

331.5:316.344.7-055.1/.3(=214.58)(497.711)

Ines Crvenkovska Risteska(Macedonia)
Institute for Ethnology and Anthropology
Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics
University “Ss.Cyril and Methodius” – Skopje
e-mail: inesc.r.2000@gmail.com

**ECONOMIES WITH THE SEXUALITY: SEX/GENDER IDENTITY
FOR BENEFIT AMONG THE ROMA “WOMEN”, SEXUAL WORKERS
IN SKOPJE**

Abstract: This paper deals with the local sexual/gender system and the sexual/gender identity for *the benefit* of Roma “women” in the Roma community in Skopje. This is a local concept according to which Roma people, biologically born as men, want to make earning for their families by doing sexual work as “women” at the “open” and “closed” stages in Skopje, Macedonia and Europe. The idea that the sexuality can be sold as service and used as income generator is one of the important reasons to maintain their sexual/gender identity also as “women” in the local economic system of the Roma gay people – “sexual workers”, through the peer system of “sisters” in the Roma community in Skopje.

Key words: economies, sexuality, sex/gender identity, sexual worker, Roma people, Skopje

This paper about the Roma “women”, sexual workers in Skopje, starts with a comment about one very important research carried out by Nanda Serena, dedicated to the third gender, which is about the “institutionalized third gender role in India, “neither male, nor female“, containing elements of both“ (Nanda 1986: 35). Nanda’s book seems useful for this research. We shall also refer to the opinion of the author Unni Wikan who, in her review of this book, talks about the new approach by Nanda towards the sexual/gender issue emphasized as “humanity“ and “it also addresses key conceptual issues in the study of gender and sexuality” (Wikan 1991: 721). It is not by chance that this paper referring to Roma “women”, sexual workers, points out Wikan’s commentary. We are also supporting Nanda’s analysis which sticks out from the common Western concepts. According to Wikan, Nanda shows “how a Western conception of gender is rigidly dichotomized into two (and only two) permanent categories is fundamentally culture – bound and pitifully constraining for those who do not fit the pair but are forced to choose to be one or the other” (Wikan 1991: 721). Hence, the norms

introduced regulate all other non-standard cultural phenomenon and push them to choose either the former or the latter sexual/gender category: either “man” or “woman”. With this approach, Nanda is introducing new anthropological discourse about the third gender. “Nanda is able to relativize many of the assumptions that have been associated with the notions of transvestism and transgendered identities in contemporary Western societies, and to suggest some ways in which other cultural assumptions may lead to very different readings of the whole notion of sexual difference“ (Parker, Aggleton 2007: 6), are comments by some authors interested about the aspects showing the gender difference in the research about the *hijra*: “an Indian religious community of men who dress and act like women” (Wikan 1991: 721). This specific interest derives from the need to analyze the institutionalized gender role both through the cultural and individual lens. This makes her approach interesting and, even more important, applicable in this research that will be related to the gender role of “both male and female“ of the interlocutors – Roma “women” who build the gender/sexual identity *for the benefit: sexual workers, cross-dressers* at the “closed” stages in the Roma community and in the City of Skopje, including the “closed” and “open” stages as *hitchhikers* in the Western European countries: Italy, Switzerland, France.

According to Marjorie Garber, the gender/sexual determination can be seen as a “method of expression”, “way to describe the space of the options” (Garber 1992). Furthermore, it can be said that the concept about the Roma “women”, sexual workers in the Roma community in Skopje is an interesting local manner of manifestation. These “women” are Roma that were biologically identified as men when they were born and who operate today in a system of symbolic relationship of “sisters” that mutually support each other in providing sexual services. This system of local economy of sisters working as “sexual workers” enables them to earn income for their families, hence their children tolerate their absence and they are supported by their parents: in one of the cases a mother of a sexual worker cares for his children while he is away from home. In the efforts to understand the concept of a Roma “woman” who earns income for herself and her family as a sexual worker, we shall find useful the images interpreted about oneself coming from individuals in the community. According to the character of the third gender (“both man and woman”), also known in the Roma community in Skopje as *buljáshi, kulale(i)ja, kulalo*, it can be compared in many elements with the manner of social organization of the third gender in India known as *hijra*. In order to be consistent to what they feel about themselves, we shall use male and sometimes female gender when speaking about our interlocutors since their sexual/gender identity includes “both maleness and femaleness“. In accordance with the context, and in trying to more clearly illustrate their background, we are essentially using both sexual/gender identifications.

If the body is a “a representation of one flesh and of one corporeal economy“ (Laqueur, 1990: 114) it is logical to expect that there is possibility for each individual who is part of this system, in accordance with the context in which the individual is working (Roma community, the City of Skopje or the cities in

Europe) to establish a specific sexual/gender identity on individual level. We are going to witness this in the examples of our interlocutors – they see themselves as “both man and woman“ doing their *job* which is important for them and for their families in order to sustain themselves both biologically and socially. Sooner or later in the course of life, the sexual/gender identity connected to the sexual work has become essential in the social and economic life of those Romas and has become equally important as other roles they have in the Roma community: to be fathers of their children, husbands of their wives, sons of their mother and father, brothers of their brothers and sisters. In essence, the building of identity on individual level and the impacts the individual experiences in the context in which he/she lives, can be best described by Cornwall, who says that the “shifting discourses have produced variant sexualities and genders over time“ (Cornwall 1994: 124).

About the third gender in the Roma community: the Roma “women”, sexual workers and sisters

In the context of this paper we are using ethnographic materials obtained as a result of field research for the needs of the Ph.D. paper related to the Roma “women” and sexual workers in the Roma community in Skopje, covering the time period between 2013 and 2015 and around 30 interviews with men having sex with men and sexual workers, related to the sexual health in the frames of the project “Mapping and community research on most-at-risk Adolescents to HIV/AIDS/STI in Macedonia” implemented by the Institute for Ethnology and Anthropology in the Roma community in Skopje, covering the period 2006-2007, but also earlier dates. These interviews were used for the research in the frames of the master thesis that was about the male same-sex sexuality in the Republic of Macedonia, mentioned in the text that follows as a research topic that is closely-related.

Common thing for all interlocutors was that they are being called *buljàshi* (bulja means booty). This term is considered insulting, except in cases when they are joking among themselves. Another term used is *kulale(i)ja*, *kulalo*, also insulting term and they use when they are having time together. The politically correct term used is the local variant of “gay”, in Macedonian language, plural, which is “*gaytsi*” that want to *have relationships* with “men” *for pleasure*, to do sexual work “like women – sexual workers”. “Like women” they *have relationship, they do it, they exploit it, they want to ...* with “man”, *they are selling themselves for money, compensation or awards; they are ‘doing’* the client. In the context of the sexual work, the men are called *clients* or *customers*. In modern context, the economic aspect is present when *boyfriend* as a term is used, which makes it close to the meaning of the term *client*. *N: a boyfriend who is paying us, sometimes they buy us or bring us the things we need. So, if it is not possible to*

pay with money, the client will buy something, will contribute with something". The "client: *is fucking you for benefit, the client is giving (money, for example) in order to use me*. Contrary to other individuals from the Roma community, the "sisters" provide their services at a "closed" stage, far away from the eyes of the wider public.

In order to be able to talk about the identity *for benefit of a "sexual worker"*, we need to be familiarize ourselves with the identity *for pleasure*, for enjoyment which is very important in building the *for benefit* identity. Based on the Indian ethnography which is related to the social organization of the hijras, some relation can be established in organizational-functional sense with the "sisters" organization. More specifically, it is about system of relations that is implemented on social, economic and ritual level. "The sisters" are a type of association of Roma men who are coming together on the basis of the joint identified segments of "femininity". It is the basis for the "practices of commensality" (Papataxiarchis, 1991: 156) of the sisters because of which the Roma men will say about themselves they are "women" and have a need to *be in relationship* with men; because of that they are identified by the "men" as *buljashi* or *gaytsi*, although they are calling themselves with those names. This "practices of commensality" is of great importance for the "sisters". According to our interlocutor L, he is usually coming together with his close "sisters" in a closed space where they are spending their time together primarily in having fun and pleasures. They can also live together for a longer time period. They spend together the entire time since their working hours are flexible, depending on the agreements entered into between some of the sisters and the clients. They can deliver the service in the house they live in, and the sister can bring the client in the house with the other sisters.

Very important for them are the periods when they function as a symbolic family community, when they are sharing communion for a longer time period. They are free to bring their *boyfriends* and *clients* in the room where they are befriending together. We can say that the congregation into a single family community is something that happens often, but because of the specific nature of their befriending, the location for occasional befriending is often changing. These congregations have significant importance according to the interlocutors. It is important for them that these befriending events take place in a closed space where the individuals can behave in a way they feel, "on a commonality of character, on the enjoyment of being together, and on the reputation they have for being emotionally involved in what they do, (Papataxiarchis 1991: 160) share their company and support themselves in what they are".

There is a hierarchy in the system of the "sisters". The oldest ones acquire the status of *senior sister and the oldest one is actually a 'chief*, also identifying himself as *mother*. In the past, the junior sisters used to address him with "mother" or *older/senior sister*. His word is very much respected among the sisters. The younger "sisters" always have the status of *daughters* in his presence

and they are learning from the seniors how to be “on their own”. During these “befriending” sessions, the sisters not only live in communion and in a space they share together, but the economic aspect is equally important in their communion and this economic aspect makes them a family community. Specifically, while the “sisters” are together, all costs are covered by the one who has the money at that particular moment. There are not special agreements when it comes to investing personal funds in this community. The money spent for costs during the socializing events of the “sisters” are non-refundable for the one who paid them, that is the others are under no obligation to repay those funds. The allocation of all money is equal for all sites present – they are used to buy food, coffee, drinks, cigarettes. If they have no money or run out of money, they are calling *clients* to whom they are offering their services.

The close “sisters help each other both financially and with other means outside their joint communion events. This is considered “borrowing” which is expected to be equally returned. According to the interlocutors, the “borrowing” is more about clothes used in the sexual work and is important instrument in building of identity of the sexual worker and the sexual work. They usually borrow only things they consider *personal*, in a sense of earned by themselves in the course of the sexual work. Contrary to money “borrowing”, which is assumed that should be repaid, the “borrowing” in clothes does not have such value so the returning of the same could take place for longer time periods. The clothing, especially those used in the sexual work, is seen as their personal ownership since the money invested in buying those clothes were earned with own work. This type of exchange in a form of “borrowing” within the community of the sisters is important for maintaining the social relations in the family which sometimes does not have to exist on a single location. For example, to the outside “public” the functioning of the community is of “closed” character – and for those that continuously meet the requirements to be potential members of this community, is of “open” character. This means that the *closeness* between the individuals is also implemented through consistency and loyalty to the community with the “sisters”. This was also proved with the field research carried out in the Roma community, during the phase when I was establishing the network of my collaborators from the community – I appeared as a researcher and as a potential financier, and “sisters” that were close to my “interlocutors” were also involved in the research. However, something that confirms the idea for symbolic sibling between the “sisters” is the type of “prohibition” they introduced: they are not allowed to have sexual intercourses between themselves. The prohibition for incest is important for the symbolic relationship between the “sisters”, between the individuals that, being “women”, feel mutual *closeness* among themselves.

About the sexual work in the anthropology

Very little has been researched and written in the anthropology literature

about the sexual work, if we compare it, for example, with research on sexuality related to other aspects within a single social and cultural context. Some authors who are experienced in these topics think that even the researches that are probing these topics are very often marginalized (for more information see Crvenkovska Risteska 2017), and "how people who sell sex are excluded from studies of migration, of service work and of informal economies, and are instead examined only in terms of 'prostitution', a concept that focuses on transactions between individuals, especially their personal motivations" (Sanchez 2003; Agustín 2004b, 2005a, according to Agustín 2005). However, in the recent years the topic of "prostitution" is becoming interesting discussion in the anthropological circles, which can be also seen in the expert literature. In order to avoid the meaning of the commercial sex only as a moral issue (Agustín, 2005b: 619), it started to be replaced with the term "sexual work" and afterwards, in the most recent papers dealing with sexual services, to be renamed into "sexual labor" (Boris, Gilmore, Parreñas 2010: 131) or into "sexual commerce" (Kotiswaran 2011: 70) – definition used by the material feminists during the late capitalism period. The study on globalization in the political economy is commonly using the "reproductive labor" definition (Agathangelou 2004), under the excuse that in this way they would deviate from the definition of "sexual work" which, according to the authors, is a political definition overburdened with meanings, and is undoubtedly advocating against the idea that the prostitution, in itself, is harmful for the women. Since our interlocutors identified themselves as "sexual workers" which "summarizes the theoretical position of those using it for analytical and interpretational purposes (Zikic 2009: 39). The definitions used in the context could help explain the relations established therein.

According to Shivananda Khan, the "sexual worker" definition came into life with the occurrence of HIV/ AIDS as a global health problem – an infection after which, in immune-preventive sense, the people "were" forced to become aware of the sexually transmittable infections, so he initiated alternative programs for protection of the sexual health. This definition "was largely invented to de-stigmatize what were once called 'prostitutes', a word that was seen to carry a great deal of shame, dishonor, and stigma" (Khan 1999: 195). According to him, it seemed that this renaming process brings two aspects – the sense of political correctness and the sense of choice. Hence, the sexual work become one more "activity" that can be abandoned at any time, and those involved in that activity to find excuse that "they are doing it in order to survive and system themselves". In this manner, the sexual work becomes economic work, a "survival strategy".

This approach tackles the economic side of the sexuality at certain individuals who, by building the personal sexual/gender identity, support the local personal needs but also the economies of the family communities, and strengthen the economic side of the personal sexual/gender identity in the frames of the wider sibling system, and sustain it in that manner. This was also happening with the economic aspects of the local sexual/gender system – the current one in the Roma community among the *buljàshi* (*gaytsi*) individuals who, united together

in a common system of “sisters” work “as women” sexual workers. This policy aims to put the personal sexuality into economic frames in order to satisfy the social aspect and for the individual to express both “as woman” in the sexual work and “as man” in the everyday public life.

In addition to satisfying the economic aspects through the personal sexuality, the “sexual worker” enters into *relationship* with her *boyfriends and clients for benefits*, meeting the personal sexual needs as well. Although it can be seen in some narratives that the sexual workers separate these two aspects (in a sense that some are compensated with material benefits for their services and others are not), these two aspects are indivisible from the personal sexuality: *L: ...it is something I learned from an old friend of mine. She said to me here: “You are gay, you are already fucking everyone without money, with this you can at least earn money.” Even when I’ll be forty or fifty, I’ll still be saying: “Sorry, money please!”. “Otherwise, why would I ... everyone and why should I show my body to everyone? When I can have some benefit from that (VN850124, 2013).*

Economies with sexuality, economies with femininity/ masculinity

The sexual work is market – organized system of selling sexual services in the Roma community in Skopje, maybe up to the level that can be called “sexual market”. The system, of course, relates the sexuality and other local economies so it is possible to give answer to the question on what is the thing that actually builds this activity ”from the perspective of what men and women believe they are doing when they engage in monetized sexual exchanges“(Hastings, Magowan 2010: 71). Many of the interpersonal relations include combination of sexual and economic activities, and that goes for this activity as well. ”Where the relations are narrow and short term, we tend to call them sex work (Stinchcombe 1999, според Zelizer 2010: 155). Where they are broad and long term, we tend to call them households“. This can be illustrated with ethnographic data collected from the field of the Roma community in Skopje.

Although the sexual service has the central place in the market organized activity, or as Bojan Zikic puts it: “doing sexual work” (Zikic, 2009: 47), seen as relationship between a “sexual worker” one side and her *client* on the other side (understood as ”consumer” in the sexual trade) or *client* – as a synonym of the previous economic term that was transformed according to the taste of the globalizing *procapitalistic* economic terminology. The market – organized activity is not representing only these two market sides (the one who is producing and selling, and the one who is buying it and using it). The relation between these two parties is the core of everything, but in order to this relation to be realized in a wider sense, “all individuals included in the market organized system and are involved in that activity, make up that system” (Zikic 2009: 47). All social stakeholders: taxi drivers, restaurant and hotel workers, families, (if any) pimps, po-

lice officers, doctors, lawyers and other official persons, civil society organizations with their programs, media, the friends of the sexual workers, and indirectly the researchers who, by providing compensation in a sense of *award*, support the sexual market logic. This also supports the local sexual/gender system and its modern variants, including the social locations, that is “anywhere that sex is offered for sale on an occasional basis” (Agustín 2005: 622): *the terminals* – which are commonly parking lots, streets, hotels, rented apartments, local and other cafeterias, restaurants, the so called “public houses”, graveyards, yards in the local schools, etc., within the Roma community and beyond. This market logic in this activity would be an incentive for the sexuality to be put in the function of market-organized system in a form of “sexual work”, that can be corroborated with the conclusion of the anthropologists who were dealing with the traditional economies – that the system can be implemented “solely through familial or political relationships” (Cohen 2011: 4) but only if the economic activity “is integrated” in the society itself (Polanyi 1944).

This can be proven with the overall attitude towards these individuals within the collective Roma community. This attitude is due to their important role in the collective inter-sexual/gender exchange of sexual relations, in order to maintain the collective reproductive potency, implemented through the mechanism of “keeping the virginity” of the girl and her family, as they (the family) are responsible for keeping her “honor” and maintaining the male potency, until the period of biological reproduction, which is also identified with the collective reproduction of the Roma community. The maintaining of the collective “honor” successfully implements the collective economic logic. Some authors take different direction by considering this type of economic exchange as “highly decentralized” (Dalton 1961: 3) because it is consisted of many mutually related by still individual “purchase and sale transactions” and, as a result, the “femininity” is economized among the individuals, which also determines their political position within the Roma community.

Profile of a sexual worker

The interlocutors see themselves, both in the narratives and in the reality, both as “sexual workers” and as individuals who are *buljashi* (“gaytsi”) who do sexual work as “girls”, “women”. Our interlocutor L is seeing himself as communicative, marry and people-friendly person, and also as a woman or girl doing sexual work and has specific clients. He thinks he is having normal life and he defines his specific work as total “transformation”. L talks about himself in third person. He is doing the “transformation” at the location where he is delivering his services, under the excuse that he is afraid about his safety and experiences it as “gender’ change which he identifies it with the term *crossdresser*: According to L: *From man to woman. A cross-dresser. I dress as a woman which means I*

wear 100% women clothes, I have a wig, I use makeup, heels, all of it. I become a real woman (VN850124, 2013). Compared to other sexual workers, only L is using this definition. When building his personal sex/gender, L aims to establish himself as a “woman” for the needs of the sexual work and as a “man” outside of the sexual work. The grounds for building the identity of sexual worker is in the segment of the “female” identity of the *buljâshi* individuals and makes up his body for the needs of the sexual work which later “identifies the special properties of the relationships between sex workers and their clients“ (Zelizer 2010: 156) with his closest “sisters”; with the family of siblings he lives with and through which he is implementing the obligations towards the wider Roma community. It can be freely said that the “sex workers live in a world of highly differentiated and well-marked social ties“ (Zelizer 2010: 156) which acquire the local economic “work terminology” (Kulich 1998: 142) and each of them need to be considered separately, through their implementation in practice, for political relevance.

Economic aspects in the positions of the sexual relation

The question of how this position is built in the sexual relations between the *buljâsi* individuals (“gaytsi“) and the “men” individuals, and how important it is for the individuals within the sexual work – is something that is of special interest for us. Our interlocutor N talks about his position he identifies it with the role of “woman” in the sexual relation, and he is building this position in his narratives according to what he desires, according to his need to experience pleasure during the sexual act. He says that another important dimension needs to be taken into account: “aside from the purely monetary one, frequently gets foregrounded and elaborated: pleasure“ (Kulich 1998: 183). L primarily experiences himself as a “female sexual worker”, he enjoys in his work i.e. he experiences pleasure in his work. “It reinforces their self-esteem, and it provides them with sexual satisfaction“ (Kulich 1998: 183). In their narratives, with the exception of C, the interlocutors talk freely about their desired position in the sexual relations. This is probably due to the frequent practicing of sexual intercourses and communication with people about that issue, so they are able to practice and to confirm their desired position and their sexual/gender identity. This ascertainment can be confirmed with the comment by Middelthon: “we subsume under sex a complex range of human phenomena (Middelthon 2002: 182), not only somatic practices but also cultural and personal signs of sexual practices and desires (i.e., immediate physical involvement and densely mediated gestures)“. The free talk about the position is probably due to the fact that it is one of the important details in the sexual intercourse which is defined in advance between the sexual worker and the clients within the sexual work. It is an activity that includes the somatic i.e. the exactly determined bodily region of the anus, rectum and prostate (Middelthon, 2002: 181) within the “the cultural and societal features, (...) the act of being penetrated one of conflicting desires and concerns“. Because of this con-

stellation, the position, it can be one of the limitations in the same-sex relation, maybe among “gay” boys, for example “active” – understood beyond the localized Roma concept, but not in the cases with my interlocutors who do sexual work as “women” and identify themselves as “receivers”: *I: ...and when do you feel better? L: As a woman. When I am passive. Then I like it the best (VN850124, 2013)*. For our interlocutors, the position in the sexual intercourses is important in building the sexual/gender identity and the positioning both in the gay world and on the sexual market. The client is buying *pleasure* as a service and he is paying for that, has elements that belong to the area of “femininity” and is getting an economic form of **for benefit** in the sexual work. *N: A man, for example, he is fucking you only for benefit. You can do him and he do you. C: So, there are different examples. You can talk to him (VN850123, 2013)*.

The interlocutors are building an identity of a “woman” and, in accordance with the understanding of the “feminine” culture of the Roma community, they are using it in the collective community as association of a female sexuality which should be the substitute for the “female” biological sexuality, which should be later used for the collective reproductive purposes; and, within the male community, and this is imposed in practice in the sexual work, to satisfy the personal economic and sexual needs. Hence, in the sexual intercourses done *for pleasure*, the emotional dimension is the only appearing factor, contrary to the sexual services where the mutual exchange of pleasure is done for agreed financial amount where the emotional dimension is acquiring economic form.

In order to be more clear what is the importance of the relations position in the sexual work, in this part of the paper we are referring to the example provided by our interlocutors N and L, regarding their positioning in the sexual relations with a boyfriend, and they retain it also in the sexual work. Contrary to the interlocutors N or E, who *do not want to* identify themselves with the position of “man” in the sexual intercourse, the interlocutor L, although he feels as a woman and enjoys that in the receptive position and in the delivery of the oral sexual intercourse (these belong to activities belonging to the “feminine area” of sexuality), the sexual work of our interlocutor L, upon the wish of the client and for particular amount of money, L is changing the position in the sexual intercourses and takes the position of “man”, which is not a big problem for him. This example can be confirmed with the idea of Robert Connell who defines the masculinity as “a configuration of practice *within* a system of gender relations” (Connell 1995: 84), same as the “femininity” in the examples of our interlocutors, which is equally building its configurations in practicing the system of sexual/gender relations. In the local sexual/gender system of the Roma community we can notice some specific tendencies in the practices that have happened as experiences of the individuals, and which we think contributed towards establishing a configuration in the femininity/masculinity system of relations. The subjectivity built in this way has significant impact on seeing oneself within the sexual work. On the basis of the personal view and experience they building

the clients view which they experience also as a view from the wider community they are in contact with, for example with the colleagues from the civil society organizations, with the people they meet on the street, etc. *L: The idea... of most of the clients, that most of the clients are, like, a male dressed in female clothes... That is that, essentially, that is what turns them on, to see you as a woman knowing that you are man. That is the 'crossdresser' term. A person that dresses only, and I repeat only in a specific period, between four walls... (VN850124, 2013).*

Since this is the way they experience the view from the clients, the most important thing for them is to first meet primarily the visual aspect of the sexual/gender identity of the sexual identity, which is essentially agreed in advance. The interlocutor has the first meeting with the potential *client* as a man, in a sense that he is dressed in common clothing. If they agree about the service, if the client has his space or has some wishes, for example in a car or something, they go to the location where the service will be delivered. If the client does not have his space, the service is delivered in a hotel or “out in the open”. The interlocutor carries his clothes in a bag and dresses at the location. In the further cooperation, and in some cases with new clients, the interlocutor agrees with the client a pick-up location and the drop-off location where the service is supposed to be delivered. The interlocutor dresses as “woman” either during the car transport or in the hotel room. The interlocutors talk not only about the actual dressing procedure but also about the undressing procedure i.e. is the undressing of the clothes during the delivery of the sexual service, where the panties (underwear) are of special relevance – a clothing that is dressed directly on top of the lower part of the body. According to the logic, these should be undressed last, and in some cases they are not undressed, so they are becoming an instrument for the interlocutors to control the situation in the intercourse with the client. According to our interlocutor N, the situation has quite changed in relation to whether this part of the clothing should be undressed or not. In the past, according to N, in the sexual intercourse with the client, he found it important not to undress the *panties* (although he was enjoying the actual intercourse), to have a control over himself and the behavior of the client and not to surrender completely to the client, which an unknown individual for the sexual worker. The fact that he will not undress the panties makes him think that he is avoiding to show the lower part of the body, that he will be able to easily control the touches of the client and to control himself. According to the interlocutor, this situation changed after the year of 2000 when, according to what they are saying, it can be said that the violence over the individuals providing services at the sexual stages in Skopje is increasing. In case of the more senior interlocutors, there were mentions that they have been attacked at the open sexual stages in the center of Skopje from individuals with ethnic Albanian background.

Origins and organization in the sexual work

What is relevant is that the sexual workers “focus their relationship on sexual activity“ (Zelizer 2010: 156) from which it is possible, within the sexual work, to identify the political position of the participants. It is possible to see, above everything else, the political position of the participants in the delivery of the sexual service which is an agreed form of sexual activity for the implementation of which the interlocutors are building various strategies. The types of these strategies not only shape the political position of the interlocutors in the frames of the sexual relation but this position is also built within the market system of sexual work “within” and/or “beyond” the Roma community. According to the examples mentioned by the interlocutors, we can see that their sexual work as “women” does have political relevance. The way the interlocutors have built that identity in the frames of the sexual work has something to do with the building of identity of a “woman” within the male community. The main reason why the interlocutors started to deal with sexual work, first on the street (the “open stage”) and later on the “closed stage”, is the personal situation, and for some interlocutors the economic situation of their family: unemployment, poverty and lack of funds for everyday things – in the example of L, it was hunger and no cigarettes.

Most of the interlocutors started when they were juvenile, not right away when the wish to walk together with man has appeared, but soon after they met someone who would support them in their activity. The aim to walk with men was for the “men” to find out about them i.e. is to affirm their own identity in the male community. In the example of interlocutor E, he started to walk with men since he was 12 years old, but he started as a “sexual worker” only when he was 16-17 years old. At the beginning of the sexual work he was very much assisted by his friend P, a *senior sister* with experience in the sexual work. From this example we can see in practice how the functioning of the “sisters” system becomes of great relevance for structuring of the system of sexual work, that it will become very important in building of identity of the “sexual workers” who are structured in the hierarchy: for their self-sustainability and for their future professional plans on which their life depends on. Same as other interlocutors, L started to do sexual work on the “open stage”, together with his friend with whom they were jointly supporting each other in the decision to “sell themselves for money”. In the beginning, most of the sexual workers were ashamed to say that they are doing sexual work. Such is the example of one adolescent who, when asked whether he has offered or has been offered money for sex, he replied negatively, but in the further talk he is using the jargon term *whores* about himself and his close sisters. He is also using the term *customer* for the sexual partners.

According to interlocutor L, it is very rare for persons from the “gay” world in the Roma community to declare themselves as “sexual workers”. It is easier for them to declare as “gay” and then to some extent, when someone says

he is “gay”, to understand in the context that he is also dealing with “sexual work”. ...because he is ashamed to say that he is sexual worker, that he is actually making money from that (VN850124, 2013). It was very common when talking with the interlocutors, when they are mentioning the sexual work, to use the term “gaytsi” as euphemism i.e. as substitute for the term “sexual worker”. According to one of the interlocutor, he was especially ashamed in the initial phases of the sexual work. According to L, there was a change in the attitude towards the sexual work as a result of his engagement as an activist in civil society organization. Such changes can be also noticed among other interlocutors who are part of civil society organization programs. They have embraced their activity and none of them is thinking about changing it. In other words, according to what they are saying about their future plans, they do not see themselves outside the sexual work. They do not imagine a future in which they would be doing something else, although they have completed secondary education. According to interlocutor I, even if he was to change his activity, he still sees the fact that he is “gay” as a economic lucrative opportunity to earn money as a sexual worker even when he is older. *I: To give up from this work? L: No way! I’m never giving up (VN850124, 2013)!* This comment is the main driver for the sexual work of the interlocutor L and, according to the material gathered from the field research, for other interlocutors as well.

The material gathered from the field research shows that the interlocutors learned, in time, to speak openly about the fact they are sexual workers, but still they are talking freely about that only when such topic is raised within a circle of “close people”, “sisters” friends or someone like me who, by paying a compensation (called *award*) has bought the service for the sexual worker to become an interlocutor and to discuss openly about her work. This shows that their attitude towards the sexual work has not changed but that they learned to adapt their attitude in the public discourse in accordance with the needs. This is confirmed by the example of L who, although he thinks that he is an individual who speaks openly about the work he loves, he admits that it not possible to discuss that openly with his mother which he sees as a very good friend of his. In this sense, the interlocutors, when it comes to public communication, are using verbal forms used as substitutes for sexual work. We mentioned some of them in the introductory part of this paper, such as: *I walk (I go), I am working, I am doing, I am doing something*, and they are also using these terms when communicating with the potential *client*. L will say, in the communication with the client: “...let’s meet somewhere, let’s see each other “ (VN850126, 2013)?

The reason why the interlocutor L started to do the sexual work as a “*sexual worker*” is the idea that the women earn more money in this work. They enter the sexual work with personal sexual experience, without any compensation, with *boyfriends* or sexual partners. In the narrative about themselves, the interlocutors are building a whole about the personal sexual/gender identity, in which it is possible to clearly distinguish between the period when the sexual work became

important in that process, and the one before, when he was establishing himself as “gay”. After building the identity as “gay” he is upgrading the identity of sexual worker and, after that, the identity of sexual worker in the context of the work as a “woman”.

Some of the interlocutors made their first efforts to reach clients before starting to actively deal with the sexual work, by using the night shows on the TV channels at specific private local TV stations that allow communication¹ and live broadcasting of SMS messages (for more information see Crvenkovska-Risteska, 2013: 99-100). Most of the interlocutors relate the beginnings of the sexual work with the “open stage” that is in the center of the city of Skopje. This stage has the longest tradition and the greatest influence in the “gay world” in the Republic of Macedonia. The same goes for the Municipality of Shuto Orizari, in the *headquarters* “a...a”, which used to be considered very important location for the “gay world” in the community – a location created following the example of the oldest and most influential open stage for the sexual workers in the center of Skopje, known as “*na kocka*”. The open stage “a...” in Shuto Orizari does not exist today. One of the main reasons for that was the violence, that increased in frequency, over individuals who were offering sexual services on this location in the period that followed after the independence of the Republic of Macedonia i.e. the conflict in 2001. The period of withdrawal from this stage matches the period when the other interlocutors also started to withdraw from “a... u...” – “the terminal” in the center of the city of Skopje due to violent behavior of group of users of the services.

The function of the “open stage” was for the individuals to congregate in large numbers which, according to them, leaves an impression on the wider public. For example, the main characteristic of the “open stage”, or as the interlocutors are calling it *the headquarters*, is the number of people that congregated, which made it recognizable between the “men” who were using sexual service. Following the closure of the *headquarters* they dispersed into smaller groups and each group opened their respective *headquarters* in the location where they live. The purpose of this localization of the stages into smaller *headquarters* in the public space of Shuto Orizari was done in order to enable greater control for the sexual workers over the location where they are delivering the service and over the selection of clients. The smaller *headquarters* had important role in the sexual work because they were less visible for the wider public thus avoiding the danger of violence and facilitating the selection of the clients. In such context, it was important for the interlocutors to inform their *permanent* clients and this became easier in time with the mobile phone communication. As we were able to see, one of the more important reasons for changing the work, the avoidance

1 According to the ethnographic research, the sexual workers were using the same local TV channels that broadcast night live contact programs, including the boys in 2006-2007 who wanted to find a same-gender sexual partner through the local television channels.

of the *terminal* in the center of Skopje and the localization of the “public stage” was the violence that frequently started to occur on this location in the period following the independence of the Republic of Macedonia, and most intensively during the conflict of 2001. This was also done due to the lack of interest among the state institutions to protect these individuals, although they reported all cases of violence to the relevant institutions.

Once they withdrew from the open stages, all interlocutors continued to work on a “closed stage”. The interlocutor L is different from other interlocutors due to the way he organizes his work, since he has been providing his services in Switzerland as well. This makes him different from his close sisters. The three-month experience of our interlocutor L as “woman on a street”, “transvestite on a street” and as a “crossdresser” in the City of Zurich, Switzerland, had very big influence in the profiling of the identity of our interlocutor L as sexual worker and on the organization of his sexual work (VN850124, 2013). This experience was very important for him because he learned many things about the “closed stage” sexual work.

The sexual workers and clients system

The building of the system of sexual workers and clients depends on the experiences and wishes of the sexual worker. For example, our interlocutors L and N, contrary to the other interlocutors, are also looking for clients outside of Skopje. According to our interlocutor L, they are commonly Macedonians, Albanians and Turks from different cities from all over Macedonia, but he avoids clients from the Roma community. Contrary to our interlocutor L, who is avoiding *clients* from the Roma community (from which he is only looking for his “boyfriends”), the interlocutors N and S organize their sexual work solely within the Roma community. They announce their offer in the same way as the interlocutor L does, with a difference is that they are also providing their telephone number in order to be contacted by the potential client. The interlocutors have a profile on the gay website which they can model according to their wishes – commonly known as a “fake profile” where they put their photos dressed as women in order to show what services they are offering. According to the interlocutor S, they are required to mention in their offer that they are males. The interlocutors establish the contact with the *clients* via telephone. In certain periods, our interlocutor L (especially in the periods when he had a *boyfriend*) also had a separate number for contacts with *clients* but today, same as like other interlocutors, he is using a single telephone number both for personal and professional needs.

The interlocutors are commonly providing their sexual services outside the home of their family, except the interlocutor E who provides the service in the house of his parents, where he lives alone. In some periods, the interlocutor L,

together with his friend, moved out from his parents home and lived in a rented apartment – this was happening in a period in which the sexual work for our interlocutor was gaining momentum. Together with his friend they were earning money from “erotic massages” in this apartment. One of the most usual locations in which the interlocutor L is providing his sexual services today is a hotel room. Contrary to the work in the apartment where he worked together with his friends, today L is providing his usual services in a hotel room by himself. For example, his requirements for clients become more sophisticated (better profiling), in a sense of being careful in the choice of hotels and discretion of the hotel staff. The sexual worker considers acceptable only hotel apartments that are outside the actual hotel, in a sense that he wants to avoid encounters with the hotel staff so he is sending to client to rent the room and take the key. The interlocutor L usually provides service on only one hotel in the city of Skopje (VN850126, 2013).

The communication between the sexual worker and the client consists of general questions. L is not trying to pry into private life details of the *client* so the most common questions are those related to the age and profession. Depending on the answers the sexual worker L builds the profile about his client. In her views, her clients do not belong to the poor category because most of them are employed in state and private institution and on the basis of that he defines the amount of financial compensation for the services. It can be therefore said that the “sex workers do not simply distinguish the sexual service itself, but who their clients are, their relationship to them, its duration and breadth, the amount and forms of payment, and the overall meaning of their work“ (Zelizer 2010: 155), and “indeed the monetary payment itself signals the form of the relationship to both provider and consumer“. Contrary to L, the interlocutor E sees most of his clients as poor judged by the fact that he must always adapt the price of the services according to the amount the client offers him at the particular moment.

Once agreement has been reached, the sexual worker N and the client arrange to meet. The first time this happens on a public location, such as the city park.

Types of exchange: money *for benefit*, awards and compensations

In this part of the paper we shall consider “a different set of stories“ (Hall 2007: 461) of individuals doing sexual work as “women” and include in their work different types of exchange which are defined depending on the interest of the sexual worker in that particular moment. This can be in financial form – “money” or “different ways of compensation” – allowances or “awards” – when it is not about sexual service but another form of labor invested by the sexual worker. This is taking away her time from the true work so she has to compensate. For example, I was requested to provide a specific amount for the interview with one

of the interlocutors, regardless of the duration of the interview.

The services provided by our interlocutor E, but she is ashamed to discuss those aloud, can be divided into three groups. *E: What do I do? I: Yes. E: Aaaaa! Well' that is really naughty! I offer him everything – I jerk, excuse my open language. I mean, I **jerk, I give blowjob** and he is doing me **from behind**. What else can I offer him? That is actually our work and that is what we provide... (VN850127, 2014).* In the local terminology we are also providing services like “*from the mouth*” and “*from the ass*”. Depending whether the requests of the client are acceptable, the sexual worker sets conditions in the sexual intercourse, that is how far the client *can go*. In the case of our sexual worker L, there are clear limits and rules about the details in providing the sexual work. However, what is considered important in this complex sexual activity is “the need to establish precise proportion values” (Graeber 2012: 413) in order to determine the right price for the value of the service provided. According to interlocutor E, for his sexual work he is charging between 150 and 300 denars. However, if the sexual worker happens to be in financial crisis he would accept amounts below 150 denars as well. Contrary to the interlocutor E, the interlocutor L was mentioning amounts in euros (150 to 200 euros). The age limit for the clients of the interlocutor E is between 15 and 50 years of age.

The interlocutors are usually asking for money for the services provided to their clients, which can be seen through their representation of the clients as sources of income. When the interlocutor L is providing his service, he is usually asking for money. Other compensations are unacceptable for him. *I usually ask for money. I don't do things like, for example, I'll give a phone or I'll give you this, I'll give you that... Cash is the king. **Cash rules**. Give me the money and I'll afterwards buy everything I need. We don't do barter or compensation things (VN850124, 2013).* This example from the interlocutor clearly confirms the fact that “money, especially in the form of precious metals, is just a convenient means of exchange or barter between individuals who hold private property in what they buy and sell” (Hann, Hart 2011: 95). This is also confirmed with the following example, when the clients are offering money to the sexual workers as compensation for the sexual service. According to the interlocutors from the Roma community, there are cases where individuals are offering money in exchange of sexual service, when the value of the sexual service is increasing, which is due to the need of the client to have sexual intercourse with the sexual worker that provides special service. This example was also referred to by our interlocutors when they were mentioning cases where their friends, Macedonian *gaytsi*, are coming to Shuto Orizaro to look for “men” for money. According to the interlocutors, there are also cases when the sexual worker are accepting *compensation* offered for the services they provide (food or medicine). In their words, *the compensation* can include things which are of existential importance for the sexual workers as well as things they consider as economic surpluses – “luxury”, such as telephone vouchers, drinks.

Clients

The sexual services are used by “men” – *clients, customers*. In great secrecy they give money *for benefits* to individuals who offer sexual services as “women”. When they agree on the services, the clients sometimes address the sexual workers as males or as females – this is usually upon the wish of the sexual worker who, in reality, has no issues with both identities. In the jargon of the male community, the men who are walking with individuals are called *buljàsi*, or pejoratively they are called: *fuckers of gays*. Therefore, the men avoid walking publicly or to have friendly relations in public.

A sexual worker can also have several clients simultaneously – this is usually the case with younger boys from the Roma community, *friends* in a company, who are coming to use services *as a group*. According to the boys using sexual worker services, this is a normal type of fun for their age. Many of the “men” interlocutors started to use services from the sexual workers in a way that, in the beginning, they are helped by their friends who had previous experience with that. Once the company of boys goes out in town, the boys first go for drinks and afterwards to the specific location – in one of the examples they mentioned apartment rented by the sexual workers offering sexual services and where they are spending time with their clients.

The complex sexual activity within the Roma sexual market-oriented system, instigated the individual to develop “various strategies (Hall 2007: 461) used by men who engage in sex for compensation, some ways that young gay men become involved in it, how they represent themselves and their activities, and some of the problems they face“. Hence, we agree that with such distribution of weight of the complex activity into multiple segments it is possible “to fill an important gap in our understanding of gay males who exchange sexual services for various forms of compensation by blurring the lines between ‘sex work’ unitarily conceived and more nuanced forms of compensated sex“ (Agustín, 2005, upon Hall 2007: 461), as it can be seen in the examples of the our interlocutors, between the *buljàshi* individuals (“*gaytsi*“) and their *boyfriends*, especially today when the definition overlaps with the definition of *client, customer* – that is: *boyfriend* sometimes also means *client*.

Conclusion

This paper is about Roma “women” working as sexual workers, in the local concept known as “both man and woman”, who have identified an opportunity for economic benefit. Carried by the idea that the “women” earn more in the sexual work, individuals are offering services “as women”. In the intercourses between the sexual worker and the *customers* or *clients* that are provided for “money” or other benefit, the sexual/gender identity of pleasure is transformed into identity of exchange – “sexual workers”, while the sexuality is acquiring economic form, so the *clients* are giving money *for benefit*. The interlocutors are usually doing the sexual work at a “closed” stage: commonly in hotels, apartments, cars or “out in the open/in nature”, but there are also others known as “public”, such as “women” working on “open” stage – on the streets.

Both in the narratives and in reality, the interlocutors experience themselves both as “sexual workers” and as *buljâshi* (“gaytsi”) individuals who are engaged in the sexual work as “girls”, “women”. They enter the sexual work usually when they are underage, always supported by more senior “sisters”. In the sexual work the interlocutors are developing different personal strategies united in the idea of creating a closed circle of permanent client from which the interlocutor will be getting stable monthly income which will enable them to live independently from their parents; to respect the rules for hygiene and discretion as mandatory for successful cooperation with the clients; to maintain the market aesthetics by keeping with the European and global fashion trends; and to be loyal to the closest sisters with whom they help each other in the sexual work.

References

- Agathangelou, Anna. 2004. *The Global Political Economy of Sex Desire, Violence, and Insecurity in Mediterranean Nation States*. PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.
- Agustín, L. M. 2005. „New Research Directions: The Cultural Study of Commercial Sex“. *Sexualities* 8 (5): 618–631.
- Boris, E., S. Gilmore, R. Parreñas. 2010. „Sexual Labors: Interdisciplinary Perspectives toward Sex as Work“. *Sexualities* 13 (2): 131–137.
- Cohen, Edward E. 2011. „A Banking Perspective“, Chapter: „Market economy – banking reality“. *Athenian Economy and Society*, Princeton University Press.

- Connell, R. W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Cornwall, Andrea, Nancy Lindisfarne (eds). 1994. *Dislocating Masculinity, Comparative Ethnographies*. Routledge, New York – London.
- Crvenkovska Risteska, Ines. 2017. „How to survive researching sexuality? – The others about my research“. Collection *Against All Odds: Ethnology and Anthropology between Theory and Praxis* (И покрај сè: Етнологијата и антропологијата помеѓу теоријата и практиката), Ljupcho S. Risteski, Ines Crvenkovska Risteska (eds.). Skopje: UKIM, FNSM, IEA. 113–129.
- Dalton, George. 1961. „Economic Theory and Primitive Society“. *American Anthropologist* 63: 1–25.
- Garber, Marjorie. 1992. *Vested Interests, Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*. Routledge, New York – London.
- Graeber, David. 2012. „On Social Currencies and Human Economies: Some Notes on the Violence of Equivalence“. *Social Anthropology* 20 (4): 411–428.
- Hall, T. M. 2007. „Rent-Boys, Barflies, and Kept Men: Men Involved in Sex with Men for Compensation in Prague“. *Sexualities* 10 (4): 457–472.
- Hann, Chris, Keith Hart. 2011. *Economic Anthropology. History, Ethnography, Critique*. Polity Press.
- Hastings, Donnan, Magowan Fiona. 2010. *The Anthropology of Sex*. BERG.
- Khan, Shivananda. 2001(1999). „Through a Window Darkly: Men Who Sell Sex to Men in India and Bangladesh“. *Men Who Sell Sex. International Perspectives on Male Prostitution and AIDS*. Aggleton Peter (ed.). 195–212. UCL Press Taylor & Francis Group.
- Kotiswaran, Prabha. 2011. *Dangerous Sex, Invisible Labor Sex Work and the Low in India*. Princeton University Press.
- Kulick, Don. 1998. *Travesti, Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*. Edited by Herdt Gilbert. University of Chicago Press.
- Laqueur, Thomas. 1990. *Making Sex, Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England.
- Loizos, Peter, Evthymios Papataxiarchis (eds.). 1991. *Contested Identities. Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Middelthon, Anne-Lise. 2002. „Being Anally Penetrated: Erotic Inhibitions, Improvizations and Transformations“. *Sexualities* 5 (2): 181–200.

- Nanda, Serena. 1986. 'The Hijras of India', in *Journal of Homosexuality* 11(3-4): 35-54.
- Parker, Richard, Peter Aggleton (eds.). 2007. *Culture, Society and Sexuality*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, New York – London.
- Polanyi, Karl. 2001(1944). *The Great Transformation, The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Beacon Press.
- Wikan, Unni. 1991. „Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India, by Serena Nanda“. *Journal of History of Sexuality* 1(4): 720–723.
- Zelizer, Viviana A. 2010. *Economics Lives, Chapter Title: 8. Money, Power, and Sex*. Princeton University Press.
- АИЕА. 2006/2007. Проект: Маџирање и ситуација заснована во заедницаиќа за адолесценци и што се под најголем ризик од ХИВ/СИДА/СПИ во Македонија, интервјуа со МСМ и АНСУ, ромска заедница.
- Жикиќ, Бојан. 2008. *Ризик и насилје: Антрополошко истражување сексуалној раѓа у Београду*, Српски генеалогски центар.
- Црвенковска-Ристеска, Инес. 2013. *Антрополошка истражувања на машката истополова сексуалност во секојдневјето – однесување и идентитетот*. Скопје: ИЕА, ПМФ, УКИМ.

