Violence in the city: exploring migration and sex work in Johannesburg

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17th October 2013
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Thank you to Marlise Richter
The African Centre for Migration & Society at Wits

An internationally engaged; Africa-oriented; and African-based research and teaching centre dedicated to shaping academic and policy debates on migration, development and social transformation

- Graduate degree programme with students from across Africa, North America, and Europe;
- Research in 12 African countries on issues related to migration, human rights, development, governance, and social change;
- Partnerships on 4 continents;
- Regional reference point for public and scholarly debate and policy formation.
Today

1. **Migration and sex work in Johannesburg**
   - An overview of “hidden spaces” (Vearey, 2010)
   - Marginalisation

2. **Mixed methods**
   - Research exploring impact of the 2010 World Cup on supply, demand and experiences of urban sex workers
   - Participatory photography project exploring lived experiences of migrant sex workers in Johannesburg

3. **Lived experiences of sex workers in Johannesburg**
   - Safety; violence; criminalisation; voice; invisibility

4. **Some conclusions and implications for urban design**
   - How to address safety and security for sex workers in the city?
1. Migration and sex work in Johannesburg

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“......migration is not a random individual choice. People who migrate are highly organised and travel well-worn paths.”

(Harcourt, 2007: 3)
Globally
– Approximately **214 million cross-border migrants** (around 3% of the world’s population) and **740 million internal migrants** globally.

South Africa
– Between 3 and 4% of the total population are cross-border migrants (around 2 million people).
– Internal and cross-border migration: different forms of migration and different reasons for migration are found to determine urbanisation experiences and relationships with the city.
Sex work in South Africa

- All aspects of sex work are criminalised in South Africa.

- Little sex work research has been conducted in South Africa.

- **Violence**: High levels of violence against male, female and transgender sex workers; violence (and fear of) against cross-border migrants.

- **Health Care**: Limited due to fear of HCW discrimination and disclosing profession - only one sex work-specific health clinic in South Africa; challenges experienced by cross-border migrants.

- **HIV risk**: FSWs: HIV prevalence between 45% - 69% in 1998
Urban space, migration & sex work

- Urban space, migration and sex work
  - Limited research in South Africa
  - Internal migration
  - Cross-border migration: regularisation, documentation, detention & deportation
  - Movement in search of improved livelihood opportunities

- Our research (2010) found that
  - 43.4% (n=971) were found to be cross-border migrants
  - 56.1% (n=1257) were internal migrants.
  - Only 11 sex workers or (0.5%) worked in the same province than they were born
Sex work, migration & urban health
considerations for urban planning

Structural violence
• Individual, social
• Urban health inequities
• Deprivation
• Migration status
• Social determinants of health

Legal frameworks
• Sex work as work
• Criminalisation perpetuates structural and direct violence
• Criminalisation has severe public health consequences

An urban health approach
• Public health: social justice
• Addressing inequity
• Social determinants of health
• Healthy urban governance
• Intersectoral action

Recommendations for action
• Urban design
• Address ‘causes of causes’
• Practitioners, policy makers, researchers, sex workers and sex worker advocacy groups
2. Mixed methods
A. Impact of the 2010 Soccer World Cup on Sex Work in South Africa

Consortium of researchers from Wits University (South Africa), Ghent university (Belgium), the Sex Worker Education & Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) and Sisonke Sex Worker Movement (South Africa)

Aims: To gather information on sex worker mobility, access to services, frequency of health care visits, interactions with healthcare providers and interaction with police.

A. World Cup research

- 3 cities and 4 research sites:
  - Cape Town
  - Johannesburg
    - Hillbrow
    - Sandton (added in Phase II and III)
  - Rustenburg

- 3 phases:
  - Pre-World Cup
  - During World Cup
  - Post-World Cup

- Sex workers and peer educators as fieldworkers

- Mixed-methods approach:
  - Longitudinal component: follow 60 sex workers for 4 months
    - Focus group discussions (FGDs) and daily diary
  - Cross-sectional:
    - Survey 200 sex workers per phase per research site

- Data gathered:
  - 2,260 surveys
  - 14 FGDs
  - 53 diaries
B. Visualising the city

_lived experiences of hidden urban populations_

- Designing cities that respond to the needs of diverse urban populations.

- Absence of the voices of marginalised, hidden, urban populations:
  - Sex workers; non-nationals; residents of informal housing

- “Participation”
  - Research, planning, governance
Working the City:
Experiences of Migrant Women in Inner-city Johannesburg

date: 06 October 2010
place: Photo Workshop Gallery
time: 18h00

This exhibition is the result of a participatory photography project with migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg in August 2010, as part of the Health and Migration Research Initiative of the Forced Migration Studies Programme at Wits in collaboration with the Market Photo Workshop.
LAND OF OPPORTUNITIES

LEITY

I came to the land of opportunities Johannesburg South Africa in 2006. Despite difficulties crossing the border illegally from Zimbabwe, life was hard in the city. I was alone with no job or source of income but I was fortunate to share a cottage with Zimbabweans.

It was hard to get a job because I did not have a work permit neither did I have a birth certificate. I had no choice but to create work for myself. As the saying goes, “A gift has got to do what a gift has got to do.”

Job hunting was not as easy as I had anticipated. Hillbrow was shabby and dirty. Many people moved to hunt for myself, to be sterile and to survive in the city.
I moved from Kaffrine to Johannesburg in 1985 to look for a job. I could not get employment so I started selling fruits and vegetables on the streets.

In 1998 I lost my husband and I also lost my stock and I went through a tough time. The situation forced me into sex work so that seemed to be the only way I could make some money to pay rent and look after my family.

In 1997 I tell, I was afraid to go to the clinic because I was afraid of being questioned about my sexual activities. This is when I heard about Dawn Care. They assured me that my clients were good as they treated us like older sex workers with respect. They taught us more about HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections.

The first story is about my relationship with Dawn Care. In the photographs I am telling a story about how I see Dawn Care. I love Dawn Care so many different ways. There are so many things. I see and do not think about Dawn Care. I feel the security of some other parts, the education, decentness and the charity. This is why I see Dawn Care is dirty, unsafe and there are so many unknown people.

I live in Johannesburg and it is a very difficult place to live because I have to pay for everything. It is also a dangerous place to live and I'm afraid especially at night. The people in this image are different, some are in a different way.

This poster is a result of a participatory photography project with regard women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg (August 2016), as part of the Health and Migration research initiative of the Forced Migration Studies Programme at Wits University in collaboration with the Market Photo Workshop.
**CONFIDENCE**

My first time in Johannesburg was a beautiful experience. I noticed a coke bottle on top of a shop at the corner of Akin and Phola Streets, which was my first stop in Hillbrow. During a visit to one of my friend’s place at the High-Rise building, the same place where I work for a factory, there was talk by the workers about the history and having fun as an art work form of transforming. It was high on drugs.

One of my dreams is to buy my own salon in Hillbrow. At the moment I am a beauty therapist, operating in Pretoria Street.

I do not like Hillbrow because there are some unhealthy and dirty streets. I also do not find it safe to be at Hillbrow. I think about workers who earn less to buy food from. Life in Hillbrow is good to go church every Sunday after which go out for a drink at the top. I also go to the shops to do some shopping. I think it must have been improved and maintained more people will have a proper place to live. I have the fact that the place I’m staying is too dirty and it needs to be fixed!

Johannesburg is a good place as I have learned lots of things, and made some friends. I have participated in educational projects, like peer education, educating my friends about taking care of themselves and what they can do to live a healthy life.

**CAPTIONS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**

On my first visit to Johannesburg, I first sighted me off at the Coca-Cola building. Every time I pass. I am always fascinated by the Coca-Cola building and the Coca-Cola signs.

The woman who is seated is her family. She had two kids, one is working, and other one is studying. The Coca-Cola factory is on the left.

A woman is walking to the main entrance, where I am, to open doors. She looks at me and smiles. The Coca-Cola factory is on the left.

The Coca-Cola factory is on the left.
3. Lived experiences
I share my flat with ten people so I put my food in my bedroom because it is safe.
High Point building reminds me of a client who wanted to kill me because he was high on drugs.
These are ARVs that I take to improve my CD4 count as well as lowering the viral load that weaken the immune system. I've been taking ARVs for six months now and there has been great improvement in my health.
Memories: This is a place, which brings alot of bad memories to me. I was passing by this place near Faraday and client approached me and I decided to go with him. He later he tried to robe me on the corner just after a five minutes walk. Two street boys helped me by beating the guy.
Before I was raped in 1998, the guy beat me up. I chose to recreate the scene in this picture as a way of trying to highlight the abuses that sex workers go through as they work to fend for themselves and provide for their families.
Police Contact

- 25% (n=491) of all respondents had a negative experience with the police in the preceding month
- 1.2% (n=29) of all respondents had a positive experience

- **Negative experiences**
  - 9% (n=170) of respondents had been arrested in the month preceding the survey
  - 5% (n=91) were sexually or physically assaulted by the police in the month preceding the survey
  - 2.4% (n=47) were given a warning or threatened by a member of the police force.
“The police officers took my money, they put me in [the police car] and drove around with me, on the way they threw me out of the moving car, my leg got injured and I went to the hospital [.....]

I was afraid to open a case because our job is not legal, up till now I still have problems with my legs”

Female sex worker, Johannesburg
3. Some conclusions and implications for urban design
What is needed to address safety and security for sex workers in the city?

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<th>Training</th>
<th>Visual &amp; participatory methodologies</th>
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<td>• undergraduate, postgraduate, continuous professional development</td>
<td>• valuable research and (community, government, academic, civil society) engagement tools.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• plural audiences, plural narratives</td>
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<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>• collectively develop integrated responses:</td>
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<td>• creative engagement</td>
<td>• (Un)safe spaces</td>
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<td>• sex workers - researchers – civil society – planners – national</td>
<td>• (In)visibility</td>
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<td>government - municipal authorities - law enforcement</td>
<td>• (De)criminalisation</td>
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http://workingthecity.wordpress.com/

WORKING THE CITY: EXPERIENCES OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN INNER-CITY JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

Participatory Photo Project with Migrant Women Sex Workers

ABOUT AFRICAN CENTRE FOR MIGRATION & SOCIETY (ACMS) SISONKE SEX WORKER MOVEMENT MARKET PHOTO WORKSHOP (MPW)

MEDIA FOR PUBLICATIONS

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Acknowledgements

- All photographers, sex worker participants and fieldworkers

- ACMS staff and students: Elsa Oliveira, Marlise Richter, Lorena Nunez, Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon, Ingrid Palmary, Loren Landau, Khangelani Moyo

- Atlantic Philanthropies
- Lawyers for Human Rights & Ford Foundation
- UNFPA
- Members of the Johannesburg Migrant Health Forum
- Sisonke Sex Worker Movement
- SWEAT
- Market Photo Workshop
- WRHI

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