp. 25-35.

KAMISE, Yumiko, “Occupational Stigma and Coping Strategies of Women Engaged in the Commercial Sex Industry: A Study on the Perception of ‘Kyaba-Cula Hostesses’ in Japan”, *Sex Roles*, vol. 69, 2013, pp. 42-57.

KAMISE, Yumiko, “Sei no shōhin ka to shokugyō sutiguma: kyabakura nitaisuru seijin danjo no ishiki chōsa kara” (Sexual Commodification and Occupational Stigma: From the Awareness Survey of Adult Men and Women on Kyaba-Cula), *GEMC Journal*, vol. 5, 2011, pp. 32-46.
上瀬由美子、「性の商品化と職業スティグマ：キャバクラに対する成人男女の意識調査から」、*GEMC Journal*、第 5 巻、2011 年、pp. 32-46.

KANAME, Yukiko, “Sekkusuwākā undō to ikutsumo no kabe” (The Sex Worker Movement in Japan and the Walls that Surround Us), *Japanese Sociological Reviews*, vol. 71, no. 2, 2020, pp. 233-246.
要友紀子、「セックスワーカー運動といくつもの壁」.

KANAME, Yukiko, NOZOMI, Mizushima, “Fūzokujō ishiki chōsa: 126nin no shokugyō ishiki” (A Survey of Sex Workers: Attitudes of 126 Sex Workers Toward their Work), Tōkyō, Potto Shuppan, 2005.
要友紀子、水島希、「風俗嬢意識調査: 126 人の職業意識」、東京、ポット出版、2005.

KEMPADOO, Kamala, DOZEMA, Jo (edited by), *Global Sex Workers Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, New York, Routledge, 1998.

KIYOSUKE, Aisa, “Post-war feminist perspectives on sex work/sex workers in Japan.”, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2000, pp. 343-347,

KOCH, Gabriele, *Healing Labor: Japanese Sex Work in the Gendered Economy*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2020.

KOCH, Gabriele, “Twenty-Four Ways to Have Sex within the Law. Regulation and Moral Subjectivity in the Japanese Sex Industry.”, *Journal of Legal Anthropology*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2021, pp. 30-49.

KOCH, Gabriele, “Willing Daughters: The Moral Rhetoric of Filial Sacrifice and Financial Autonomy in Tokyo's Sex Industry.”, *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2016, pp. 215-234.

KRAMM, Robert, “Haunted by Defeat: Imperial Sexualities, Prostitution, and the Emergence of Postwar Japan.” *Journal of World History*, vol. 28, no. 3-4, 2017, pp. 587–614.

KUMADA, Yoko, “Gendai nihon ni okeru seifūzokuten eigyō no hōteki ichizuke” (Discussing the “lawfulness” of sex-related businesses in contemporary Japan), *Ningenbunka Sōseikagaku Ronsō*, vol. 13, 2010, pp. 309-318.
熊田陽子、「現代日本における性風俗店営業の法的位置づけ」、人間文化創成科学論叢、第 13 巻、2010 年、pp. 309-318.

KUMADA, Yoko, “The historical and current stigma of sex workers in Japan”, in Jeanett Bjønness, Lorraine Nencel, May-Len Skilbrei (edited by), *Reconfiguring Stigma in Studies of Sex for Sale*, New York, Routledge, 2022, pp. 185-202.

KUNIHARU, Tokiyasu, “Social Exclusion of Warikiri Women: An Aspect of Prostitution in Contemporary Japan.”, *The Gakushuin Journal of International Studies*, vol. 1, 2014, pp. 41-59.

KUROSAWA, Aki, “Beyond ‘Sex Work’: Japanese Night Work and ‘Shakai-Keiken’”, *Asian Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2020, pp.209-230.

MCLELLAND, Mark, “Sex, censorship and media regulation in Japan: A historical overview”, in Mark McLelland, Vera Mackie (edited by), *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, London, Routledge, 2014.

Momoka Momoko, "Sekkusu Wākā kara Mita Piru" (The Pill as seen by a Sex Worker), *Impaction*, vol. 105, 1997, p. 54-61.
桃河 モモコ、「セックスワーカーから見たピル」、インパクション出版会 編、第 105 巻、1997 年、p. 54-61.

MUN, Eunmi, BRINTON, Mary C., "Workplace Matters: The Use of Parental Leave Policy in Japan", *Work and Occupations*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2015, pp. 335-369.

NISHIMURA, Yuichiro, "Shokuba ni okeru jendā no chirigaku" (Geography of Gender in the Workplace), *Chirigakuhyōron*, vol. 75, no. 9, 2002, pp.571-590.
西村雄一郎、「職場におけるジェンダーの地理学」、地理学評論、第 75 巻 、9 号、2002 年、pp. 571-590.

PARREÑAS, Rhacel. *Illicit Flirtations: Labor, Migration, and Sex Trafficking in Tokyo*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2011.

PHETERSON, Gail, "The Whore Stigma: Female Dishonor and Male Unworthiness.", *Social Text*, no. 37, 1993, pp. 39–64.

RAMSEYER, J. Mark, "Indentured Prostitution in Imperial Japan: Credible Commitments in the Commercial Sex Industry." *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1991, pp. 89–116.

RANI, Uma, "Economic Growth, Labour Markets and Gender in Japan", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 41, 2006, pp. 4369–4377.

RINGDAL, Nils Johan, *Love for Sale: A World History of Prostitution*, Grove, Atlantic, 2003.

ROTTENBERG, Catherine, *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2018.

ROWLEY, G. G. "Prostitutes against the Prostitution Prevention Act of 1956." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*, no. 23, 2002, pp. 39–56.

RUBIN, Gayle, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex", *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, New York and London, Monthly Review Press, 1975, pp. 157-210.

SASSEN, Saskia, "Global Cities and Global Survival Circuits", *Cities in a World Economy*, Thousand Oaks, SAGE Publications, 2019, pp. 273-292.

SEIFERT, Ruth, "Der weibliche Körper als Symbol und Zeichen. Geschlechtsspezifische Gewalt und die kulturelle Konstruktion des Krieges.", *Gewalt imKrieg: Ausübungen, Erfahrungen und Verweigerung von Gewalt in Kriegen des 20. Jahrhunderts,* Münster, LIT Verlag, 1996.

SHIGEMATSU, Setsu, "The women's liberation movement and sexuality in Japan", in Mark McLelland, Vera Mackie (edited by), *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, London, Routledge, 2014.

SMITH, Robert J. “Gender Inequality in Contemporary Japan”, *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 ,1987, pp. 1–25.

SUTHERLAND, Kate. "Work, Sex, and Sex-Work: Competing Feminist Discourses on the International Sex Trade." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, vol.42, no.1, 2004, pp. 139-167.

TAKAHASHI, Mana. "When the Law Is Silent: Stigma and Challenges Faced by Male Sex Workers in Japan", *International Journal of Law in Context*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2021, pp. 301-317.

TAKEYAMA, Akiko, “Marriage, aging, and women’s pursuit of commercial sex in Japan.” *Sexualities*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 592-613.

TRƯƠNG, Thanh-Đạm, *Sex Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia*, London, Zed Books, 1990, pp. 158-191.

TSUNODA, Yukiko, *Seisabetsu to Bōryoku* (Sexism and Violence), Tokyo, Yuhikaku, 2005. 角田由紀子、『性差別と暴力』、東京、有斐閣、2005 年.

VANWESENBEECK, Ine, “Another Decade of Social Scientific Work on Sex Work: A Review of Research 1990-2000”, *Annual Review of Sex Research*, vol. 12, 2001, pp. 242-289.

YU, Wei-hsin, “Jobs for Mothers: Married Women’s Labor Force Reentry and Part-Time, Temporary Employment in Japan”, *Sociological Forum*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2002, pp. 493–523.

YUKI, Fujime, “Japanese Feminism and Commercialized Sex: The Union of Militarism and Prohibitionism.”, *Social Science Japan Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2006, pp. 33–50.

YUKI, Shiga-Fujime, BEVERLY L., Findlay-Kaneko, “The Prostitutes’ Union and the Impact of the 1956 Anti-Prostitution Law in Japan.”, *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal. English Supplement*, no.5, 1993, pp. 3-27.

Sitography

"Baishun Bōshi Hō" 売春防止法 (Prostitution Prevention Law), 1956, https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=331AC0000000118_20230606_505AC0000000028, accessed 21 November 2023.

"Fūzoku Eigyōtō no Kisei oyobi Gyōmu no Tekiseikatō ni kansuru Hōritsu" 風俗営業等の規制及び業務の適正化等に関する法律 (Law Regulating Entertainment Business), 1948, https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=323AC0000000122, accessed 22 November 2023.

HARAGUCHI, Yuko, *'sekkusu wāku is wāku' wo meguru soshō ni itaru made(zenpen)* (Leading up to the Lawsuit over 'Sex Work is Work' (Part One)), in "Oasis", 2021, https://www.keiben-oasis.com/call4/015, accessed 02 February 2024.
原口侑子、「『セックスワーク is ワーク』をめぐる訴訟に至るまで（前編）」、2021 年、最終確認 2024 年 2 月 2 日

HOFFMAN, Michael, "Japan's love affairs with sex", *The Japan Times Online*, 2007, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2007/04/29/general/japans-love-affairs-with-sex/, accessed 8 November 2023.

JUN, Hongo, "Law bends over backward to allow 'fuzoku'". *The Japan Times Online*, 2008, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2008/05/27/reference/law-bends-over-backward-to-allow-fuzoku/, accessed 22 November 2023.

"Koyō no bunya niokeru danjo no kintō na kikai oyobi taigū no kakuho tō nikansuru hōritsu shikō kisoku" 雇用の分野における男女の均等な機会及び待遇の確保 等に関する法律施行規則 (Ordinance for the Enforcement of the Act on Ensuring Equal Opportunities for and Treatment of Men and Women in Employment), 1985, https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=347AC0000000113, accessed 29 December 2023.

LIMANI, Donika, SODERGREN, Marie-Claire, *Where Women Work. Female-Dominated Occupations and Sectors*, 2023, in "International Labour Organization ILOSTAT", https://ilostat.ilo.org/where-women-work-female-dominated-occupations-and-sectors/, accessed 05 February 2024.

NORMA, Caroline, *Japan's Sex Industry in the Year of Corona, 2020*, in "FiLiA", 2020, https://www.filia.org.uk/latest-news/2020/11/19/japans-sex-industry-in-the-year-of-corona-2020, accessed 18 January 2024.

SNOW, David, *Collective Identity and Expressive Forms*, in "UC Irvine: Center for the Study of Democracy", 2001, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2zn1t7bj#main, accessed 02 February 2024.

TATSUMI, Kenji, ENDO, Koji, *Exclusion of sex industry from COVID subsidy programs 'constitutional': Tokyo High Court*, in "The Mainichi", 2023,

https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20231006/p2a/00m/0na/027, accessed 03 February 2024.

US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report June* 2004, in "US Department of State, 2004, https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/34158.pdf, accessed 06 February 2024.

US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report June* 2005, in "US Department of State, 2005, https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/47255.pdf, accessed 06 February 2024.

YEUNG, Jessie, OGURA, Junko, RIPLEY, Will, *Japan is offering sex workers financial aid. But they say it's not enough to survive the coronavirus pandemic*, in "CNN", 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/19/asia/japan-sex-workers-coronavirus-intl-hnk/index.html, accessed 03 February 2024.

S*ei fūzoku eigyō to korona kyūfu kin* (Sexual Entertainment Business and Corona Benefits), in "cocolog nifty", 2022, http://eulabourlaw.cocolog-nifty.com/blog/2022/06/post-fb0749.html, accessed 03 February 2024.
「性風俗営業とコロナ給付金」、2022 年、最終確認 2024 年 2 月 3 日

Sei fūzoku gyō e no korona kyūfu kin fu shikyū wa"gōken" tōkyō chisai (Corona Benefits for Sex Industry Non-issuance deemed "constitutional" by Tokyo District Court), in "NHK", 2022, https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20220630/k10013696201000.html, accessed 02 February 2024.
「性風俗業へのコロナ給付金 不支給は"合憲" 東京地裁」、2022 年、最終確認 2024 年 2 月 2 日

Shingata korona to fūzoku eigyō toyuu shōchō (The New Corona and the Symbolism of the Sex Trade), in "cocolog nifty", 2020, http://eulabourlaw.cocolog-nifty.com/blog/2020/04/post-b631f8.html, accessed 03 February 2024.
「新型コロナと風俗営業という象徴」、2020 年、最終確認 2024 年 2 月 3 日