

University of the Witwatersrand

Fictional Representation of Migrant Women Involved in Sex Work in Inner-City Johannesburg: How Does Self-Representation Compare?

MA Research Report
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A research report submitted to the Faculty of the Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Forced Migration Studies).

Declaration

This work is submitted for the Masters Degree in Forced Migration Studies, in the School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree in any other university.



Agnieszka Flak

February 15, 2011

Acknowledgments

A number of people have been crucial in making this research happen.

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Key Terms and Acronyms

For the purpose of this research, I have chosen the following definitions for the terminology I use. For a more detailed discussion see my methodology section.

Fiction: Any works that involve a fictional representation of migration. These could take the form of literature, films, music, and drama or any other form of artistic representation. Whenever I refer to fiction without specifying one, I will have the general group in mind.

Gender: The social and cultural construction of disparities between sexes.

Identity: A set of rules or characteristics which a person identifies with (Fearon, 1999).

Migration: Refers to migration in its broadest sense, including all internal and transnational movements.

Prostitute: A person who exchanges sex for money, but does not regard it as work.

Representation: An interpretation of one's identity, background and personal trajectories, and communication thereof either by oneself or by others (Breakwell, 1993).

Sex Worker: I use "sex worker" as my preferred definition of someone soliciting money for sex because it puts sex on an equal level with work and allows those engaged in the profession a level of agency and dignity. I acknowledge, however, that there are other names – such as "prostitute", "villain" or "wicked woman" – which are referred to interchangeably with "sex worker". I will refer to those when used by others as I see them as an integral part of how migrant women involved in sex work create their own identity and others do it for them.

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
RHRU	Reproductive Health & HIV Research Unit
SWEAT	Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce
STD	Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Abstract

Migration has been represented in a variety of ways, whether within academia, the policy world, the artistic arena or the general public domain. Due to its multi-disciplinary nature, migration is represented in the research/academic space using various or a combination of different analytical and empirical research tools. Equally, the arts have used a multitude of methods – be it visual, audio or performance tools – to represent migration, those involved within it and the politics and society surrounding it.

This study shows how each representation is just one way of telling the migration story. I use the example of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg because the four characteristics in the women's lives – migration, gender, sex work and urban space – play a key role in identity formation and the representation thereof. Using the contradictions and paradoxes in the way those women portray themselves and how that compares with representations by others, my findings show how looking at different forms of representation – be it primary research or fiction – could complement the picture and allow for a more nuanced understanding of the migrant and sex worker experience.

It is not my goal to argue that fictional forms of representation can be a substitute for academic or policy work on migration. I rather argue for the inclusion of fictional works in the study of migration. I suggest researchers, policy makers and public alike see it as yet another 'proper' or 'valid' representation of migration knowledge, able to offer a different point of view on the migration phenomena, in the position to challenge accepted norms and as a means to inform and engage at a different cognitive and emotional level.

Dedication

I dedicate this report to my mother.

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1. Introduction & Research Question

1.1 Introduction

Many South Africans and migrants living in South Africa who have watched the movie *District 9* (2009) were both appalled and amazed by the way the film depicted Johannesburg, its governance and the migrants living in the townships (Khalil, 2010; Moses et al, 2010; Pithouse, 2009). The Nigerian government went as far as asking its cinemas to stop showing the science fiction film which it said denigrated the country's image by representing Nigerians as cannibals, criminals and sex workers (BBC, 2010). Others have praised the movie for successfully depicting the reality of South Africa's migration politics, both now and in the apartheid era, which the film alludes to (Gunkel & Konig, 2010; Pithouse, 2009). Director Neill Blomkamp made a conscious decision to 'represent' South Africans and migrants in a particular way. That made me wonder: Why? Does it matter? Should the film and other fictional work be included in the way we research migration? Is it a valid representation of how migrants perceive themselves?

Migration is an old phenomenon and has been represented in a variety of ways, whether within academia, the policy world, the artistic arena or the general public domain. Due to its multi-disciplinary nature, migration research has been approached from different perspectives and by using various or a combination of different analytical and empirical research tools (Greenwood et al, 1991; Hammar, 1989). Equally, the arts have used a multitude of methods – be it visual, audio or performance tools – to portray migration, those involved within it and the politics and society surrounding it.

The complexity of the migration discourse makes it an interesting subject: migration is about movement and has a spatial dimension (Greenwood et al, 1991; Landau, 2006; Vearey, 2010); it is a socio-political phenomenon with distinct social, economic and political consequences for both the migrants and their host communities (Turton, 2003; Castles & Miller, 2003; Adepoju, 2006). Migration is not limited to one particular region of the world or a specific community but its presence in every corner of the planet also reflects the complexity and challenge of trying to research, understand and ultimately represent such a complex and heterogeneous field (Hammar, 1989; Martin, 2001; Bakewell, 2009).

The fluid nature of the migration process, where different social structures, identities and cultural contexts overlap, feed into and reflect from each other, makes it an interesting topic to use to analyse the strength and validity of different types of representation. Migration is about the acquisition of a new identity, re-negotiation of rights and social status in a new setting (Sigel,

2001; Polzer; 2008). Migrants “lead dual lives, socially and economically” (Adepoju, 2006:38). Gender has been a key element in defining identity and power structures within societies, and in the context of migration those roles have, on occasions, been both challenged and reversed (Adepoju, 2006, Palmary, 2005). Urban spaces, the destination for a great number of migrants, and their fluid dynamics frame the backdrop against which both the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ are constructed (Landau & Monson, 2008; Lalli, 1992, Vearey, 2010). Each of these factors helps form representation; each needs to be considered for a comprehensive representation of the migration experience. That complexity raises the question whether academia and policy papers alone can do it justice. Are they the only valid representation of how migrants see and ultimately represent themselves?

Each representation of migrants is one way of telling the migration story. Migrants choose to represent themselves in a way they want – consciously or not – others to perceive them. Migration scholars target their work, opinions and findings to selective audiences to inform or even impact public opinion and policy. Their representation is only one way of looking at migration; it is, inevitably, their own subjective understanding of how migration works (Bal & Boheemenl 1984). This is not to discredit any of their work. On the contrary, it is to emphasise that theirs is just one point of view on the theory or ‘reality’ of migration, and that looking at other forms of representation would possibly complement the picture and allow for a more nuanced understanding of the migration experience.

It is not my goal to argue that fictional forms of representation can be a substitute for academic or policy work on migration. By conducting the research outlined below, I rather argue for the inclusion of fictional works in the study of migration. I would like for researchers, policy makers and the public alike to be able to see it as yet another ‘proper’ or ‘valid’ representation of migration knowledge, able to offer a different point of view on the migration phenomena, in the position to challenge accepted norms and as a means to inform and engage at a different cognitive and emotional level.

To do so, I have used the example of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg and compared their self-representation with the fictional representation created by others, be it authors, film directors or playwrights. I have drawn parallels and examined the differences between the two types of representation to understand if and how they complement each other. My hope is that this research will add to the debate and academic literature on self-representation of migrant women involved in sex work and their portrayal by others in fiction. The study has further allowed me to analyse the choices made and tools used to create each type of representation and to examine the effectiveness of each.

1.2 Research Question & Objectives

1.2.1 The Research Question

How do migrant women in Johannesburg represent their involvement in sex work and how does that compare with representation of migrant sex workers in Johannesburg-based fiction?

1.2.2 The Objectives

My study involved two forms of data collection and analysis that were then compared:

1. Self-representation:

- To explore how migrant women involved in sex work represent themselves in the context of urban space in inner-city Johannesburg; and
- To understand ways in which migrant women involved in sex work construct their identity in the context of urban space

2. Representation by others:

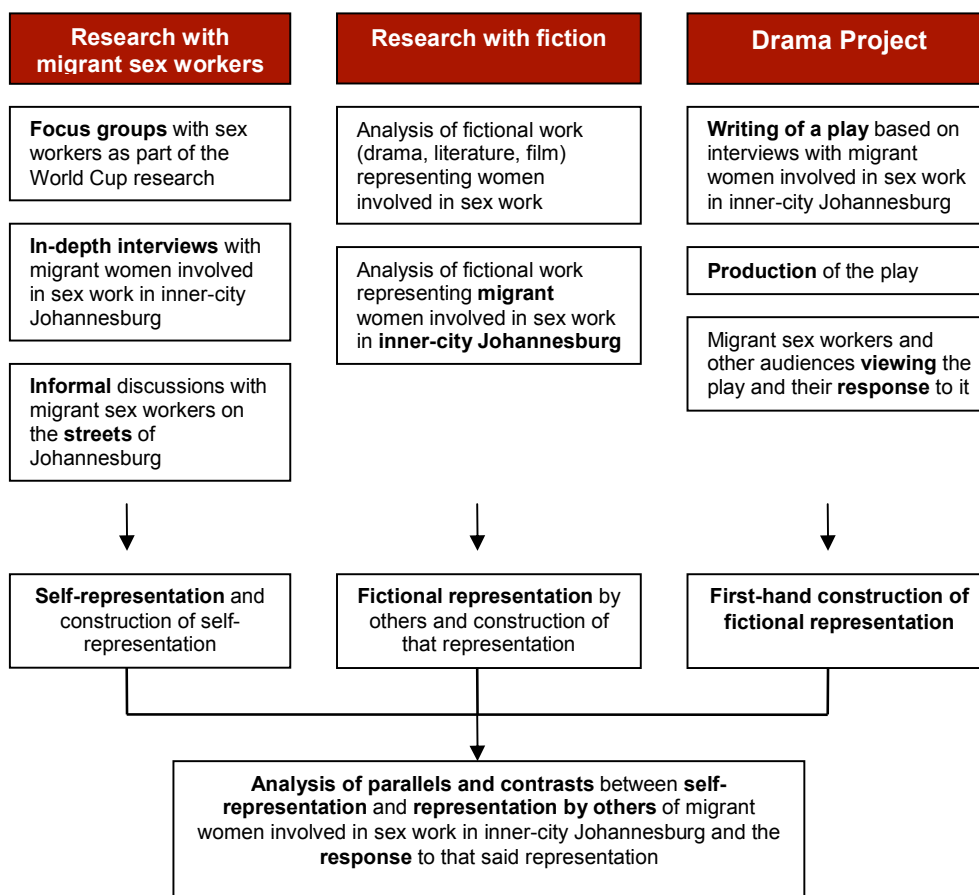
- To explore representation of migrant women involved in sex work in fiction depicting inner-city Johannesburg, and
- To understand ways in which fiction constructs representation of migrant women involved in sex work in Johannesburg-based works

3. Comparison:

- To analyse parallels and contrasts between the self-representation and representation by others of migrant women involved in sex work in the urban context of inner-city Johannesburg

1.2.3 Research Outline

My research included several components. These involved working with migrant sex workers directly, analysing their representation in fiction and a first-hand experiment of translating the findings of my primary research with the women into a stage production. The different components fit into the project as shown in the following graphic:



Graphic 1: Research Outline

As this research involved work with human objects, I submitted my project to the ethics committee for review, with an approval granted in September 2010, protocol number H100831¹.

1.3 Rationale

Nearly all literature on identity theory focuses on the creation of self without taking the reconstruction of that same identity or representation by others into account (Howarth, 2002). Howarth argues that “identities are always constructed through and against representation” and have to feed into each other to portray the complexity of real-life identities (Howarth, 2002:20). Similarly, research in identity formation is very discipline-specific, with scholars shying away from collaborating with each other (Sigel, 2001). This is the gap I would like my research to help fill.

¹ For the ethics certificate, see the appendix section.

I focus on migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg because each characteristic that define that group – migration, gender, sex work and urban space – plays a key role in identity formation and the representation thereof (Sigel, 2001; Polzer, 2008; Adepoju, 2006; Palmary, 2005; Ghosh, 2003; Sanders, 2005; Riccio, 2005; Vearey, 2010; Kerkin, 2004). My research centres on Johannesburg's inner-city because it allowed me to conduct field work, collect primary data and execute the comparative study between primary and secondary research I had in mind. Equally, Johannesburg's inner-city is home to a large migrant population (Leggett, 2003; Landau, 2006), with a number of them involved in the local sex industry (Richter, 2010).

Yet another argument for my choice to engage with female migrants involved in sex work in Johannesburg is the scarcity of research on the subject of self and re-presentation of sex workers and migrant sex workers in particular (Riccio, 2005; Hubbard, 1999). There is a rising number of novels, films and plays that have sought to engage with the concept of migrant sex workers in the arts arena. Equally, there is an increasing number of fictional works which explore the themes of sexuality, identity and stigma in the context of transnational movements, changing identities and challenges to established norms and perceptions. Some examples include Kleinboer's *Midnight Missionary* (2006), Ken Bugul's *The Abandoned Baobab* (2008), Paul Grootboom's *Foreplay* (2009) (*for a list, see methods section*). Yet research that would pull and compare the individual works, identify similarities or disparities, compare with the self-representation of sex workers in the field is scarce.

In this study, I look at how these women see and choose to represent themselves and how that identity construction takes place. I compare the findings with the way the same group of women is represented in works of fiction, be it literature, drama or film. I define the framework under which each representation happens and examine how 'self' and 'other' feed into each other. Ultimately, I show whether they reflect, contradict or complement each other.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the following section, I discuss in more detail the discourse on migration identity and representation within which I place my research. The review begins with a distinction between identity and representation. It further includes a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of scientific representation of the migration theme and how it compares or differs from fictional accounts. It then places the discourse on migration representation within the specific arena of an African urban setting and the sex work industry in particular to illustrate how both offer a valid and interesting context for the study of migrant representation.

As the literature review illustrates, migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg provide a very specific research base for a study on self-representation and fictional representation by others because of the complexity created by their migration background and the line of work in which they are presently involved. The geographic and social setting of urban Africa equally serves as an interesting backdrop against which to measure or research those said experiences.

The overview will also show, however, the limitations of the literature available on the subject which has been dominated by works from the West. Sex work research has been more concerned with the argument of sex worker rights than (self)-representation. Equally, any research on migrant sex worker representation has focused on one line of study only e.g. either academic or artistic but rarely both. The comparison between the two fields has been widely ignored by scholars – a gap which I hope this study will help address.

2.2 Discourses, Debates in Migration Identity & Representation

2.2.1 Identity & Representation

The themes of identity and representation are two main concepts underlying this research and it is important to make a clear distinction between the two. Identity has been defined as “either a social category, defined by membership rules and allegedly characteristic attributes or expected behaviours, or a socially distinguishing feature that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential” (Fearon, 1999:36). Authors point to different types of identities, be it personal, group and other social identities, which overlap and influence each other (Breakwell, 1993; Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000; Fearon, 1999). Timotijevic and Breakwell emphasise an individual's agency in the creation of identities, saying that people are “self-

constructors: renovating, replacing and removing elements of identity as necessary" (Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000:355).

A migration story challenges that concept of identity, forcing an individual to reassess or reconstruct his/her identity based on the new social context s/he is confronted with. Malkki (1992:37) argues that "identity is always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield, a fund of memories". This is not to say that a geographical movement always has to threaten an identity; it does so if the new social context is "so different from their original that the bases for continuity, distinctiveness, self-esteem or self-efficacy become unstable or, in the extreme, disappear" (Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000:358). Representation, in contrast, is an interpretation and communication of those said identities, either by the persons themselves or by others (Breakwell, 1993).

Identity and representation are closely interlinked. The self does not exist without the other. As Howarth (2002:20) puts it, "identities are always constructed through and against representation" and have to feed into each other to portray the complexity of real-life identities. Identity and representation influence each other and the relationship can be either causal or non-causal (Breakwell, 1993). Representation can have a real and immediate impact on how a person or a group are perceived and treated within a society as representation of a population group is closely linked with the way the group perceives and represents itself. As Dyer put it, "representations delimit and enable what people can be in any given society" (Dyer, 1993:3). Representations create expectations, both amongst the migrants themselves and their local community in particular (Riccio, 2005); they can shape individual memories and those of a cultural group (Nunning, 2009; Viljoen, 2004). Howarth's example of a migrant community in London's Brixton suburb showed how identities are contested through others' representations and can have a negative impact on a group's perception of self (Howarth, 2002). The contrary can happen if a representation depicts migrants in a better light than that in which they see themselves.

2.2.2 Narrative Authority

Among migration scholars there is often an underlying assumption of what is considered as 'valid' knowledge or valid representation of that knowledge (Lewis et al, 2008). Academics go to great lengths to defend the methodologies they use in their research to prove that what they intend to study will result in a valid documentation of the subject under discussion (Voutira & Dona, 2007). The academic approach is still largely accepted as the dominant form of representation within the

migration field. As such, policy papers and academic journals become a “benchmark against which other forms of knowledge representation are measured” (Lewis et al, 2008:199).

Some authors dispute that assumption, especially given that in the past, oral narratives, poems and plays were both the accepted and respected forms of knowledge representation and migrants’ political advocacy (Lewis et al, 2008). Some argue that social science draws its authority “from its perceived aesthetic value rather than the use of putatively factual data or objective theory” (Lewis et al., 2008:200). They argue that its interpretation is rhetoric in nature, one-dimensional and that it reduces the message to the bare minimum to preformed structures (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Battersby, 2006), silencing the subjects themselves e.g. migrants (Malkki, 1996; West, 1993).

It is also difficult to make a valid distinction between scholars and fictional authors, including filmmakers, writers and playwrights, when the sources for their work are often the same. Both may ground their research or representation in an analysis of the same group; some authors of fiction base their narratives on academic research (Lewis et al, 2008); others, like the film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), which is a vivid portrayal of the genocide in the eastern African country, are a fictional representation of a true story, seeking to stay as close as possible to the historical material, yet applying fictional methods to shock, engage, convince, and make believe (Nzabatsinda, 2005). Equally, there are fictional texts, films and other artistic forms of representation which have been used as the subject for scholarly research on migration and inspired a debate which scholars before failed to identify within the realms of academic research (Makrenoglou, 2002; Anagnostou, 2003; Nzabatsinda, 2005; Sadat, 2004; Gunkel & Konig, 2010; Pithouse, 2010).

2.2.3 Representation & Truth

The main criticism of fictional work on migration scholars put forward is that it is removed from truth and that its fictional portrayal is an invention of the author rather than being based on facts (Rabinovitz, 1977). But as others point out, there is no complete truth in any form of representation, be it fiction, academia or other; they are all misleading (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Gaillard & Weinberger, 1984; Bal & Boheemen, 1984; Viljoen, 2004). Neither is there an objective representation (Bal & Boheemen, 1984). As Battersby put it, the “whole truth is, unfortunately, a chaotic mess of stuff belonging to a massive number of incompatible categories that simply cannot be brought under the control of a single discursive taskmaster” (Battersby, 2006:43). The truth is thus too complex to be captured by one representation only. As an audience, we will never be able to perceive the truth, as the migrant self represents himself in the way he would like to be perceived and also as a reflection to the representation of himself by others (Howarth, 2002;

Vearey, 2010; Landau & Monson, 2008). As Dyer put it, “reality is always more extensive and complicated than any system of representation can possibly comprehend” (Dyer, 1993:2)

It would be wrong, however, to assume that representation misses the truth altogether. Rather, each mode of representation contains a partial truth, a selective or incomplete section of what’s real (Dyer, 1993; Viljoen, 2004). Memory, which a great portion of migration research relies on, is a combination of reality and fiction. As Nunning put it, “memories have to be aided by invention or they could not be formulated at all”; while they have roots in social forms, narratives and relations, they are also open to “revision and manipulation” (Nunning, 2009:1). The reliance on memories is particularly pertinent when studying migration, where a person’s movement is often an ongoing process, which in turn leads memories to become a constant re-evaluation and reconstruction of what happened in the past. But although the inconsistency of remembered oral testimonies has raised methodological concerns among scholars, fiction authors argue that these can serve as a further indication of the complexities of the migrant experience and help understand the subjective meanings of historical experiences and how they change over time (Thomson, 1999; Viljoen, 2004). Similarly, the use of metaphors, emphases, silences and patterns – much used tools in fictional representation as well as in oral history – can be particularly revealing about the intricacies of a migrant’s experience (Thomson, 1999).

While fiction may not supply replicable or generalisable data in the scientific sense (Landau and Jacobsen, 2005), it does provide a valid picture or representation of that specific reality (Lewis et al, 2008; Viljoen, 2004). Fiction can be a way to ease our access to the truth or the real (Bal & Boheemen, 1984); as Gaillard and Weinberger put it, fiction expresses something about reality; it does not provide an “escape from reality” but rather provides “a path to that very reality” (Gaillard & Weinberger, 1984:759). To be able to call a representation misleading, one would need to actively reflect on it, which only becomes possible when one is confronted with conflicting or alternative forms of representations. Most of the time, one trusts – both in the case of fiction and of scholarly articles – that the representation one faces is ‘reality’ or close enough to it. As much as critical reading in academia requires a profound knowledge of the subject matter, the ability to question fiction also requires alternatives against which the present representation can be questioned (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999); if, on the other hand, the audience becomes susceptible to the strategies of representation or simply agrees with the image presented, then that representation becomes a temporary reality or truth (Bal & Boheemen, 1984).

An interesting example in the debate on truth in migration fiction is the film *Hotel Rwanda*, which is based on a true story, but whose strength lies in the form of its fictional representation. As Nzabatsinda argues, the film manages to outdo other non-fictional portrayals of the events by

“giving a metaphoric structure to what occurred in 1994” (Nzabatsinda, 2005). None of the actors in the film are actually Rwandan; neither has the film been shot in Rwanda itself. While the film does not claim to be a truthful representation of the events, nor does it include actual survivors and their testimonies to prove its point, it achieves an effective balance between fiction and reference to historical facts that make it credible and engaging at the same time.

2.2.4 Knowledge & Representation

Both fiction and academia seek to transmit knowledge on migration, to present an aspect of the migrant experience they deem worthy of attention. According to Davis et al, knowledge representation is a substitute, a set of ontological commitments in answer to how one should view the world, a theory of intelligent reasoning, a medium for organizing information, and a means to express things about the world (Davis et al, 1993). Representation is a way of seeking to simplify reality; it is a process of communication (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Bal & Boheemen, 1984; Viljoen, 2004). Representation serves as a translation of the ‘real’ – a selective vision of what is out there. The representation tools applied serve as a mediator between the subject and the recipient’s understanding, and are necessary for the audience to be able to access a particular reality (Gaillard & Weinberger, 1984). Representation is a cultural model through which we “perceive, interpret and describe reality” (Amossy & Heidingsfeld, 1984:689).

Representation is context-specific, and uses codes and conventions available in a given space and time (Dyer, 1993; Bauer & Gaskell, 1999). The context – be it politics, history or culture – helps form an identity and its representation (Kerkin, 2004) and so does space (Landau, 2006; Viljoen, 2004). Spaces define an identity as much as (self) representation by their residents helps define public spaces (Vearey, 2010). Migrant identity is linked to broader social and political changes, and shifting representations seek to portray that fluidity (Riccio, 2005). Any analysis of the image portrayed needs to be conducted against those cultural and political norms (Kraus, 2006); it needs to include the totality, construction and method, but also context in which the representation has been constructed and in which it will be viewed; it needs to include not only the ‘who’ constructs and ‘for whom’, but also who is excluded from such a framework (Lewis et al, 2008; Bauer & Gaskell, 1999).

There are disagreements among scholars as to which form of representation – be it the more iconic nature of fiction or the more symbolic one in argumentative discourse – is more complete or more representative of the migrants’ experiences (Bal & Boheemen, 1984). Some argue that fiction is too simplistic and that it objectifies migrants, ignoring their historical, cultural and political baggage (Wright, 2000). They say that its representation is based on stereotypes and a preconceived notion of what is the real (Amossy & Hedingsfeld, 1984). Similar criticism of seeing

migrants as objects, a tabula rasa has been connected with academic work as well (De Haan, 1999; Hovil, 2007). Others say that it is the use of fiction that makes it possible to reproduce the various nuances of a migrant experience and become a key testimony of societies (Lewis et al, 2008; Makrenoglou, 2002; Anagnostou, 2003; Nzabatsinda, 2005; Sadat, 2004; Gunkel & Konig, 2010). They argue that it is the subjective creations by ordinary people rather than scholarly articles, which strive – I would argue in vain – to reach objectivity, that become rich sources of migrant identity and migrant discourse (Riccio, 2005). Yet others argue that academia is too limited; that it constrains researchers within predefined structures and methodologies; that it asks researchers to reduce their findings to fit within a confined space of academic journals, leaving little space for creativity, depth and the voice of the migrant themselves (West, 1993). In contrast, fiction gives an author the freedom to fabricate, to carefully craft his characters, and also to produce an “ideal type” of social phenomenon (Lewis et al, 2008:205).

It is the combination of academia and fiction that promises to offer a more comprehensive picture of migration given the fact that the relevance of representation lies more in the content rather than in its form (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Lewis et al, 2008). The combination not only allows for the presentation of the various perspectives on migration, but also gives a chance to examine the contradictions and similarities, it gives authors an opportunity to inspire each other, and to address both the core and peripheral elements of each representation form to create a more balanced picture (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Lewis et al, 2008; Sadat, 2004; Gunkel & Konig, 2010).

Migration is a multidisciplinary field which has ignited interest from scholars from fields as diverse as social science, religion, health, architecture and linguistics. The multi-dimensional nature of the migration discourse also needs to be reflected in the way it is represented, not just in the context, but also via the tools and methods used to do so (Madsen & van Naerssen, 2003; Riccio, 2005; Kraus, 2006).

As O'Neill put it,

“the role of the sociologist and artist as interpreters producing knowledge through interdisciplinary phenomenological research and artistic re-presentations of lived experience can help to counter identity thinking, make critical interventions, and help us to get in touch with our social worlds in ways which demand critical reflection through participatory methodologies through what may be called a politics of inclusion” (O'Neill, 2008:20).

The argument for the combination of various representational tools to depict migration should also be analysed against the background of an ever more blurring division between author and

the person at the receiving end of the representation. The introduction of social media and other multimedia tools has created a space where the audience is no longer a passive receiver but an active collaborator in creating social realities, by contributing via blogs, online forum and other forms of social media. There is little space for that engagement within scholarly research and its prescribed format. Even scholars and policy makers have sought to use visual, audio and interactive stimuli to engage with their recipients. International organizations such as the World Bank or the United Nations have long opted to make use of storytelling methodologies, video elements, and personal accounts to broaden knowledge beyond academic formula (Lewis et al, 2008).

2.2.5 Tools & Audiences

Social science and fiction differ in the tools they apply to create representations. Scholarly research is often bound by qualitative and quantitative methodologies which in itself have led to an in-depth debate about the merits of each (Voutira & Dona, 2007; Landau & Jacobsen, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The reader of scholarly research typically remains outside; academia provides information, guides, comes to conclusions and gives recommendation, but does not necessarily seek to involve the reader in the construction of that said representation. That is different in fiction where it is left up to the reader, the listener, the viewer to help interpret the portrayed images (Benjamin, 1992; Viljoen, 2004).

To analyze the merits of representation in the field of migration one also needs to consider the impact that knowledge creation is seeking to achieve as it shapes the way that representation is constructed. Scholarly research on migration tries to analyze the causes and effects of the phenomenon, it analyses the responses or the lack thereof (Voutira & Dona, 2007); research can be policy-targeted or policy-relevant or neither; it seeks to provide facts and numbers, analysis and insight (Ragin, 1994). Researchers are likely to draft their conclusions in a way that would result in a policy response they advocate (Lewis et al, 2008); papers are geared at fellow academics, politicians, international actors and policy makers and written in a way that would seek to prompt a reaction of high-level individuals or groups, while the voice of the migrant themselves often remains silent (Malkki, 1996; West, 1993).

A representation gives us tools and references to be able to discuss an issue, engage with it, communicate it via the means provided. If the representation itself is inaccessible to some due to its complexity of language and structure or adopted form of representation, the authors may miss out on a large audience for the message they are trying to bring across. That as simplifying or translating the message through more accessible media could be done without much sacrifice to the meaning itself (Davis et al, 1993; Lewis et al, 2008).

Fiction, on the other hand, is trying to create empathy, engage its reader/viewer/listener in a way that would make him an active participant in the representation process. It can provide insight into migration processes that are often de-personalised within academia and still do so without compromising the complexity of the issues at hand (Lewis et al, 2008; Viljoen, 2004; Bal & Boheemen, 1984). Fiction can offer a genuinely good story and it can be essential in attracting the interest and engagement the migration scholars ultimately have in mind. It is also able to reach much larger audiences than scholarly articles and enjoys the benefit of being more influential in shaping public knowledge or raising awareness of migration issues (Lewis et al, 2008). The film *Avatar* (2009), which serves as a metaphor of forced migration as a result of people's quest for natural resources, was a box office hit from the first day it opened, reaching out to millions of viewers worldwide. In a separate example, Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* (2003) is considered to have contributed more to the public's better understanding of the daily life in Afghanistan than any social research or advocacy report has managed to do in the past (Sadat, 2004; Lewis et al, 2008).

It is in the context of being able to reach out to a bigger audience that fictional representations can play a bigger role than academia as the general public is more likely to be aware of images portrayed in films, music and literatures than those represented in scholarly and policy research. In a world where people are constantly exposed to images in the form of advertising, television and others, they find themselves in an ongoing process of identity re-construction whereby they seek to define their perceptions of migration and their role within it.

While the perception of fiction nowadays centres on the idea of entertainment, its role historically has always been to convey a message as well (Lewis et al, 2008; Ludl, 2008). Fiction can be used as a powerful tool to raise awareness amongst a large number of people; it can evoke empathy and lead to political action as a result of it, both on part of the migrants and their host communities (Ludl, 2008; Gunkel & Konig, 2010; Sadat, 2004). *District 9* is just one example of how a film can become "a dream of the present illuminating it with more power than the ordinary categories through which we see the world" (Pithouse, 2010:1)

Fictional representations can also mobilize and lead to political action both by the migrants and the audience at their receiving end. In her example of migrants in Senegal, Ludl shows how migrants in the western African country have used rap and theatre to change the local population's perception of migrants and ultimately led to changes within society and politics (Ludl, 2008). No fictional representation ever attempts to offer a comprehensive depiction of migration, an image in its totality; not that it would be possible. Authors argue that it is more a means to

lending the silent a voice and a way to contest and balance official stories. In accounts relating to forced migration, genocides and wars, fictional representation is also driven by a desire to use that emotional engagement of fiction to “contribute to mourning, emotional recovery, and reconciliation” (Robben, 2009:317; see also Nzabatsinda, 2005; Sadat, 2004; Gunkel & Konig, 2010).

Fiction, more than a scholarly journal or policy paper, tends to provoke; it touches the reader on an emotional level and seeks to invoke empathy; it asks the recipient to internalize the message; to become part of its construction (Lewis et al, 2008; Bal & Boheemen, 1984). Unlike a scholar who often directs his research at a specific audience and with a concrete purpose in mind, a fiction author can rarely predict how an audience is going to react to his representation, especially as each person, each community and each culture will internalize and analyse the portrayed message within particular cultural and historical norms (Dyer, 1993; Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Riccio, 2005). The independent film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002), which depicts the trial of a Greek-American woman with strong family ties in trying to marry an American man, generated widespread debate about the reality of intra-ethnic marriages in the United States and ethnic ties within the country’s migrant communities (Anagnostou, 2003). The popularity of the film, and a media debate over ethnic success and assimilation in the American diaspora that followed, even led to the creation of a television series that explored ties and memories within the country’s ethnic communities (Anagnostou, 2003). This is just one example of how fiction sparked further research and how it highlighted a characteristic of the American migrant communities not under much discussion thus far. Yet more than anything this example shows how it was the reaction to the movie, its vast popularity across the United States and abroad, that inspired further analysis of that specific aspect of U.S. migration. If scholars do not have access to that immediate response, if what they write remains within academic or selected circles, then they miss out on an opportunity to gain further insight on a topic and miss out on possible directions for further research.

This clearly shows that there is a role for fiction in the migration discourse. The overwhelming and often surprising reach of fictional representation, however, also begs the question whether there is an intrinsic responsibility that comes with that methodology which its authors need to be aware of. While fiction can spark a debate on migration and issues related to it, and as much as it can help audiences engage with topics that otherwise get easily overlooked if only discussed at government’s top levels or within academic circles, recipients of the messages may not always be prepared for how to critically engage with signals that fiction sends out. *District 9* sparked resentment among the Nigerian community; the film also reignited anti-foreigner resentment in a country still battling with the remnants of its divided past and recent xenophobic violence (Gunkel

& Konig, 2010; Khalil, 2010; Moses et al, 2010; Pithouse, 2009). When Hugh Masekela, one of South Africa's top musicians, featured in *Songs of Migration* (2010), a show focusing on the plight of migrant workers coming to Johannesburg, some audience members I spoke to immediately following the show questioned whether the all-negative portrayal of the migration story was the right choice. They wondered if Masekela's popularity should have been used to advocate a more positive outlook on migration dynamics in the country.

Reactions to that particular show were mixed. Some praised its musical and dramatic professionalism (Davis, 2010); others I spoke to felt it reconfirmed their perception of all migration leading to negative outcomes; yet others criticized the message of being too one-dimensional. Each reaction happened within the audience member's specific frame of reference. As this diversity in reactions portrays, a critical engagement with both fictional and academic representation of migration can only happen if audiences are frequently exposed to different types of messages and images as it will force them to compare, to analyse and to form opinions rather than be overwhelmed by individual sites (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Bal & Boheemen, 1984).

As the literature review illustrates, there are arguments for fictional representation of migration and that found in scholarly articles. While social sciences use strict research methods to construct knowledge that is generalisable and observable (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Landau & Jacobsen, 2005; Voutira & Dona, 2007), the freedom afforded to fiction writers creates powerful images in a process where the viewer or reader is actively involved in its construction (Howarth, 2002; Riccio, 2005). Neither can claim to be a complete representation of the truth or reality; yet each represents a portion or version of that 'real' (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Gaillard & Weinberger, 1984; Bal & Boheemen, 1984); they feed off and complement each other. To some extent, one could argue that migration representation is in a transition phase where fiction and academia test each other and the ways to coexist.

2.3 Representation & Urban Space

As mentioned above, the context – be it politics, history, or culture – helps form a person's identity (Kerkin, 2004) and the representation of that same identity. So does the space in which that representation is formed.

Urban spaces are more than an architectural construct. The city is "an intricate interplay between the human agents, the social structures that give this enactment a context of meaning and the institutions that provide the arena in which these things can happen" (O'Shaughnessy, 2008:11); it can determine how its residents' lives develop and in turn can influence the evolution of the city itself.

In his much acclaimed work 'Walking in the City', Michel de Certeau defines space as a "practiced place", transformed into a space by the people living within it and walking its streets (1984:117); space occurs "as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalise it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities" (1984:117). Another classic author in the literature on identity and urban space, Henri Lefebvre, develops the idea of space as a socially-produced phenomenon, which is modified over time and by the societies occupying it (Lefebvre, 1991). Irrespective of the restrictions placed on a space by governments, institutions or physical structures, it is its residents' interaction with the space that ultimately defines its social meaning.

When seeking to analyse the representation of migrant sex workers in an urban setting as this research proposed to do, one needs to put the study against this theoretical backdrop as migrants mould the space they occupy; sex workers specifically "shape the urban environment in which they work by adapting and moulding the space so they can successfully sell sex" (Hubbard & Sanders, 2003:87). By thus challenging established notions of morality, body, sexuality and the city, they create new types of spaces which become an intrinsic part of how they represent themselves and how they are portrayed by others.

African cities, often hubs for migration trajectories, displacement, poverty, competition for strained resources and a lack of infrastructure, can be fragile, but they can also provide creative, mobile and versatile spaces which can be constantly (re)produced by its residents (O'Shaughnessy, 2008; Lalli, 1992) and form a means in their identity construction.

Narrowing down the discourse to South Africa, Landau describes its cities as a "dynamic and diverse urban environment filled with overlapping systems of exchange, meaning and privilege" (2009:197). Johannesburg, with its multicultural setting and social and economic challenges, has created a space where identities are constantly formed and reassessed (Landau & Monson, 2008).

Migration is an important factor in the study of African cities and their particular social realities and Johannesburg is no different in that regard. According to a 2002 survey, nearly a quarter of the city's inner-city residents were born outside of South Africa (Leggett, 2003) and as some more recent data suggests, in certain parts of the city more than half of the neighbourhoods' residents are non-nationals (Landau, 2006). Johannesburg as the country's economic hub also attracts a large number of internal migrants: studies show that more than two-thirds of inner-city residents, three-quarters of whom are South African nationals, have only arrived at their present address in the last five years (Vearey et al, 2009; Landau, 2006).

The large influx of people into the continent's urban centres such as Johannesburg leads to developmental challenges and a fight for already scarce resources, especially jobs, housing and social services (Vearey et al, 2009, Landau, 2006). Some 40 percent of South Africans live in poverty and the poorest 15 percent struggle on a daily basis to survive and Africa's biggest economy, is also estimated to have one of the most unequal income distributions in the world (Landmann et al, 2003). Integration of the various ethnic and racial groups is widely absent (Landau, 2007). Vearey speaks of "hidden spaces" (2010:37), where some groups use strategies to invisibly navigate within the city, ultimately defining their identity and the space they occupy.

Unemployment in the inner-city is high (Beall et al, 2000). In a survey on Hillbrow, the neighbourhood that serves as a focal point for this research, Leggett (2002) uncovered a "startling frankness about the prevalence of drugs, commercial sex work and corruption" in Johannesburg's urban centre. People are found to compete for already scarce resources and examples of informal and sometimes illegal activities have been identified (Mpe, 2001; Rees et al., 2000). Hillbrow was found to be one of the most densely populated and rapidly expanding areas in Africa (Silverman & Zack, 2007). Hillbrow was found to be the first point of call for many migrants arriving in Johannesburg (Landau, 2004). Many authors point to the poor living conditions in the overcrowded neighbourhood (COHRE, 2005; Wafer et al, 2008). There is no consensus about the number of sex workers working in Hillbrow. Some articles report that there are between 5,000 and 10,000 sex workers operation in the neighbourhood, although they fail to provide the source for those estimates (Rees et al, 2000; Pettifor et al, 2000). Studies suggest a high HIV prevalence rate amongst sex worker in Hillbrow, with some quoting levels close to 50 percent (RHRU, 1998). Reasons cited include lack of access to health services, the need to pursue high-risk sexual activities in order to survive and abuse many in the industry become victim of (Wojcicki & Malala, 2001; Pettifor et al, 2000; Dunkle et al, 2005; Rees et al, 2000). Any research on representation of migrants living and working in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg needs to be analysed with that context in mind.

2.4 Representation, Migration, Gender & Sex Work

Any study on the representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg needs to be placed within the wider literature on the representation of migrants, particularly female migrants, and the sex industry itself.

There are still few studies that look at female migrants in particular, especially those involved in sex work. The focus on women in migration is only recently gaining attention in literature, with critics accusing policy-makers of viewing women as a homogenous group void of political action and/or as victims of conflict (Bhabha, 2004; Crawley, 2000). As the discourse of gender politics

indicates, women have for long struggled to make their voice heard and identity recognized; instead, they fall victims to generalizations, stereotypes and stigmas (Crawley, 2000; Hubbard, 1999; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Existing representations of women involved in sex work are no different.

The link between migration and sex work has long been established: studies show how sex work can be both the cause and consequence of migration (Venables, 2009; Busza, 2004; Nyangairi, 2010). Research shows that a large proportion of sex workers are migrants, be it transnational or internal migrants (Richter, 2010); studies point to a large number of migrants who end up in sex work by chance (Phoenix, 2000), there are those who see no other choice than engaging in sex work in their host communities. There are others who deliberately move to another country or province hoping that sex work will be a means to a better life (Scambler, 2007).

Engaging in sex work can add yet another layer to a migrant population often presented as vulnerable (Palmary, 2005) as much as it can become an empowering element for those who deliberately choose to trade sex for cash (Sanders, 2005). Sex work is seen as challenging a person's sexual identity (Phoenix, 2000). Gosh (2003:201) described the sex worker as a "flying woman (who) dwells in a space that is both moral and immoral". Examined in the context of migration, those challenges are intensified by the nature of the sex worker's exposure to a host community that may completely challenge her perceptions of self and sex (Sanders, 2005; Ghosh, 2003; Phoenix, 2000).

Much of the existing literature on sex worker representation has painted the negative image of women involved in the sex trade, further exacerbated by the labels used to describe women involved in the industry. Terms such as 'whore', 'prostitute', 'wicked women' and 'villain' have contributed to the perception of women in sex work as secondary class or diabolic (Venables, 2009; Busza, 2004; Nyangairi, 2010). In this research I plan to contest those perceptions and contrast them with how the women see and ultimately represent themselves, and what their interaction is with the images portrayed by others.

While abolitionists and advocates of sex work argue over the way forward in the debate about legal reform, sex workers themselves recognize their own paradoxical being and construct an identity that accommodates those contradictions, with women seeing themselves "as both workers and commoditised bodies, as both businessmen and loving partners, as both victims and survivors" (Worrall, 2000:178). Their way of life both enables and threatens their material and social survival. It is that duality in the context of the (re)presentation of female, urban migrants that I want to target and explore in this study and compare with works of fiction.

2.5 Migration, Sex Work and Fiction

Migration is a very common theme within fictional work and the topic has inspired writers, directors, playwrights and other artists worldwide. It is the complexity of the migration story, its various nuances and relevance to contemporary life which has led to artists exploring its representation in a variety of forms. While each story or portrayal differs, the simplified nature of fiction has led to the creation of “pre-established patterns” of migration (Wright, 2000:2). As Wright put it in his analysis of the treatment of refugees on screen, “the selective nature of the visual image frequently objectifies them, dismissing their historical, cultural and political circumstances” (2002:24). This stands in dire contrast to my discussion around the interviews I conducted with migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city, where the emphasis was based on their individual experience, their own representation thereof and their challenge to accepted norms or stereotypes. I thus attempted to contrast the two types of representation to test their strengths and weaknesses, to question or ascertain their validity and to see how and if they can complement each other.

The migrant sex worker is a frequent motif in fictional work. Both in Africa and elsewhere in the world, writers, film directors, painters and other artists found the figure of the sex worker a fascinating theme which to explore in their work. As literature shows, it is the nature of the sex worker’s job and her marginal position within a society which holds a special allure for artists (Campbell, 2006). Senkoro said in his research on African literature that the latter is “literally flooding with dayless cities, notorious re-light streets, and cheap cafes filled with girls of the street” (Senkoro, 1982:100).

While there are numerous examples of sex worker representation in fictional work, so are there different ways those said artists chose to portray the migrant sex worker motif. In his study on sex work in cinema, Russell Campbell identified fifteen recurrent character types of sex workers within the cinema, including the “Happy Hooker”, the “Avenger” the “Junkie” or the “Working Girl”, just to name a few (Campbell, 2006). The same types can be found across other works of fiction. While the figure of the woman who sells her body for cash has intrigued artists for centuries, the manner in which they chose to represent those said women has won both praise and harsh criticism. Critics have raised questions about the validity of those said representations; have questioned the motives of the artists behind them and their objectivity, and have held them against the background of the theories – be it feminist, patriarchal or others – which they stem from (Campbell, 2006; Senkoro, 1982)

Campbell bases his book entitled *Marked Women* on the premise that the portrayal of female sex work is “predominantly attributable to the working of the male imagination, modified by the

requirement for a certain verisimilitude ... and by the conceptual framework of patriarchal ideology” (Campbell, 2006: 21). As he summarized it, “the representation of female prostitution in the movies thus takes place in a complex, dynamic field in which the forces of male fantasy and patriarchal ideology ... merge and collide, occasionally buffeted by free-market capitalist ideology, the interests of female spectatorship, and two opposed varieties of feminist discourse” (Campbell, 2006:39). Representations influenced by feminist theory, he says “deny the element of erotic enjoyment for the woman, to delibidinize the sexual act and represent it as a burden, a dull and alienating routine” (Campbell, 2006:38). Among feminism-influenced films he distinguishes between those that fall under the sex workers’ rights movement and those that represent the radical feminist view. The former promote the profession as a legitimate service that should be “decriminalized and accorded societal respect by the removal of the whore stigma. It contends that the great majority of prostitutes have chosen the work voluntarily” while the latter deny that the choice to engage in sex work is voluntary and see sex work “as an institution created by the patriarchy to exploit and abuse women” (Campbell, 2006:39). Neither of these theories assigns much blame for the existence of the sex work industry on the male population whose demand for sexual service keeps the industry alive.

While there are some films – and this could easily be applied to other forms of fiction as well – which as a result of patriarchy create characters which are either one-dimensional, full of clichés and are “regressive, deadening, reactionary” (Campbell, 2006:383), there are other emerging portrayals of the industry which mix the various archetypes, or deliberately challenge them: “There are studies of prostitutes’ lives that tell it like it is, building their representation on a base of research, observation, and personal testimony. There are films that expose the oppression and exploitation of women in the sex industry, and those which are particularly concerned with exploring female subjectivity among those engaged in the work. And there are the films, finally, that contest the exercise of patriarchal power in society by celebrating the prostitute’s defiance” (Campbell, 2006:383)

As this research seeks to illustrate, the representation of the migrant sex worker in fictional work can not only influence public opinion, but can also affect social and political response. This is where F.E.M.K Senkoro – whose 1982 analysis of sex worker representation in African literature is a rare title on the subject – criticizes some of the works in African literature which he says use the migrant sex worker motif to “mystify and distort realities in African societies” (Senkoro: 1982:xii), yet often fail to suggest solutions for the sex worker’s fate. Listing examples from across the continent, he shows how some authors have portrayed the sex worker’s plight as fatalistic, creating characters which are “static in moods, outlook, beliefs and behaviour”, with no visible way out of the profession (Senkoro, 1982:4). He criticizes the authors for failing to use the

sex worker to address bigger social, economic and political themes and for failing to provide solutions for the sex worker and her fellow sufferers. Equally, he lists examples of literature which he says focuses only on the sexual lives of the characters and portray women as “mostly passionate, lustful animals, prostitutes who sell their bodies, sometimes not really for money and promotion in work, but in attempts to satisfy their insatiable sexual appetite” (Senkoro, 1982:8). Senkoro compares their work with that of other authors who “have protested in their works against the inhuman, rotten, and suffocating environment of the prostitute’s world” (Senkoro, 1982:44). These authors have at times linked the protest of the sex workers against social and economic inequalities and stigmatization on part of the society with the wider upheaval against oppression and exploitation by the people. He then finally shows examples of other novels in which the sex worker realizes that “her emancipation and her liberation requires her to enter the political milieu” (Senkoro, 1982:72). Senkoro’s analysis show how different authors have been able – to a varying degree of success – to question the system which they have identified as being one of the co-creators of the sex work industry.

2.6 Directions of Sex Worker Research

Public health and sociology research on sex work has been much more about sex, sexual victimization and risk, than it has been about work (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001) or identity, with writers focused on the association between sex work and misery rather than sex workers’ rights and perceptions of self. Authors have been more likely to attribute the wrongs associated with sex work to the nature of the profession itself rather than the stigma attached to it and its circumstances. For many authors the industry still remains too controversial to explicitly defend those said rights or document ways in which these are abused and violated.

The available academic literature has focused on female street sex workers, with other types of sex workers such as indoor sex workers, transgendered workers, customers and managers receiving little attention (Weitzer, 2005). For decades, sex work research has been dominated by a radical feminist theory, which clearly denied sex workers’ agency and depicted sex work as a “quintessential form of male domination over women” (Weitzer, 2005:211), which advocated that violence, degradation and gender oppression were inherent and omnipresent in sex work and that the industry could never be organized in a way that would safeguard sex workers’ interests. It dismissed the possibility of supporting the rights of those engaged in sex work, but remained critical of the social and political inequalities that underpin the sex work market (Davidson, 2002)

The criminal label still attached to the profession in some countries has led to the marginalization and stigmatization of sex workers and a lack of protection (Scambler, 2007; Pheterson, 1993). Labeling of vulnerability has also had a profound impact on the perception of agency in migrant

women, particularly among the undocumented refugee populations (Palmary, 2005; Zetter, 1991; Bhabha, 2004). Authors have equally been accused of purposefully selecting the worst examples, generalizing them and thus distorting the image of the industry (Weitzer, 214; Pheonix, 2000). Social science research has focused on representation of sex workers via “metaphors of degeneracy, contagion and promiscuity” (Hubbard, 1999:230), with lack of academic attention also attributed to its stigmatized status and the challenges of conducting research in a sex work environment.

As McClintock argued in her introduction to essays on sex work, “there is not a single, authoritative narrative of prostitution, nor is there a single, internationally correct blueprint for political organizing. Sex work is a form of work that is variously shaped by the diverse social context out of which it emerges” (McClintock, 1993:9). Increasingly, however, a movement for sex workers’ rights has emerged in which sex workers and former participants in the profession have become the main spokespersons (Pheterson, 1990). Studies from contemporary feminist debate surround “the politics of agency, the politics of representation, and the politics of alliance across social imbalances of power” (McClintock, 1993:3), raising the question as who would be best qualified – the sex workers or others – to make strategic decisions about the politics of representation and the politics of agency, echoing a debate from the gender literature, particularly as relates to women in migration (Palmary, 2005; Bhabha, 2004)

While there has been an increase in literature on sex work in Africa, notably Gould and Fick’s (2008) analysis of the sex work industry in Cape Town, the research on the topic is still largely dominated by works from the West. The abolitionists and advocates of sex work rights have been arguing over how sex work is defined, whether or not it should be protected under criminal law, what rights sex workers should be afforded and how sex work affects the perceptions of sexuality (Nyangairi, 2010). While a consensus on the matter is lacking, the debate itself has changed the playfield of the industry on an international scale, with one country, New Zealand, choosing to decriminalize the profession, while others have moved to a legalization model (Weitzer, 2009).

The point of migrant women and sex worker agency plays a central role in the debates introduced in the literature review and shall also form the focus of this research. My research will explore how migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg negotiate their self in the industry, how they construct an identity in response to the social, economic and political climate afforded by the inner-city of Johannesburg, and if or how that representation contrasts with images depicted by others, specifically in the context of fiction.

3. Research Design & Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In my approach, I draw inspiration from postmodern feminist theory, which stresses that research should “not be ‘on’ sex workers but ‘with’ them” (Hubbard, 1999:231), with a focus on the empowerment of research participants and the construction of knowledge for social change (O’Neill, 1996). I believe an understanding of how identities among migrant women in sex work are created and how they are represented by others may help shift the academic debate about sex workers from discourses of sin, sex and crime into those of work, choice and civil rights (Weiner, 1996). Rather than looking for solutions to immediate problems, I see the application of participatory action research as a way to changing the balance of power by “helping people to start seeing themselves as being able to make a difference and being worthy of voicing opinions” (Bhana, 1999:235). Similar to research conducted via health-promotion projects (Bhana, 1999), I see the study of (self) representation as a way of bridging the gap between theory and practice and allowing participants to examine the way they view themselves and how they are viewed by others.

My research, which focuses on the construction of identities, was primarily qualitative in nature, as it gave me the opportunity to study specific issues in greater detail and to reflect on the diversity among the migrant women in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg (Barbour, 2001; Dawson, 2009; Patton, 1990).

The validity and reliability of qualitative data depend to a great extent on the “methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (Patton, 1990:11) and required proper preparation and training before the research began. This included exposing myself to other research with migrant sex workers – see World Cup study described below – and studying past examples of how research with migrants and sex workers had been conducted, analysed and presented. The small sample of open-ended interviews I conducted with my research participants allowed me to add depth, detail, and meaning to the findings at a very personal level and capture different points of view without predetermining them (Patton, 1990).

I applied various methods within my research as they allowed me to capture the different facets of a migrant sex worker’s identity formation for a more comprehensive analysis. The triangulation of the different data (Patton, 1990; Dawson, 2009; Barbour, 2001), including interviews, focus groups, textual analysis, writing and production of a play based on primary data, gave me an opportunity to observe a number of components of a person’s personal and working environment

that ultimately define her self-representation and therefore assist in exploring the different layers and ways in which identity is constructed.

Representation is not a stand-alone concept but is constructed by including one's history, environment and other factors impacting it (Kraus, 2006; Josselson, 2006). Narrative inquiry, which strives "to preserve the complexity of what it means to be human and to locate its observations of people and phenomena in society, history and time" (Josselson, 2006:3), was a key method I used to reconstruct that representation. As Kraus (2006) put it, narrative inquiry is used to self-position oneself and be positioned by others to ultimately be able to negotiate one's identity and belonging within a society. Narrative research is always interpretive (Josselson, 2006), from the framing of questions, to the choice of participants, and the way questions are coded. I used that method based on the assumption that "humans create their lives through an autobiographical process akin to reproducing a story" (Josselson, 2006:4). It is that story telling that became part of my comparison with a similar story telling process found in fiction.

3.2 Operational Definitions

Migrant

I define migrant as anyone who has left his place of birth, be it within South Africa or elsewhere. I have included both internal and transnational migrants in my study as each gave me a different representation of self-identity in the urban context of inner-city Johannesburg constructed both by self and by other.

Women in sex work

Names and labels are loaded and people, especially migrants, are vulnerable to imposed categories (Zetter, 1991). Zetter puts it well in his definition of labelling for the purpose of "conditionality and differentiation, inclusion and exclusion, stereotyping and control" (1991:59).

It is exactly this kind of stereotyping that I would like to contest in my research. The study looked at how migrant women involved in sex work identify themselves and how they prefer to be represented by others. Equally, research of works in fiction, drama and film will use different definitions to address a migrant woman engaged in paid sex, which I have identified.

Beyond the legal definition of a sex worker as someone soliciting money for sex, the term can become a "heavily stigmatized social status" (Pheterson, 1990:398). Sex workers are often described as being socially illegitimate, and generalizations and wrong assumptions are already made by the way they are described and placed within the context of social research. The words 'prostitute' and 'whore' are often used interchangeably, and are seen to distort reality and deny

sex worker autonomy (Pheterson, 1993). Other stigmas such as “villains” or “wicked women” have also emerged (Venables, 2007:78) Researchers instead argue for the use of the name ‘sex worker’ which, while it clearly puts sex on an equal level with work, allows those engaged in the profession a level of agency and dignity.

Research has revealed that while certain derogatory names might be commonly used among the sex workers themselves, who develop a certain language specific to their own “subculture”, outsiders might not be privileged to using them (Nyangairi, 2010: 98). I believe it is important to be sensitive to the names used – both by the migrant women involved in sex work themselves and also by others – to describe them. I have used ‘sex worker’ as my preferred definition. However, where my research revealed the application of different labels, I have included them as I see them as an integral part of how migrant women involved in sex work create their own identity and others do it for them.

Fiction

For the purpose of this research, I shall define fiction as any work that involves a fictional representation of migrant women involved in sex work. These could take the form of literature, films and drama or other artistic forms of representation. Whenever I refer to fiction without specifying one, I will have the general group in mind.

Identity

I define identity as a set of rules or characteristics which a person identifies with (Fearon, 1999). There are different types of identities – personal, group or other social ones – which impact on each other and overlap (Breakwell, 1993; Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000; Fearon, 1999).

Representation

I define representation as an interpretation of one’s identity, background and personal trajectories, and communication thereof either by the person or by others (Breakwell, 1993).

3.3 Research with migrant women involved in sex work

3.3.1 The World Cup sex work research project

In order to establish initial contact with migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg, I participated in the project researching demand and supply of paid sex during the 2010 FIFA World Cup (Richter, 2010). The World Cup research, hosted by the Forced Migration Studies Programme at the University of the Witwatersrand, was conducted in Johannesburg (Hillbrow), Cape Town and Rustenburg. The Hillbrow research specifically became an entry point

for me into the sex industry in the inner city, especially as it was co-facilitated by groups who have long established links in the sector. Researchers in that project have partnered with the sex worker organization Sisonke, the Sex Worker Education & Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT), a sex worker advocacy NGO base in Cape Town, and the Reproductive Health & HIV Research Unit (RHRU), a Hillbrow-based research group that is part of the University of Witwatersrand.

The World Cup research project² involved focus group discussions with sex workers that centred around their anxieties and expectations ahead of the World Cup, their experience during the event and their thoughts on the World Cup once it had ended. I joined the focus groups as an observer/co-facilitator. Around 20 sex workers participated in the focus groups in Hillbrow. Participating in this study gave me a chance to get to know more sex workers and the focus groups became an entry point into the industry for my own research.

3.3.2 Interviews

With the help of the RHRU, I identified four women with whom I conducted in-depth interviews to get a better insight into the specific scope of my research project. After I presented to the RHRU my research criteria, they searched for women they knew through their outreach work that would fit the profile I was looking for. They also narrowed their choices to women who spoke English and those who were willing to participate in this research.

I first met with the women to explain the project and what it would entail. This was also a chance to gain their official consent to participate in this research. I then met with each individually to conduct the in-depth interviews.

I conducted three in-depth sessions with each of the women on the way they view themselves, their trajectories into migration and their engagement in sex work. These sessions were conducted as open-ended interviews. As Patton (1990:18) put it, the much smaller sample of open-ended interviews add depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level of experience.

While the meetings were pre-arranged, the interviews themselves were more informal, with open-ended rather than closed questions. This allowed for a more in-depth discussion and enabled participants to direct the course of the conversation and enable them to discuss the issues they felt were of importance, which in itself lent itself as part of the identity construction I wanted to observe.

² Main findings from the study suggest that supply of and demand for sex work remained constant during the one-month period. Data collected did not support fears of an increase in influx of children and foreign migrants into sex work for the World Cup; cases of police brutality, corruption remained high; health care coverage decreased during that period; the researchers advocate for sex work-specific health care services, access to female condoms to address some of the vulnerabilities of sex worker (Richter et al, 2010).

This type of interviews required an already existing rapport between myself and the participant in order for the migrant women to trust me enough to reveal intimate information about their lives and histories (Dawson, 2009). In order to establish that trust I conducted these interviews with each of the participants over three separate sessions.

The initial discussions were held at the RHRU clinic which was convenient and safe to both the researcher and the participant. Some of the consecutive sessions were held at a public coffee shop, one of the women's home and in a classroom at the University of the Witwatersrand. I provided refreshments for each of the sessions and reimbursed the women with a 50 rand food voucher for attending each interview.

In addition to the five interviewees, I spoke to five other women whom I either identified via RHRU or met on the streets. All five women complemented my research via short-term discussions. I specifically targeted those women with questions that sought to test themes that emerged from my in-depth discussion and to fill some outstanding gaps.

3.3.3 In-depth research participants

I identified research participants based on the following three criteria:

Women over 18-years-old: Choosing women over 18 assured me of their conscious consent to participate in my research.

Women who are migrants and have been in Johannesburg for at least six months: Due to the purpose and rationale of my study, I needed to identify women who are migrants, be it internal or transnational, so that the process of representation can be placed within the migration context. However, I wanted the women to have been in Johannesburg for at least six months so as to allow me to better fit their experience within the political, social and economic framework of the city. I believe six months is a sufficient time base to have an overall grasp of the city.

Women who have been engaged in sex work in Johannesburg for at least six months: Setting the selection criteria at six months allowed me to find women who have been soliciting money for sex in Johannesburg on more than just an occasional basis and provided me with an in-depth insight into their role in the industry in Johannesburg and changing perceptions overtime.

I decided to limit my research to female migrant sex workers only because of the fact that they still represent the majority of people engaged in sexual activity for money (Gould & Fick, 2008)

and because gender as related to being a woman featured as one of the main themes underlying my research. That, however, is not to say that I see male sex workers and transgender groups as less valuable, but simply decided that it would go beyond the scope of this research.

3.3.4 Location

I focused my study on the inner-city of Johannesburg to have a basis for comparison between the migrant women that participated in my research, and the Johannesburg-based works of fiction that I looked at.

Hillbrow, an inner-city neighbourhood, is considered to be a hot spot for crime, with drug abuse and sex work widely present in the community, leading to one researcher calling it a “den of iniquity” (Leggett, 2002:19). The area is also home to a large migrant population, and new arrivals to Johannesburg, including students, often find their first accommodation in that area (Leggett, 2002; Richter, 2010). Sex work in Hillbrow is mainly brothel-based after many of Johannesburg’s accommodation spots have been converted into brothels (Leggett, 2002; Richter, 2010).

3.3.5 Positioning myself within the industry

I never conducted research in a sex work environment before and it was a challenge to position myself within the industry and to engage in deep conversations about a topic that is controversial, sensitive and political. The World Cup study facilitated my entry into the environment and the focus groups which were part of that research helped me establish contact with some sex workers or researchers within the sex work arena.

Security is a concern when engaging in research within the sex work industry. While it poses difficulties for researchers of both sexes, being a woman in an environment where most sex workers are women does put you at risk of being the target of unsolicited offers. I have, therefore, conducted my research in a “safe space” like the RHRU. Once I felt comfortable with the environment and once relationships with some of the sex workers had been established, I managed to conduct my research elsewhere as well.

3.3.6 Observations

Some researchers argue that participant observation is the most comprehensive of all research strategies as it allows us to gather information about some social event, “the events which precede and follow it, and explanations of its meaning by participants and spectators, before, during and after its occurrence” (Patton, 1990:25). I had hoped to conduct observations to collect data on the behaviour of my research participants, about the way they interact with me and others not just in the context of their work environment but other public spaces as well. I saw this part as

yet another element in the migrant women's construction of their identities, which partially would have been a reflection of the environment they find themselves in. Unfortunately, due to logistical and time constraints, observing the women in their work space was not feasible. However, having one of the women participate in the production of my fictional play, I had some opportunities to reflect on that one woman's behaviour, her representation within a public space and how she interacted with me and others within the context of a drama production.

3.3.7 Stories to drama – an experiment

In addition to my main research, I used the findings from my interviews in an experimental stage production, which was facilitated via the Wits School of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand. The project culminated in a drama festival in late 2010, during which I had a chance to present my work.

As a trained theatre director, I used to work on shows which focused on the representation of social issues on stage based on works by other writers. I wanted to use this opportunity to personally go through the process of drafting the material that I eventually use to represent migrant women engaged in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg. That representation was based on material collected from the individual interviews, my observations and my prior research on migration and sex work within a South African context.

The purpose of this component was to actively apply the process of representation of migrant sex worker identity in a drama context. I also explored how migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg could possibly engage with their representation in fiction by inviting my research participants to attend one of the performances.

This component was experimental in nature and used short monologues and acts to explore the various methods of dramatic representation. The project included the following parts: writing of a one-act play based on findings from my research, play direction, presentation and a validation process. An ethics approval for the drama project was granted as part of the main approval for my research (see appendix).

In my approach to the drama project, I drew inspiration from ethno-mimesis, a methodology that seeks to represent ethnographic or social research in a visual/artistic form and creates a participatory method that seeks to recreate history, lived experiences and identities. Ethno-mimesis has proven a useful tool, especially when working with migrants, to create a space for dialogue and narratives to emerge around the themes of identities, home and belonging – all themes that emerged from this research (O'Neill, 2008).

3.3.8 Positioning myself within the research

There is nothing like an objective search for facts (Palmary, 2005). Palmary argues a reader needs to reflect on both his subjectivity and the contextual information that frames his narratives. I do not believe my research to be any different: any information given to me during the interviews was a reaction to me asking participants specific questions. Equally, my findings were yet another representation of the women's realities. The praxis in itself cannot be avoided and can be of advantage at times (Venables, 2007). Positioning myself within my research and reflecting on my reactions formed an integral part of my findings. I used field notes to describe some of my experiences and later incorporated them within the various discussion chapters in this report.

3.4 Research with works of fiction

3.4.1 Target material

I focused this study on works of fiction because of the creative tools they use to represent society. I looked at works of fiction from across Africa – be it written by African authors or based on Africa or both -- that depicted migrant women involved in sex work to develop a framework for my research and to later serve as a basis for comparison. My in-depth textual analysis focused on works depicting Johannesburg only, as it allowed me to set my analysis against the political, social and economic background of inner city Johannesburg.

The works I identified include examples from each media I was looking at. In the end I focused on a few works which I analysed in greater detail for my comparative study. The final selection was based on the fictional representation which lent most detail and perspectives to the representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg. I also tried to include works which used different types of techniques to construct representation. Unfortunately, my final choice was largely limited by my ability to source the material as several novels, movies, and drama pieces I was hoping to include were long out of print.

(I highlighted in bold all Johannesburg-based work or works with references to the city)

Literature	Drama	Film
Midnight Missionary by Kleinboer Welcome to our Hillbrow by Phaswane Mpe Room 207 by Kgebetli Moele The Abandoned Baobab by Ken Bugul On black Sister's Street by Chika Unigwe Beyond the Horizon by Amma Darko Song of Malaya by Okot p'Bitek	Love, crime and Johannesburg by Musical Junction Avenue Theatre Company Foreplay by Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom	District 9 By Neill Blomkamp Blood Diamonds By Edward Zwick

Table 1: List of fictional works

3.4.2 Textual analysis

I use textual analysis to examine representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg within the works of fiction I have identified above. Textual analysis is a method to deconstruct texts, films and other forms of media to analyse the work's rhetorical context, textual features and the wider context to be able to reveal both intended and unintended meanings (NIU, 2010). This includes the de-construction of the material and coding along the same categories I also use to code my primary data to allow for a comparison. The deconstruction involves both discourse and narrative analysis. Where possible, I used some of my initial findings from the fictional analysis as prompts for my interviews, to have a better basis for a later comparison between the two.

The analysis of the various fictional works was conducted on different levels. I began by identifying the main storyline of each work, its primary message and the moral it sought to convey. I used all the works to identify common themes and contradictions. I then analysed each piece according to its structure and the methodology adopted in its construction. This included an analysis of each work's protagonists, the narrator, the setting, the conflict, the style and dominant theme of each work. I then used my guiding themes of migration, gender, sex work and urban space to set my textual analysis within the context of this research to provide a comparison base for the analysis I conducted on my primary data. I will explain the themes and approach in more detail in the analysis section.

3.5 Analysis & Comparison

3.5.1 Components

After having compiled the field work and text data, I conducted my analysis as follows:

1. Narrative analysis of interviews through thematic and discourse analysis and by generating codes.
2. Textual analysis of fiction by generation of codes from the themes identified.
3. Writing and production of a fictional play based on themes and codes identified through interviews; analysis of methodology by generation of codes from themes identified
4. Comparison of the narrative and textual analyses, the codes and differences/similarities in (re)presentation of migrant women in sex work in Johannesburg by self versus others; comparison of methodologies applied in self-representation, fictional representation and my own representation within drama

3.5.2 Conceptual Framework

Post-Modern Feminist Theory

I place my research and its analysis within a post-modern feminist conceptual framework. Choosing this method of presenting and analysing my findings allows me to include the varying, often complex, experiences of the women I interviewed and the different ways they chose to represent those said experiences.

Postmodern feminism defines knowledge as “socially constructed”, with different ways of “perceiving an experience” (Forro, 2005:2). As Forro explains, there is no single correct interpretation within this theory; instead, importance is given to each subjective experience regardless of background and context. This appeared as the right framework for my research, given that my study focuses on representation and a migrant sex worker’s subjective portrayal of her experiences. This study does not seek to create generalisable data, but rather focuses on the individual experience of each woman that participated in my study and her reconstruction of that knowledge and experience. Forro said “postmodern feminism holds that individual choices, perceptions, and lives are influenced greatly by society and individual subjectiveness” (2005:4). This theory also allows me to put my interviewees’ experience in the context of Johannesburg and to show how the city’s specific economic, political and social climate help define those women’s experience and perception of self.

Postmodern feminism also allowed me to contest some general perceptions or assumptions about the lives of migrant sex workers in Johannesburg. Putting emphasis on each woman’s personal experience I sought to underline how each was unique, thus challenging accepted notions or stereotypes. Given its emphasis on subjectivity, the framework also lends itself to sex work research given its mobile nature: as much as a sex worker moves between brothels, the street, different cities and partners, so does her experience, representation of the industry and her role within it. This means I could analyse my data without the pressure to have to create generalisable data or theories about the industry as a whole.

The strength of this theory lies in its focus on diversity, allowing for those marginalized, stigmatized and oppressed to be heard (Nyangairi, 2010; Ebert, 1991). This appears fitting in any study on sex work, as the industry often becomes victim to generalizations, stigmatizations and policies that put sex workers into a basket without taking their individuality and often contrasting experiences into account (Hubbard, 1999; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001).

Representation, Analysis, Reflexivity

An analysis on representation needs to be reflexive and I see reflexivity as a key concept that underlines my data collection and analysis. As Palmary put it, a researcher needs to place herself within the process of knowledge construction which requires a researcher to “reject the notion of knowledge production as an objective search for facts and instead consider the ways in which all interviews, focus groups, workshops and other sources of knowledge production ... are a co-production” (2005:37). This requires both placing my research, the self-representation of my interviewees and the representation found in fiction within their respective contextual frames and analysing against those backdrops: “All writing is political, and acknowledging this politics of representation and reflexivity puts us in the position of considering how our representation of those on the margins of society can be most politically useful (Palmary, 2005:41)

My reflexivity involves not only a reflection of what has been either said by the women or portrayed within the fictional works. It also consists of an analytical comparison and evaluation of the conveyed information. Doing so, my aim is to “represent and interpret the experience of my respondents and the theorising that respondents engaged in” (Letherby, 2002:8). I look at what is being said and ask the question ‘why’. Equally, I analyse what has not been said or portrayed and present this as a conscious choice on behalf of my interviewees or fictional authors. I need to emphasise that each reading of the data is just a partial understanding; my own analysis becomes yet another representation of what is conveyed. In the context of research on sex work, reflexivity also means being aware of one’s own attitudes to the often stigmatised profession and how that may affect what one hears or perceives the respondents to be saying. As a researcher, I have my own values and beliefs, which I may unintentionally project on my choice, interpretation and analysis of data. This is why throughout my analysis I seek to spell out the role I play in construction of those said interpretations and what role the context or other “bodies of knowledge” play in that knowledge construction (Palmary, 2005:32).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitivity of research with migrant women involved in sex work, I needed to consider a number of ethical issues to assure that the anonymity of research participants was protected, and that their participation did not expose them to risk.

3.6.1 Ethics Committee approval

The University of the Witwatersrand Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) has approved the World Cup study, protocol number H100304, which I have been participating in as a formative

phase of my research. Subsequently, I submitted this research to the ethics committee for review, with an approval confirmed in September 2010, protocol number H100831³.

3.6.2 Data Collection

Being part of a hidden population such as the migrant group or the sex work industry often involves being exposed to stigmatized or illegal behaviour, making concerns regarding privacy and confidentiality paramount and difficult to resolve (Shaver, 2005). This may lead to participants being unwilling to participate in the study or people intentionally changing their answers as to protect their identity. Equally, as in any research, they may choose to tell me what they believe I would want to hear. The last point has been addressed through the way that I define representation, as not being a reality, but rather a construct within a particular context, and in response to the environment created by the researcher. I also apply reflexivity techniques to analyse what has been said against my interviewees' and my own framework of knowledge that is likely to affect their representation and my own analysis thereof.

3.6.3 Informed Consent

I used consent forms to establish verbal consent⁴. Most guidelines require that the forms include information on the research and researcher, the risk and benefits, on who will have access to the data, the right to withdraw, and contact for a responsible party other than the researcher (Blinik, Mah & Kiesler, 1999).

3.6.4 Confidentiality and Data Storage

There is an inherent danger in making the practices of sex workers visible to those who dominate, especially in countries such as South Africa where soliciting money for sex is illegal, and many sex workers will want to remain "invisible to protect themselves against legal repression and stigmatization" (Hubbard, 1999:235). The same concerns apply to migrants, especially those without documents and often represented as a hidden population (Vearey, 2010), which use that invisibility to navigate in a complex urban space like inner-city Johannesburg. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to assure the participants that their identity would not be disclosed, while I used some general characteristics such as gender, country of origin and sexual orientation to describe my interviewees. Equally, I have assured participants that they can exit the research at any time if they feel uncomfortable. I have also instructed them about the way I plan to use the data to avoid misconceptions. Sex work is illegal in South Africa, thus I needed to assure the sex workers that any information that they provide and any observations I made about their work place as part of the research would be kept confidential. The collected data is kept confidential and safe from unauthorized access. All of the material, including digital voice recorder files, have

³ For the ethics certificate, see the appendix section.

⁴ For a copy of the consent forms, see the appendix section.

been stored on a computer and protected with a password. Only the researcher has access to the computer files and copies of the interviews. Paper copies of the interviews have been stored in a locked file cabinet.

3.6.5 Impact on Work Life

I have sought my research to be as little disruptive to the women's daily and work routine as possible. I arranged my interviews during a time that was most convenient for them and when there was sufficient time to allow for a constructive discussion.

3.6.6 Stereotypes and Generalizations

Another point I needed to keep in mind while conducting and analyzing my research was to overcome assumptions of homogeneity, by granting each research participants her due individuality. Migrant women and sex workers are very heterogeneous groups but due to perceptions, stereotypes and stigmas tend to become victims of generalizations (Hubbard, 1999; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). I do believe that stigma can be avoided if proper interviewing techniques have been identified and practiced before the start of the interviews. The use of open questions and letting the women take the lead was part of the methods I adopted.

3.6.7 Benefit to Participants

An important ethical consideration in any research is the benefit to the participants. I plan to give my research participants access to my research project by letting them have a copy of my final paper. I plan to conduct a validation process (Dawson, 2009) via a focus group discussion with all of my research participants to discuss the findings, my conclusions and the validity thereof. In addition, via the drama component outlined below there was a chance for my interviewees to engage with fictional representation of their own narratives. Overall, I believe this research adds to the literature on self-representation and the construction of identities by others, particularly as it relates to migrant identity within inner-city Johannesburg. The study gave my research participants the opportunity to examine how they see and represent themselves and using my play production to also see and experience how that compares with representations by others.

3.7. Limitations

3.7.1 Researching vulnerable groups

Researching sex work, migration and gender raises several methodological challenges. Especially in South Africa, where sex work of any kind is illegal, some sex workers might be hesitant to openly speak about their profession and their role within it which could have an impact on the results of my research. As some researchers pointed out, it took sometimes years to establish deep-enough relationships with women in the sex industry to have meaningful

conversations (Hubbard, 1999). A similar concern relates to migrants, who due to their sometimes undocumented status might be hesitant to participate in research.

3.7.2 Sampling

The size of the sex worker population in South Africa is unknown. Figures for Cape Town, the only city for which there are currently estimates, forecast some 1,200 in that city alone (Shaver, 2005; Gould & Fick, 2008). Given that my research is qualitative in nature, it does not seek to be representative of the migrant population in inner-city Johannesburg involved in sex work (Barbour, 2001; Patton, 1990). My choice of participants may be biased towards the more cooperative and accessible participants and may not be representative of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg, but the aim of it is to gather depth rather than being representative. I will stress that as one of my limitations.

3.7.3 Language

An important limitation in this research was language. Given my language constraints, I was forced to limit my choice of research participants to women who spoke English. I do understand that the issues I discussed with the women were very personal and some may have felt more comfortable to discuss them in local dialects and languages. I have expanded the scope of the study to include internal migrants as well, partially to overcome the linguistic challenge as it increased my pool of migrant women from whom to choose from.

4. Research Findings & Analysis: Interviews

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and analyses how the women I interviewed as part of this research saw and represented themselves. The aim of the interviews was to explore how migrant women involved in sex work represent themselves in the context of urban space in inner-city Johannesburg. I further wanted to understand ways in which those women construct their identity in the context of urban space. To do so, I not only look at what the women said or did not say, but also examine the way in which they said it or which tools they used to construct that said self-representation. In the following chapter, I will then show how that self-representation compares with representation by others in fiction – be it cinema, literature, poetry or theatre. It is not my intention to offer a comprehensive analysis of the various types of migrant sex worker self-representation available as this goes beyond the scope of this study. Instead, using the example of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg I highlight some of the themes found among the women involved in the industry within the city's urban environment. I will then compare my findings with the 'character types' found within Johannesburg-based fiction. All along, I set my analysis against the four underlying themes of this study: migration, urban, gender and sex work.

I applied participatory action research techniques (Bhana, 1999) while conducting my interviews hoping to assist my interviewees to examine and understand the way they view themselves and how they are viewed by others. Inviting the women to a performance of a play which was based on the information they shared in the course of the interviews then became a chance to test the validity of my representation of what they represented to me. I will discuss the results of that experiment under the play analysis section.

4.2 The Interviewees

I interviewed four women in-depth via three individual sessions of about 1-1 ½ hour each. With the women's consent, all of the interviews were recorded. Three of these women served as the basis for the fictional play I wrote and directed that sought to test the idea of translating a 'real-life' story into a fictional representation of the sex work industry. One of the women even starred in the play. All three women attended one of the performances. After the performance, I conducted a focus group discussion to test the accuracy and effectiveness of the play.

All the four women I interviewed were migrants: one was Zimbabwean, one was Zimbabwean-South African (but grew up in Zimbabwe), one was Swazi and one was an internal migrant from South Africa's KwaZulu Natal province. Their ages ranged from 30-40 years.

In the following analysis I refer to them using pseudonyms as explained below:

Pamela is a 40 year-old woman from Harare, Zimbabwe. She is a divorced mother of three. All three children are living in Zimbabwe and Pamela supports them by sending money home. She has been a sex worker for two years. Her ex-husband, whom she has started seeing again, also lives in South Africa, some 40 minutes outside Johannesburg.

Anna is a 30-year-old woman from a town in South Africa's KwaZulu Natal province. After trying endless jobs – in factories, as a security guard, a cleaner in dams – she became a sex worker. She is a mother of two little children who live with her mother in KwaZulu Natal.

Mary is the 32-year-old daughter of a Zimbabwean mother and a South African father. She grew up in Zimbabwe and fled to South Africa after her mother passed away and she fell victim to her uncle's abuse. She has been a sex worker for the last 15 years. She is a mother of three children, two of which live with her sister in Zimbabwe. The third child is staying with a woman Mary pays to look after her daughter while she attends school in another part of Johannesburg. Mary is HIV positive.

Nicole is a 26-year-old woman from what she calls a "respectable family" in Swaziland. She has a 6-year-old son who lives with her parents in Swaziland. She has been a sex worker for the last three years.

In addition, I conducted interviews with five other women to either validate findings from my in-depth interviews or to fill gaps I identified when analyzing my findings. All of these women were either cross-border or internal migrants involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg. They were all working on the streets and have been identified by visiting areas I knew to be frequented by sex workers. In the following analysis there is no specific reference to these women as I used those short discussions to merely test themes identified within the in-depth interviews or to fill outstanding gaps.

4.3 Emerging Themes & Coding

The following themes and codes emerged from my analysis of the interviews:

DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Migration / sex work trajectories	
• Present migration/sex work as a survival strategy / point to lack of opportunities back home • Present migration as search for better opportunities or better opportunities in sex work • Point to single-parenthood and its role in decision to migrate • Emphasise responsibility for extended family in decision to migrate • Point to Migration as a means to engage in sex work and migration as key to ensure anonymity for sex work	"I left home because there was no money, no jobs" (Anna) "I've tried all types of jobs, but they just didn't work out" (Anna) "When I had a kid out of wedlock, I felt I had a responsibility at home and I wasn't contributing anything. So I was having that pressure that I need money, I wanted to contribute just to show that I can help, I can do something" (Nicole) "I don't do business where I know people. If people find out that you're a sex worker, most people won't like you," (Pamela) "I didn't and never would do it back home. When I was in school, I was the school president, I was very famous. That's how they know me." (Anna) "If I had a decent job, I don't think I should have ventured into sex work." (Pamela) "My uncle was abusing me so I ran away" (Mary) "At least here I know what I can do to get money. In Zimbabwe where would I start?" (Mary) "I wouldn't say I was forced. I was interested to see the place and do the job. I could see the way she was dressing, that she had money. I wanted to do it as well. Because my aim was to have money and change my life." (Nicole)
Role of sex work	
• Sex work as temporary • Other work to quit sex work • Other work as alibi to sex work • Sex work vs many boyfriends • Use of business language to present sex work as work • Present sex work as a secret • Use of false names • Dependence on cash from sex work • Sex work as a means for a father figure • Age limit to sex work • Justification via religion	"I work at the clinic, that's my alibi" (Pamela) "I use a false name to keep it private from my family. I use that name because of my security. I didn't want to be exposed" (Anna) Describe quitting sex work and going back to it because of need of cash "He could be my father I think (laughs)... but I liked him. (laughs). He was old enough to be my father. He took care of me. But he wanted to own me." (Mary) "I didn't want her to come here to see like when I go out. Because she's old now. To see what I'm doing..." (Mary) "There is a difference between a sex worker and a prostitute. A sex worker is earning a living through business, but someone who goes around and sleeps with many men for enjoyment, or just for him to get up... that's a prostitute" (Pamela) "I'm 40. It will be difficult for me to get clients when I get old" (Pamela) "God help me so that I can get out because I know that you don't want me to do this. I'm doing a sin. I know one day he will help me" (Anna) "The ladies who are working on the streets, they are so cheap." (Anna)
Managed Vulnerability	
• Emphasise lack of protection from the policy, the system, the law • Point to inability to fight clients who are stronger • Represent their dependence on having to bribe police, security guards, pay brothel owners for protection • Represent women as physically weaker than men • Differentiate between street- and brothel-based sex work • Visitors from home in a brothel	"When the man is with you in the room often he will change. He will use you, abuse you. Sometimes no one will hear your scream. And the lady will be dead and the guy is gone" (Mary) "On the streets, they take advantage of you. They always think you're cheap" (Nicole). "He won't say anything. He would disclose himself." (Pamela) "I once had a customer who would be doing it too violently. And he would take a knife and put it by your side. 'if you don't comply with my I'll kill you'." (Pamela) "Black people are very rude. After sleeping they will say... eish... very bad things. They will call you names. Things that are bad and boring. They call you names. After sleeping with you and finishing business with you, then they will threaten you... 'I could kill you and take my money'." (Mary) "When he starts threatening, what do you say? In his house you can't say anything. I think they feel guilty. Or they take you, drop you in the middle of nowhere where there is no one. In the bush." (Mary)
Perception / Meaning of sex work	
• Legitimize sex work: sex work as work • Self-degrade themselves: sex work and shame • Battle with cultural beliefs/norms and stigma associated to sex work • Portray themselves as "victim of circumstance" • Representation of clients as "normal, good people" / "clients", "customers" • Satisfaction in sex work / doing a "good job" • Addiction to money from sex work	"In our culture, people don't think a person should have more than one boyfriend at a time. A person mustn't sleep with more than one man in her life" (Pamela) "We are on business. You won enjoy sex now. You are after money" (Pamela) "There are guys who are stepping through the door and I know, that guy is coming for me. It's good. You'll be knowing each other by then. You know what he wants. He knows me." (Pamela) "She kept on saying, 'you're not a virgin, you've been fucking guys back in Swaziland, you can do it, you can make money' (Nicole) "I'm a very streetwise person now. Everything to you is based on money. When you see a man, even when he wants to marry you, you will look at money. You wanna see how much money he has and stuff like that. So somehow it distracts your normal life" (Nicole) "You get used to the. If I go out now and I see something I like, I always have money. I can buy at anytime I want to buy" (Nicole) "The guys who don't mind for their women to be sex workers, they are lazy. They prefer their women to work for them. You will end up working for them." (Pamela) "If it will be legal, we will be having free working conditions. We would be treated like any other worker, with respect and dignity." (Mary)

Role of networks	
• Migrate/become sex workers through friends/acquaintances • Other sex workers as friends or enemies • Lack of privacy in brothels • Role of people from the same country of origin • Present themselves as 'good citizens', friends	"She told me she was doing this business. It was a difficult decision for me but she said, 'come, you will be fine'" (Pamela) "The older ladies, they were even saying that we were using 'muti' to stop them from working because we were busy. It was just their jealousy" (Anna) "Some like maybe to double ladies, then if the client chooses a girl, if he wants to do a threesome, he will ask you to choose another girl. Then of course I'm going to pick my friend" (Anna) "The advantage was we were speaking the same language. He was from Zimbabwe as well. We understood each other" (Pamela) "You know ladies cannot stay together for a long time. You end up quarrelling, fighting" (Pamela) "He can go with anybody, I'll go with anybody. It doesn't matter" (Mary)
Mobility within Jo'burg	
• Change of brothels/streets • Change in home • Change in types of sex work • Mobility as means to survive/endure in sex work • Mobility as means to see /represent herself differently	"Going out to the hotels was making me wiser because you're meeting people with a different character, in a different environment. It teaches you how to talk to people in a decent way. In that club (in Hillbrow), people obviously would come for sex, but in, let's say Hilton hotel, he didn't come there for buying sex. So now I have to have a certain approach, to talk to a client about what I'm doing as a decent person and I have to represent myself as a decent lady." (Nicole) "Where I am today I feel a bit more comfortable about the whole situation because I'm more into myself, more independent, more free." (Nicole)
Xenophobia	
• Local sex workers vs migrant sex workers • South Africans vs migrant sex workers • Migrant sex workers as entrepreneurs • Xenophobia in their descriptions of clients / fellow sex workers	"They say you're taking their jobs." (Pamela) "The foreign ladies understand that we are in the business. If they were making too much money, they would give you one of their clients and if you then offer to give them half of the money, they would say no, it's fine. South African girls wouldn't do that. They would rather die" (Anna) "If you go to a brothel house, the majority of those who own the brothel house are not South African, these are people from outside. They come here to do business. They come here, save money, look for a place, then they make an advert and call the ladies" (Anna) "It doesn't matter where they come from because I don't have a relationship with them. I'm on business" (Mary) "During sex they say Zimbabwean ladies are more active than South African ladies" (Pamela)
Agency / Autonomy	
• Agency in decision to migrate/become a sex worker • Point to rules in sex work, own rules for what they accept and refuse, their rights • Say accept responsibility for consequences of choices • Juggle sex work against inability to support family • Represent as heroes • Represent ability to deal with police / work with rules / system • Point to transition: I know the rules now	"I was interested to see the place and do the job. I could see the way she was dressing, she had money. I wanted to have money, change my life" (Nicole) "I do have a choice (to refuse a client). I've realized that I'm doing something that I don't want to do. I'm not enjoying it, so I don't want to be hurt doing this." (Anna) "I manage my own business. The client don't have to tell me what to do" (Pamela) "Most of the police, they are my friends. They don't trouble me. When they arrest you, you just give them money" (Mary) "I'm principled. I know my rights" (Pamela) "Guys don't come to a lady. A lady is the one to approach the men" (Pamela) "They know you don't know anything the first time. They will try to take advantage of that." (Pamela) "At times you have to give the security an incentive. They'll say 'we are doing you a favour'" (Pamela) "I never tried for 50 rand. I didn't think I could do that. Not that I'm saying... but you make choices in life. The place I worked at started from 150 upwards" (Nicole)
Role of families / partner	
• Present themselves as good mothers or daughters • Emphasise men's inability to provide • Emphasize vulnerability of other family members • Attach little importance to having a partner or point to difficulty of being in a relationship • Changing perception of what a man/partner should be	"I'm a woman and I have to produce as well" (Pamela) "Before I would tolerate being with a guy who is not rich, but a guy who gives me love, is taking care of me. Now he has to have money" (Nicole) "I always tell him that I want to settle down and do something, like a business. He will say there is no money, how can I talk like that" (Pamela) "Clients want to use you. Sex work is about business, money, not about relationship. It's not right to fall in love with them" (Anna) "I think it's going to be difficult for any man to stick with a person he knows he met here in this business. He will never trust you." (Nicole) "Even in the future, if I kept doing this, I wouldn't be able to tell him what I was doing. It wouldn't be easy to tell him." (Anna) "If I'm happy and he is treating me nicely, then it's ok. If he doesn't want to be with me anymore, and is not happy, then it's ok." (Anna) "I would like to get married, to a man who is honest, caring, loving and who has respect for women, humble, not abusive" (Mary) "With sex, that's when I'm with my husband. That's the time I climax." (Pamela)

Health	
- Reject notion of sex worker as spreader of HIV/AIDS - Represent sex workers as responsible, health-conscious - Emphasise responsibility for their own well-being - Represent as "volunteers at clinic"; those who educate other sex workers - Represent clients as ignorant / those who ignore risks - Dismissed notion of sex workers abusing drugs/alcohol	"If you don't take care of yourself, you're risking yourself. If I get an infection, it will be my fault. I need to protect myself" (Pamela) "If a client says 'please, let's not use a condom, I'll put another 100 rand', I say 'no'. No sex. It's better not to have sex at all" (Mary) "These rural people don't even want to hear anything about condoms. They say they are not allowed to use it. It's their ignorance. They still live in stigma, think that if they see me fat like this, I'm free from HIV" (Pamela) "I like working as a peer educator. When I go to the streets now, people give me more respect. They take us as nurses and we have to tell them that we are not nurses, but peer educators" (Pamela) "I used to smoke. I started smoking when I was maybe 15. Because when I saw other girls smoking, I thought they were doing something really nice, the way they were touching the cigarette. Then I bought my cigarettes. And when people were looking at me, I enjoyed that" (Mary) "If the condom bursts, I always tell them" (Anna)
Double / Triple life	
- Representation as part of every day life depending on context - Use of different phones for private/sex work life	"I use my business phone to talk to my clients, so I would get some SMS and go with clients if I wanted to go with them. If not, I just turn it off" (Anna) "I like the wig. It makes me a little bit different..." (Mary) "The money that I'm getting I'm taking myself to school, I've opened a small business. I'm trying to cover up so my parents wouldn't find out. I need to take myself out of this before they find out" (Nicole) "I wouldn't want them to know, because I'm from a very strict family. They don't even think I could do something like that" (Nicole) "When I'm at home, I make sure I'm a normal girl." (Nicole) "There is always a way to represent yourself, you cannot just tell a person that I'm a sex worker. You just have your own way to talk to the client" (Nicole) "Since I've opened a salon, when I meet guys, I can talk about it. Those are the things that you can sit at a table and talk about. You're not ashamed of it." (Nicole)
Reaction to representation by others	
- Reaction to derogatory words - Present themselves as helping their clients' wives - Present themselves as respectful of their clients' privacy and empathetic to their clients' wives	"Sex workers are treated like dirt; they are outcast to the community. The community says we are taking their husbands, we are bringing diseases like HIV/AIDS, breaking up marriages" (Mary) "I don't care about what anybody says. They haven't done anything for me. I live my life." (Mary) "I can admit it, like I am not a bad person. I can tell the truth if I want to tell the truth, especially ... Nobody can judge my past. It's my past" (Anna) "The taxi driver told me 'Please, you have to act wisely. The place where you are going is a dirty place'" (Pamela) "If they are saying we are bringing diseases, they need to get tested and know their status and start using a condom. We are using condoms because we know our status. They should stop accusing us of something we don't even do" (Mary)
Urban space and sex work	
- Present crowded Hillbrow/Johannesburg, competition for scarce jobs as a precursor to sex work - Sex work within Hillbrow vs sex work elsewhere and impact on self-image and representation	"It's a place where you find people from everywhere... everyone says, if you've never been to Hillbrow, you've never been to Joburg. That's where the cream of Joburg is... all of the entertainment of Joburg is in Hillbrow. Especially all African people start in Hillbrow" (Pamela) "I feel a bit more comfortable about the whole situation because I'm more into myself, I'm more independent, more free, more in control of myself," (Nicole about sex work from her home) "Now crime is there, but not like before. And police is always patrolling" (Mary) "You know, where there is sex work, there are thieves. They go hand-in-hand, these people" (Pamela) "In this area I work as a peer educator, I want to keep it as that" (Pamela) "I like it here. I've been here before, I'm here now, I'll be here again, forever. I like the area, and I like the people. I just like it" (Mary) "Each street there will be vendors. People always think of money there" (Pamela)
Methodology	
- Lack of eye contact - Speaking in third person - Openness to speak about sensitive matter - Language: vulgar vs eloquent; business language - Use of silences - Disjointed sentences	"I am doing this sex work business" (Pamela) "She wanted to change her life, she was trying her best, she was going to school, but ends up losing hope" (Anna) "They want to be treated like human beings, like any other South African workers" (Anna) "I don't want to lie..."

Table 2: Emerging Themes from Interviews

4.4 Self-representation: Discussion & Analysis

4.4.1 Migration and Sex Work

All four women I interviewed have a migration background and their migration history is closely linked to the way they represented their trajectory into the profession.

Representation of Migration / Sex work as a Survival Strategy

All the women I spoke to – be it in the context of the formal interviews or via ad-hoc discussions on the street – depicted their choice to migrate and engage in sex work as a survival strategy. The women said they had come to Johannesburg in search for a better living and better opportunities or as a means to earn an income to support families back home: “I left home because there was no money, no jobs” (Anna). Each woman emphasized that she had no idea she would end up as a sex worker when she left home; nor was it her plan to become a sex worker when arranging her trip to Johannesburg (see Table 2:39). While there is literature which supports the idea that a large number of migrants end up in the industry by chance (Phoenix, 2000), there are other works which suggest that migrant women usually know beforehand that the job they are migrating for would be in sex work (Agustin, 2006; Scambler, 2007). This partially suggests the women’s deliberate desire not be judged and be viewed as someone who purposefully left home to engage in a stigmatized industry. Only one admitted to having an inkling about what she was about to do, yet she said she was “curious” and tempted by the promise of financial rewards (Nicole). Although sex work as such was not a foreign concept to them, each spoke of “shock” or “surprise” when they learnt which profession their acquaintances or friends – their first contact within the city – were engaged in. “I met my friend from Zimbabwe. I went to stay with her there. She said ‘here we do this... we do business here’. I said ‘Noooo way’...but she said there is nothing else I can do. That’s how I started.” (Pamela). Some, like Anna, said they had tried all possible jobs from stints as a domestic cleaner, security guard to cleaning dams before turning to the profession: “I’ve tried all types of jobs, but they just didn’t work out” (Anna). Two of the other women said they had started in the job on their first night of arriving in Johannesburg; still, they later claimed that they had tried and there were “no other jobs available” (Pamela). Most of the women portrayed their plight as “forced by circumstances” (Anna) – either by having a family to support back home, by the lack of valid documents, lack of proper jobs or South Africans’ general mistrust against employing foreigners. Each took great care – be it out of shame, embarrassment or fear of judgment – not to be associated with the “other women, who leave their husbands to make a quick buck as sex workers” (Pamela). Almost all of the women left their homes as adults; their choice to migrate was their own, they say. Only Mary, who ran away from an abusive uncle at the age of 15, said she was forced to migrate. She said she became a sex worker shortly after arriving in Johannesburg, when she had no other means to

feed or cloth herself: “I started drinking, doing everything that they were doing, even sex work” (Mary). Seventeen years later, the now 32-year-old woman describes her beginnings in the industry as that of a naïve teenager, for whom sex work became a method to keep her alive, fed and living off the street.

Single Mothers / Sole Breadwinner

All four women I interviewed used the fact that they are single mothers or the sole breadwinners in their families to explain/justify their decision to migrate (see Table 2:40): “When I had a kid out of wedlock, I felt I had a responsibility at home and I wasn’t contributing anything. So I was having that pressure that I need money, I wanted to contribute just to show that I can help, I can do something” (Nicole). They presented their families as financially strained, some even destitute: “if I don’t send them anything, they will starve” (Pamela) and their places of origin as town/cities/countries without any opportunities or other means to support their families: “At least here I know what I can do to get money. But in Zimbabwe, where would I start?” (Mary). They accused the political and economic system where they come from for not affording them an opportunity to have a “normal” job: “If I had a decent job, I don’t think I should have ventured into sex work” (Pamela). They represented themselves as heroes who had the courage to migrate and become a sex worker to be able to take care of their loved ones rather than wait for others – be it men who have long left or a fragile economic system – to take care of them: “My mother is unemployed, my brother is unemployed and I have two kids. All of them, I’m the one who is taking care of them” (Anna). All women spoke in detail about the money and other supplies they manage to send back home in what seemed as an attempt to further justify their decision to leave their children behind and engage in sex work. Having said that, none of them had plans to bring her children over to South Africa, at least not until she has a “normal life, a real life” (Nicole).

Migration as a Chance for Anonymity

Even though sex work exists in their places of origin, none of them could imagine going into the profession back home: “There, everyone knows me, I was the school president, I was very famous. That’s how they know me and it should stay like that. I’m not proud of what I do so I don’t tell anyone that I work in the industry” (Anna). While the women have accepted that this was the livelihood choice they made or had to make, they were not prepared to face the judgment of their friends and families or have to directly confront the stigma associated with the industry: “I don’t do business where I know people. If people find out that you’re a sex worker, most people won’t like you” (Pamela). They were intent on keeping the profession a secret (see Table 2:39), especially from their children, for whom they have created the image of a good mother and provider: “I don’t want my daughter to come here and see when I go out because she’s old enough now to understand what I’m doing” (Mary).

Migration / Sex work as Temporary Solution

Each woman I spoke to represented her migration to Johannesburg and her involvement in sex work as temporary and emphasized her desire to eventually quit the industry and go back home (see Table 2:39). “I have no intention of being a sex worker for a long time. If it’s better in Zimbabwe, I’ll go back to my country” (Pamela). None, however, could say when this would actually happen, raising the perception that they would stick to the profession for an indefinite period, especially since most of them had spent years as a sex worker already. None of the women presented sex work as her ultimate profession, but rather as a temporary means to an end, partially because they see an age limit for working in the industry: “I’m 40. It will be difficult for me to get clients when I get old” (Pamela). They all pursue different types of courses and trainings in order to find an alternative to their current means of earning a living and gain skills to be able to transition to another job. They pursue courses and set up small businesses such as a manicure/pedicure salon also to have a cover should their families ask about their employment or come on a surprise visit. “I work at the clinic, that’s my alibi” (Pamela). One of the main reasons for their desire to one day quit the job are their children: “I have a kid. One day he will have so many questions like ‘I never went to my mother’s work’. You will not always be able to come up with fake stories” (Nicole).

The “Gold Digger”

While most referred to the money they earn as a sex worker simply as a way to support their families, others, such as Nicole, admitted getting satisfaction from having a steady income:

“You get used to the money because if you’re doing this job it doesn’t have to be month end for you to have money or go shopping. If I go out now and I see something I like, I always have money. I can buy at anytime I want to buy. If I want to spoil myself today, take myself out, I can go out and have fun. You just think about money, everything is about money. If you don’t have money, you get disturbed, you’re not ok.” (Nicole).

The image portrayed by Nicole similes what Campbell refers to as the “Gold Digger” portrayal of a sex worker, a woman “who exploits men’s natural sexual desires to effect a redistribution of wealth in her favour” (2006:149). Having said that, one needs to balance Nicole’s story against that of a person who simply enters the profession in order to make a fortune for herself as the support of her child and her other family members were partially the reason why she engaged in the industry. It is the new-found independence – be it financial and otherwise – and the temptation of a luxurious life that keep her in the industry, despite several attempts to quit.

Role of Networks

None of the women I interviewed portrayed their entrance into the profession as something they had initiated (see Table 2:40). Instead, each spoke of a friend or acquaintance who introduced

them to the profession and helped them persist during the initial days on the job. This could be interpreted as a deliberate choice to put some of the responsibility for having started out on the other person and contrast that with their own “shyness” and “hesitation”: “She told me she was doing this business. It was a difficult decision for me but she said, ‘come, you will be fine’” (Pamela). None of them spoke of being forced into selling their bodies by a third party, and some admitted to a temptation of what the job could offer: “I was interested to see the place and do the job. Because I could see the way she was dressing, that she had money. My aim was to have money and change my life” (Nicole). Literature stresses the importance of networks in getting access into the industry, given that its stigmatized nature and often illegal status make it difficult for an outsider to access it (Agustin, 2006). Studies also mention the existence of organized networks that facilitate access into sex work (Agustin, 2006), but the women I interviewed said they were not aware of any such networks.

South African vs Non-South African Sex Workers

Even though all the women I spoke to engaged in the same profession, an idea of belonging to a group, or a group identity, were largely absent. Instead, the women referred to wide-spread mistrust and jealousy between domestic and foreign-born sex workers and even between women of the same nationality (see Table 2:40). The non-South African women said they were often accused of taking South Africans’ jobs: “They say you’re taking their jobs. ‘Why can’t you go and do that in your country?’” (Pamela). Equally, they referred to jealousy between younger and older sex workers: “The older ladies, they were even saying that we were using ‘muti’⁵ to stop them from working because we were busy. It was just their jealousy” (Anna).

All four women, including the South African, represented foreign sex workers as women who entered the profession with a purpose, more entrepreneurial and more pleasant to work with than South African women: “The foreign ladies understand that we are in the business. If they were making too much money, they would give you one of their clients and if you then offer to give them half of the money, they would say no, it’s fine. South African girls wouldn’t do that. They would rather die” (Anna). Foreign sex workers are represented as women who even in sex work manage to find a business opportunity that goes beyond them selling their bodies:

“The foreigners don’t work as sex workers for a long time if you compare to South African ladies. If you go to a brothel house, the majority of those who own the brothel house are not South African girls; these are people from the outside. They come here to do business. They come here, save money, look for a place, then they make an advert and call the ladies. The foreign girls just wait till they have enough money to do something else. They don’t want to stay in the business forever. Then they think of something that they can do that will take them out of the business.” (Anna)

⁵ Muti is a term used to describe traditional medicine in southern Africa.

In contrast, South African sex workers are portrayed as having little plan beyond sex work: “The South African girls take money for their kids and then spend the rest on alcohol, going out. They don’t think about saving money. They don’t think about doing something better tomorrow” (Anna). The women also classified their clients according to where they came from: “The Zulus, they are rough, they are very abusive” or “the Indians, they don’t treat people nice. So pushy, forcing you...” (Mary). But the women referred to something nearing a mutual understanding when their clients were foreigners like them or even coming from the same country: “The Malawians, they give us respect; after all, we’re all foreigners here” (Pamela). This suggests a common identity among foreigners in South Africa.

Mobility within Sex Work, within Johannesburg

While all of the women I spoke to initially started working as a sex worker in a brothel in Hillbrow, they were all very mobile and kept moving within Johannesburg, be it from brothel to brothel, brothel to street, and between neighbourhoods (see Table 2:40). They represented their mobility as a quest to improve on what they could earn in exchange for their services and their desire to work in places that would guarantee them clients and an income. They also represented the changes as a means to endure in the industry and manage its often challenging conditions: Anna said she changed her brothel after the previous place became “unbearable” due to disagreements with other sex workers or when she saw better opportunities elsewhere. Nicole said she periodically changed her routine because she believed that “life should go through stages”. She started as a sex worker in a Hillbrow brothel, then tested the streets for a while, before moving to look for clients in hotels in the upper-class suburb of Sandton. The mobile nature of their livelihoods could be seen as a continuation of their migratory pattern, but also as a reflection of the fact that they would like to represent the profession as a temporary solution only. Equally, their mobility afforded them the opportunity to represent themselves differently in each different setting and with a different audience:

“Going out to the hotels was making me wiser because you’re meeting people with a different character, in a different environment. It teaches you how to talk to people in a decent way. Top businessmen, decent people. In that club (in Hillbrow), people obviously would come for sex, but in, let’s say Hilton hotel, he didn’t come there for buying sex whatever. So now I have to have a certain approach, to talk to a client about what I’m doing as a decent person and I have to represent myself as a decent lady” (Nicole).

Only Mary, who has been in the profession for the last 17 years, appeared reluctant to change and even refused to move beyond Hillbrow, even describing the troubled inner-city neighbourhood as her comfort zone and “home”. The 32-year-old woman, who spent most of her life working as a sex worker, had little ambition beyond the profession or referred to it as out of reach. Even though she said she was “bored with business” now, she did not, like the other women I spoke to, make an effort to represent herself as someone who actively fought to escape the profession; being HIV positive, Mary described herself as a “pensioner”, a person who with

little options, a limited time left to live and someone who has made peace with who she is and what she has done.

Double Life, Double Identity

Both migration and sex work is about juggling different identities (Sigel, 2001; Polzer, 2008) and for the women I interviewed this was no different (see Table 2:41). The women referred to leading a “double life” (Anna), between their work as a sex worker and the image they portrayed to their families: “When I’m at home, I make sure I’m a normal girl. I’m from a very strict family. They don’t even think I could do something like that” (Nicole). All of the women have adopted a different name for their work and make use of different cell phones to differentiate between the job and home: “I use a false name to keep it private from my family, I also use that name because of my security. I don’t want to be exposed” (Anna). Representation and creating a different identity is part of their job, the women admit, and they juggle different personalities and identities to appease clients:

“Some ladies advertise themselves as a police, others as a nurse, others as a maid, others as a doctor. The point of lingerie is to give attention to the client, because you don’t know what he is thinking when he comes to a brothel house. Maybe he is imagining doing it with a school girl and will be looking for someone in a school uniform, Maybe thinking about lesbian, maybe thinking about doing a threesome, maybe thinking about the G-string. So you just wear something that you think the client will like” (Anna).

They differentiate between “work clothes” and “normal clothes” and some wear wigs to set apart their work life from the “normal her”: “It makes me look and feel a little bit different” (Mary). When they portray themselves in Internet or newspaper advertisements, it is usually without showing their face, but to expose their body and to represent themselves in a way that would attract a client:

“I just pose nicely with my body. You don’t want to do this thing forever. We take pictures and everything, but the day I want to resign I will tell them to disconnect my pictures, to delete my profile. I don’t show my face and I use different names on different sites. Nobody will be able to connect this to me” (Nicole)

Even the women’s pursuit of a different job outside of sex work – while also a means to get out of sex work – becomes in itself a representation of that different self: “They don’t know what I’m doing because I’ve been studying as well. The money that I’m getting I’m taking myself to school, I’ve opened a small business at home...I’m trying to cover up so my parents wouldn’t find out. I need to take myself out of this thing before they find out what happened” (Nicole). Pursuing a job or a project outside of sex work has changed the way the women feel about themselves. “I like doing it (work as a peer educator)... even when I go to the streets now, people give me more respect” (Pamela). It also allows them the chance to talk about the profession they pursue: “Since I’ve opened a salon, when I meet guys and tell them what I do, I can talk about it. Those are the things that you can sit at a table and talk about. You’re not ashamed of it.” (Nicole)

Summary

Findings show the extreme challenges migrant women involved in sex work often face in navigating the space within the city and creating their own identity by doing so. On the one hand, the women legitimize their choice of becoming a sex worker as a means to support their family and as a means to escape an economically difficult situation back home. They use the lack of economic opportunities both in their places of origin (e.g. rural South Africa, Zimbabwe) and in Johannesburg and the fact of being single mothers and their families' sole breadwinner to justify their decision to engage in sex work. Thus they represent sex work as work and seek to put themselves equal with any other person pursuing a job trying to make ends meet. These findings illustrate the value society places on parents, and women in particular, who can provide for their families and how migrant women in sex work navigate that discourse to justify the profession they are involved in. Doing this they re-establish respect for themselves by being able to put food on the table, but also change the traditional image of mothers as nurturing, living with their children, married and monogamous (Arendell, 1999) to women who live separate from their families, engage sexually with various partners and who sacrifice their bodies for cash. The women's responses further support the image of what Nyangairi calls "women entrepreneurs" (2010:86; see also Bujra, 1975) seen as women who might have been forced into sex work out of necessity, but then turn their plight into one of economic advantage. On the other hand, however, they battle with the stigma attached to sex work and the fact that the industry is looked down upon where they come from.

Neither woman portrayed herself as a victim, powerless, sexually harassed or oppressed but rather as a survivor, someone who makes choices for which there are consequences. This supports other research which portrays women as "go getters, women with a plan" (Nyangairi, 2010:88) and sex work as a means of empowerment and one way of escaping poverty (Agustin, 2006). The fact that three of the women engaged in sex work immediately upon their arrival in Johannesburg points to the limited choices available to migrants for earning a reasonable income in the city, but also shows that the same women may not even pursue other avenues first, but will see the industry as a means to get good cash fast to either make a living or to simply survive. Their answers showed their desire to emphasise their agency in wanting to find a solution to their precarious economic and family situations (e.g. single-motherhood). In this context, their migration background played a key role as it showed that the women would have unlikely engaged in the industry if they had stayed home. Migration provides them with an opportunity to make a living and support their families, something those who stayed behind might not have been able to do. Being a migrant provides them with a certain level of anonymity and security they might not have enjoyed back home should they have wanted to pursue sex work over there as well; equally it empowers the women and provides them with a means to take responsibility of

themselves and their loved ones. That, inevitably, led to the women creating a life with multiple identities where they navigate between being the “good mother and daughter”, the sex symbol that clients will yearn for and the girl next door who pursues a “normal job”. The idea of a migrant’s mobile identity finds support in a lot of migration literature (Malkki, 1992; Riccio, 2005). Findings support Timotijevic and Breakwell’s (2000) thesis who suggest that it is the contrast in social contexts between home and where they are now, the change in norms and values that come with it, which make it impossible for the women to continue representing themselves in the same way. Instead, the lack of continuity or context to fall back upon forces the women to reassess how they see and represent themselves; it forces them to choose the way they represent sex work and their space within it. The women represented migration and sex work as something that has changed the way they see themselves, echoing the idea of migration-induced reconstruction and re-evaluation of identities found in literature (Malkki, 1992; Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000; Howarth, 2002). Migrating to Johannesburg and engaging in sex work has forced the women to reassess their identity within a new social context and new rules associated with it. This is not to say that they completely rejected their former identity, but rather adjusted their image of themselves and their role in society to a Johannesburg-based context and the context of sex work in particular.

Representations define what people can be in a society (Dyer, 1993), and the women’s choices ultimately reflect their desire to be accepted as part of the working community in Johannesburg’s inner city. The women’s representations had a clear business undertone and some even presented the profession as a real alternative for a long-term livelihood. Money was mentioned as a key driver for their work in sex work and was seen as a sign of security and prosperity. They contrasted their entrepreneurial spirit in sex work with the lack of economic opportunities elsewhere. Giving up sex work would mean giving up being a good mother and daughter, something none of them is willing to do, unless there are other options available to them. They put themselves on a par with any other women pursuing a job, seeking to silence critics and gain moral justification for what they do. The women never described their work nor themselves in derogatory words; at the same time they referred to other women as “decent” and “normal”, suggesting that the opinion they have of themselves is not necessarily as free-of-judgment as they would like it to seem.

They represented their life as extremely mobile. That mobility is represented not just as a necessity to move and survive within a rather fragmented space, to maintain a double life between an identity as a sex worker and that as a good mother and daughter, but also as a genuine desire to move away from sex work, the stigma attached to the profession and return to what they describe as a “normal life”. Anonymity for the women was key and they represented

themselves as rather invisible subjects in a fragmented space. The space they occupy becomes one of the “hidden spaces” mentioned by Vearey (2010:37) in which they invisibly navigate and ultimately define their identity and the space they occupy.

Each woman’s representation should also be seen in the context of the socio and political circumstances they sought to convey. The women referred to the dire economic situation in Zimbabwe, Swaziland or rural South Africa when and as it served to emphasise the push factors that led to them seeking a better life in Johannesburg and in sex work. While their descriptions of the situation back home were rather simplistic and subjective, they did manage to convey an image or partial representation of that reality. This conforms with what scholars referred to as representation being a process of communication and a selective translation of the ‘real’ (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Bal & Boheemen, 1984; Viljoen, 2004). While the information may not suffice to conduct an economic analysis on the situation in Zimbabwe, it did serve to represent a place where livelihood choices were limited and with little prospects of any change in the short to medium term.

4.4.2 Migration, Sex work and Gender

An analysis on representation of migrant women involved in sex work inevitably begs the question of how both migration and the profession challenge gender roles and the women’s own position within society and their respective families.

Agency and Rules

Each woman I interviewed clearly sought to reaffirm her authority or agency within the context of the sex industry, either by establishing rules for the way she went about her job: “I manage my own business. The client don’t have to tell me what to do” (Pamela); or by claiming responsibility for her decisions “I do have a choice (to refuse a client). I’ve realized that I’m doing something that I don’t want to do. I’m not enjoying every piece of it, so I don’t want to be hurt doing this.” (Anna). Even though they may have been forced into the industry by circumstances and a difficult economic situation back home, they sought to portray themselves as women who have ascertained their (limited) agency within the new job by establishing rules their clients have to abide by e.g. choosing which sexual activities they are willing to perform and which not or their insistence on using a condom: “I’m principled because I don’t do my things blindly. I know my rights” (Pamela). All of the women presented themselves as breadwinners in their families, even though they may have had occasional long-term relationships with men, and even though traditionally the caretaking of those same families was the responsibility of men. The women referred to limited employment options for migrant women in Johannesburg to justify their decision to engage in sex work, with domestic work offering too little to give them a sufficient

income to be able to support large families back home: "It was because of circumstances in South Africa. If I had a decent job, I don't think I should have ventured into sex work" (Pamela). While they sought to represent themselves as women who tried all other avenues before engaging in sex work, their answers did not always support that claim, especially as two of the women began in the industry on the day they arrived in the city, with little time to look for other jobs. Equally, they wanted to dismiss opinion by some who "think that you're lazy, and they will think you do sex work because you didn't go to school" (Pamela). Yet when asked how they went about finding other jobs, the same woman said: "There are no jobs. My friend told me sex work is the only thing we can do here" (Pamela).

The "Hero"

The women often chose to represent themselves as heroes, persons who unlike the fathers of their children, took matters into their own hands and sought a way out of their financial predicament, even if that meant "sacrificing their own dignity" (Pamela). The women rarely spoke highly of their male partners or other men in their lives. On the contrary, they portrayed men as weak, without jobs or lacking an idea about how to support their families: "I always tell him that I want to settle down and do something, like a business. He will tell me that there is no money, how can I talk like that" (Pamela). The descriptions stand in contrast to the way the women portrayed themselves as someone who not only makes a living and earns good money to support herself and her family, but someone who also plans ahead. The women represented themselves as independent human beings, yet each claimed to be in something she would call a "normal relationship" (Mary). None of the partners were living with them, even though some of those men were living just a few streets away. And while they dismissed the man's ability to provide for them or their families financially, they attached great importance to the men satisfying them sexually: "I'm a woman and I have to produce as well" (Pamela). This stands in clear contrast to roles traditionally attached to women and men, where it is the women whose role it is to satisfy the man, while he provides for her financially (Crawley, 2000; Hubbard, 1999). In describing their relationships, the women portrayed themselves as those who set the rules in relationships; the men were merely described as "the father of my children" (Anna) or "the man that makes me come" (Pamela). In this context, sex work and migration appear to have had an influence on how the women see and portray men. They all portrayed their partners' worth in monetary terms or by his ability to support a family, primarily because of having been left as a sole breadwinner of their families in the past. They represented themselves as women for whom being economically independent has become more important than falling in love: "Before I would tolerate being with a guy who is not rich, but a guy who gives me love, is taking care of me... I would be with a guy like that. But now, he can take care of me, but it has to go with a package that he's got money" (Nicole). Yet the fact that neither told their partners about the job they were doing points to the

limitations of that newly-gained independence. Some said “I didn’t want him to judge me” (Anna), while others feared the man might want to use it to his advantage: “The guys who don’t mind for their women to be sex workers, they are lazy guys. They prefer their women to work for them. At the end of the day you will end up working for them. They will stay at home and she will sell her body.” (Pamela).

All four women made clear distinctions between relationships and work. They all spoke against getting involved with their clients, saying one should not mix business with pleasure: “Clients want to use you. They just want to come and fuck. Sex work is about business, money, not about relationship, unless you get addicted and you consider the guy the one and you fall in love. But it’s not right to fall in love with them” (Anna). The idea of pleasure features little for the women in their job who said they reserved that for their partners. Similarly, the women attached little importance to their clients and whom he chooses to go with: “He can go with anybody and I’ll go with anybody. It doesn’t matter” (Mary). Both in regards to their partners and clients the women sought to represent themselves as emotionally independent and not bound by the idea of love and long-lasting commitment: “If I’m happy and he is treating me nicely, then it’s ok. And if he doesn’t want to be with me anymore, and he is not happy, then that’s ok too” (Anna). They prioritized money over love and questioned their ability to be in a long-lasting relationship ever again: “It’s going to be difficult for any man to stick with a person he knows he met here in this business. He will never trust you because he will never know what you will be doing behind his back” (Nicole). Having experienced the other side of the coin, they represent themselves as women for whom fidelity becomes secondary, as long as the man cares and respects them: “If he cheats, I don’t care, as long as he comes back in the morning and is safe” (Mary).

Summary

The way the women I spoke to represented themselves contradicted the abolitionist view which portrays women as victims and vulnerable. On the contrary, the women portrayed themselves as independent individuals, who made conscious decisions about entering the industry as a means to improve their lives and support their families. The women presented sex work as something that allowed them to transition from someone constrained by circumstances (e.g. poverty, lack of jobs) to somebody who can make choices or decisions about her family and future by gaining financial independence. The women challenge common gender norms by portraying themselves as the breadwinners in their families and as those who dictate rules in relationships. That idea of migration and sex work as empowering women is supported by other literature which point to the idea of a “manufactured identity” that allows sex workers to both control their workplace, but also to define a “business strategy” to create a character that will appeal to their clients and allow them to maximize their profits (Sanders, 2005:319)

The women's portrayal of men as weak and a tool for their own pleasure seeks to underline their own status as independent women in control of their lives and families, and unwilling to let men, who have disappointed and left them alone in the past, rule their lives. The findings reflect other literature on the subject, which suggests that the business approach to sex work and refusal to pretend intimacy serves as a means to retain the women's autonomy (Nyangairi, 2010) and manage the tensions of the job (Phoenix, 2000; Sanders, 2005). Some literature does suggest emotional connections between migrant sex workers and their clients (Sanders, 2005), although the women I spoke to vehemently rejected that as even a possibility. The women rejected labels which marked women engaged in the industry as either secondary class or diabolic (Venables, 2009; Busza, 2004; Nyangairi, 2010), but rather insisted on representing themselves as heroes who managed to take entire families out of misery and who, unlike their former partners or husbands, took initiative to change their lifestyle and escape economic difficulties. In addition, their drive to emphasise agency and their individual trajectory into migration and sex work supports research that advocates for a more nuanced study on migrants and sex workers that would recognize the women as active individuals rather than a homogenous group void of political action and victims of stereotypes and generalizations (Bhabha, 2004; Crawley, 2000; Hubbard, 1999; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001).

4.4.3 Migration, Sex work and Self-Representation

Along with migration and gender, the representation around sex work plays a key role in the way women involved in the industry define their identity and how they choose to portray that image to others.

Sex work as Work

All the women I spoke to represented sex work as work (see Table 2:39). Neither spoke of being trafficked or forced into the industry by a pimp, but rather described their trajectory into the job as their own choice or decision. This is not to say that trafficking or cases of forced engagement with the industry did not exist, but rather that they did not feature among the women I interviewed.

All women went to great lengths to differentiate between their job and that of other women who would have many boyfriends at the same time, yet not acknowledge to be selling sex: "There is a difference between a sex worker and a prostitute. A sex worker is earning a living through business, but someone who goes around and sleeps with many men just for enjoyment, or just for him to get it up... that's a prostitute" (Pamela)

The women translated their business approach to the profession to any other relationships they have with men: “We are all on business. You won’t be enjoying sex now. What you will be after is money” (Pamela). Two of the women described themselves as “addicted to the money” (Nicole) and the luxuries it afforded: “I wanted more money. You know you get used to the money and you just want more” (Nicole). They never questioned their own values, norms or character, but rather blamed their fascination with money as a result of the profession: “This job made me hungry for money, I tried to quit, but I couldn’t. Next thing you know you are broke and clients are calling you. This job has changed me” (Nicole). Even their personal relationships with men were presented as a business proposition: “When you see a man, even when he wants to marry you, you will look at money. You want to see how much money he has. So somehow it distracts your normal life” (Nicole).

Migration, Sex work and Shame

The women I interviewed clearly rejected the victim image, but rather represented themselves as strong and independent individuals who made choices for which there were consequences: “I’m just proud of myself and that I can support my family. I’m proud that I’m not discouraged by what other people say about me” (Anna). However, each was aware of the stigma associated with the industry, especially given that it contradicted the values they were brought up with: “In our culture, people don’t think that a person should be having more than one boyfriend at a time. A person mustn’t sleep with more than one man in her life” (Pamela). They thus represented their involvement in sex work as a battle between the need to support their families, their belief of doing “something good for my family” (Anna) and the label that society put on them: “People don’t even know why we are on the streets. Maybe their mothers were sex workers before, but they don’t know. What is dirty there? Maybe others they are doctors today because their mothers were sex workers and paid for their education” (Mary). While they all sought to justify their involvement in sex work by their support of entire families, they also sought validation from the fact that they were helping their clients and even “saved some marriages” (Anna). Here they represented themselves as women who respected the men’s privacy and their family life: “I don’t want to ruin this; I respect that he has his own family and just want us to have fun” (Nicole). They also spoke about providing a vent for the men’s problems at home: “Sometimes men need a break. As long as the wife doesn’t know anything that is happening, as long as the client goes back home and behaves... I don’t see any problem” (Anna).

Migrant Sex Worker as Health Ambassador

The women were very keen to present themselves as very health-conscious (see Table 2:41), as responsible women who understand the risks of the job and took clear measures to protect themselves: “If you don’t take care of yourself, if you don’t use a condom, you’re risking yourself.

If I get an infection, it will be my fault. I need to protect myself" (Pamela). Three of the four women are volunteers at the clinic and often visit brothels to educate other sex workers about infections and other diseases. They used this fact to depict the image of women who not only look after themselves but also after others. Using the example of their volunteering work, they sought to depict the image of women who are respected and whom others turn to for advice: "Now, people give me more respect. They always take us as nurses and we have to tell them that we are not nurses, but peer educators" (Pamela). In the same context, the four women presented themselves as women who did not use drugs or alcohol, although they said there were others "who did those things once in a while" (Anna). Their desire to be perceived as "clean" and health-conscious women also comes through in their description of their interaction with clients. Once again, they emphasised their control and their right to refuse a client if they felt they could be harmed: "When he took off his clothes, he was looking terrible. He was having some sores at the back. I was even afraid of touching the guy...his discharge. I was thinking that if I touch the guy, I'll get it. I told him I'm sorry but I can't," (Anna). They dismissed the notion or accusation that most sex workers spread HIV/AIDS; instead, they portrayed themselves as knowledgeable about the risks of condom-less sex and eager to protect both themselves and their client: "If a client says 'please, let's not use a condom, I'll put another 100 rand', I say 'no'. No sex. It's better not to have sex at all" (Mary). To emphasise their own superiority or their awareness on the subject matter, they represented their clients as "ignorant", "clueless", and "reckless" and men who would willingly risk their lives and that of the women: "These rural people, they don't even want to hear anything about condoms. They say they are not allowed to use it. It's their ignorance. Others they still live in stigma. They think that if they see me fat like this, I'm free from HIV" (Pamela). The women claimed to "always tell" the clients when the condom breaks and also urge them to visit a clinic. They pointed to trainings they have done as part of their volunteer work to make a distinction between themselves and the "other sex workers": "I used to use two condoms, but now, after I've done this basic HIV course, I know that it's more likely that they will break if you use two. Now I just use one" (Pamela).

Managed Vulnerability

Even though the women I spoke to sought to represent themselves as independent and strong women, able to provide for themselves and their families without the help of their men, they did indicate that there was a limit to that independence (see Table 2:39). Given that sex work is illegal in South Africa, the women were limited by the lack of protection from police and the law and were often forced to oblige police officers and security guards within brothels via monetary bribes or by offering them sexual services to avoid being arrested or beaten up by violent clients. Even here, however, the women sought to represent themselves as individuals who have learnt how the system works and have found their own way of dealing with its restrictions: "Most of the

police, they are my friends. They don't trouble me. When they arrest you, you just give them money" (Mary). Equally, knowing their physical limitations and their inability to defend themselves against too violent clients, they will pay security guards to assure that they are assisted, if needed. "You have to give the security an incentive. They'll say 'we are doing you a favour'" (Pamela). It is in that context of what I would call "managed vulnerability" that the women place their preference to work in a brothel as opposed to a street. They differentiate themselves from the women who continue working the streets and even call them "cheap": "On the streets, they take advantage of you. They always think you're cheap. It is very dangerous. You get caught by the cops and they will lock you up" (Nicole). Only Mary made a calculated choice to continue working on the street, despite having been raped three times. She presented that decision as a conscious choice to ascertain her freedom and her independence from a "greedy brothel owner" (Mary).

Hidden Pride

Even though the women pursue a job they are "not proud of" (Nicole), which they "don't like" (Anna), are "bored with" (Mary) or "ashamed of" (Pamela), there were instances when their responses reflected a certain pride, not only in their ability to provide for their families, but in their services as a sex worker as well. "There are guys who are stepping through the door and I know, that guy is coming for me. It's good. You'll be knowing each other by then. You know what he wants. He knows me" (Pamela). All four women claimed to have "more than enough" clients (Anna), although there may have been some dry spells here and there. They each believed to have something to offer that the clients like: "I'm fat, I'm a dwarf, but there are other guys who like the curves" (Pamela), and they believe to have something that the wives or local sex workers may not be able to provide: "During sex, they say Zimbabweans are better in bed than South Africans" (Pamela). They all represented themselves as women who took the initiative, not only in attracting clients but also in bed. This was reflected in their choice of clothes or costumes to attract certain clients or please certain states; as Pamela put it, clothes would be "abused" to serve their purpose. Rather than waiting for men to choose them among other ten or more sex workers, the women represented themselves as women who developed their own strategies for approaching clients and went about executing them. Nicole made a clear distinction between attracting clients in a Hillbrow brothel where everyone is expected to be a sex worker and in a Sandton hotel: "In a Hilton hotel, he didn't come there for buying sex. So now I have to have a certain approach, talk to a client about what I'm doing as a decent person and I have to represent myself as a decent lady" (Nicole). This comment adds yet another layer to the woman's double life; she not only has to choose between representing herself as a "good mother and daughter" or a "sex worker", but, depending on circumstances, also represents herself as a "decent lady" in order to get access to a man and work as a sex worker.

As Nicole's comment shows, the women grapple with the tension of seeing their job as a livelihood choice and fighting the stigma attached to the industry. The strong use of business language when referring to the industry speaks for their desire for sex work to be recognized as work. While they referred to themselves as "worker" and to the men as "clients" or "customers", they grappled with names such as "whore" or "mahure"⁶ used by others to refer to them: "Sex workers are treated like dirt; they are outcast to the community. The community says we are taking their husbands, we are bringing diseases like HIV/AIDS, breaking up marriages" (Mary). Yet the debate around legalization or decriminalization of the industry in South Africa puts the women in a dilemma: While it would allow them to pursue the work without being hassled by the police and with access to service as any other worker, it would mean pursuing the profession openly, which nearly all of them are trying to avoid: "Nobody wants their woman or man be involved in sex work. So legalizing wouldn't really change it for me" (Pamela). This is why most choose to work in brothels or from the privacy of their own home so as not to be recognized as a sex worker or avoid being seen by people who know. This I saw as one of the contradictions the women were grappling with: while they were open to speak to me about their job and how they got there, it was not something they were willing to admit in public.

Out of all the women I interviewed, both formally and informally, only Mary appeared to be open in public about the job she was pursuing. She even went on television to talk about the industry after she fell pregnant for the third time following a rape. She said that while some may judge her after those revelations, it made life easier overall and she was not bothered by others' opinion anyway: "I don't care about what anybody says. They haven't done anything for me. I live my life. I live for myself" (Mary). Her TV appearance was linked to her desire to give up her child – the result of a rape – for adoption. As she explained to me, it was not her desire to be pitied or ridiculed, but a genuine "call for help" and an attempt to "show people that sex workers are human beings too" (Mary).

Summary

As this section illustrates, the women go to great lengths to represent their involvement in sex work as work and as a livelihood choice they made to support their families. Relationships with men are sporadic and loose at best, with each women taking great care not to rely on any after having been left alone and penniless in the past. The women battle with the desire to see themselves as heroes and those who are helping their families out of poverty, yet being marked by society as doing something that is perceived as 'bad' or 'immoral'.

⁶ Whore.

The fact that all the women I spoke to represented sex work as work seems to suggest a common attitude to the industry or how those involved or its advocates would like it to be represented. This can be partially attributed to the fact that all the women had at some point come in contact with groups such as SWEAT and Sisonke which are advocating for sex worker rights and for sex work to be recognized as work. Their own representation could possibly be understood as a reaction to those messages and reflect what Howarth describes as identities constructed “through and against representation” (2002:20), making the women’s self-representation also a reaction to representations by others. While their stories were unique in terms of factors that influenced the women getting into sex work and their choices in staying in the industry, there were many similarities in the way they described the industry and their attitude to sex work. This can be seen as a reflection of a group identity (Breakwell, 1993; Timotijevic & Breakwell, 200; Fearon, 1999) which the women subconsciously formed while at work, living in Johannesburg and through their interaction with other migrant sex workers.

The women represented themselves as very health-conscious, partially to emphasise their agency in being able to look after themselves and to protect themselves from the harms of the industry. Insisting on the use of a condom is one of the things all women mentioned. Literature takes that argument further and suggests that for the women the condom becomes a “psychological barrier” which helps avoid any skin-to-skin contact with the client’s genitalia and which separated the sexual act from any emotional feelings (Sanders, 2005:326).

4.4.4 Migration, Sex Work and Urban Space

Urban space – in this context the inner-city neighbourhood of Hillbrow – has a clear implication on how migrant women engage with sex work and ultimately how they represent themselves (Kerkin, 2004; O’Shaughnessy, 2008; Hubbard & Sanders, 2003). All of the women I spoke to started in the profession while working the streets or the brothels in Hillbrow. They said the industry was “wide-spread” in the downtown neighbourhood (Anna), making it easy for a woman to start in the job immediately after arriving in the city. In the brothels everyone was expected to be a sex worker, making it easier for the women to approach clients, especially that first time.

Hillbrow

Most represented Hillbrow as “very crowded”, full of “crime, drugs, and corrupt police”: “You know, where there is sex work, there are thieves (see Table 2:41). They go hand-in-hand, these people” (Pamela). Others said the situation has improved after the government had stepped up its measures to fight crime. The reputation of the neighbourhood preceded it, one admitted. This raises the question whether the woman knew what lay in store for them before actually arriving in

the city, although they declined this being so: "If you tell people that you live in Hillbrow, people will be shocked, because they've heard about it" (Pamela).

The women portrayed the urban centre as a place which centres on people's quest to make a way out of poverty and to improve their livelihood: "people always think of money there" (Nicole). This would apply to the women as well, who represent themselves as business women with a clear business approach to their job. Like other people in Hillbrow, they compete with fellow migrants and locals for already scarce resources, especially jobs and housing. Similarly, they compete with other sex workers for clients and an opportunity to make a living. They presented the brothels as very crowded places with little privacy, with up to three women entertaining their clients in one room at the same time: "I tried to tell her that we are on business, there is no privacy" (Pamela). The women spoke of incidents in which other sex workers reported them to the police or had organized gangsters to rob them their hard-earned cash, painting a picture of a neighbourhood with little camaraderie, where everyone minds his own business and his own quest for survival.

Hillbrow is a place where many Africans from across the continent first come to when arriving in Johannesburg and (Richter, 2008; Leggett, 2002). "It's a place where you find people from everywhere... everyone says, if you've never been to Hillbrow, you've never been to Joburg⁷. That's where the cream of Joburg is... all of the entertainment of Joburg is in Hillbrow. Especially all African people start in Hillbrow" (Pamela). Similarly, the sex workers I spoke to have started in Hillbrow, but some eventually moved their job to neighbourhoods adjacent to Hillbrow or sought to pursue their profession in other parts of the city where they said it was easier to be paid better and where there was less competition for clients. Even within Hillbrow the women attached different labels to different brothels and the amounts one could charge in each: "I never tried for 50 rand because I didn't think I could do that for 50 rand. Not that I'm saying... but you make choices in life, I never worked in those places... The place I worked at started from 150 upwards" (Nicole). Moving out of Hillbrow gave the women an opportunity to fight what they described as "the image of a Hillbrow sex worker" which they described as women being "cheap" (Nicole). After looking and entertaining clients in hotels in the upper-class suburb of Sandton, Nicole eventually set up her business at home in another inner-city neighbourhood, from where she entertains selected customers whom she finds over the Internet. Her two-bedroom apartment in a suburb adjacent to Hillbrow stands in dire contrast to the living conditions of women living in the brothels in Hillbrow and her lifestyle reflects a desire to move away towards what she calls "a more normal life, a real life": "I feel a bit more comfortable about the whole situation because I'm more into myself, I'm more independent, more free, more in control of myself," she said. Her mobility has

⁷ Short for Johannesburg, used in colloquial language.

become not only a way to “get access to more clients and better money”, but ultimately affected how Nicole saw and represented herself. While she still pursued the job, to her being a sex worker in a Hillbrow brothel was attached a different label than working from her home in the adjacent neighbourhood where she says she can “set all the rules”. Equally, the surroundings in which she conducts her job have a major influence on how she perceives and ultimately describes what she does: whereas she described her work in Hillbrow as “cheap” and a way to “get quick cash”, she credited attracting clients in Sandton and from the privacy of her home to her ability to “represent myself as a decent lady”; here she turned away from the description of her job as work, but rather referred to it as “we enjoy our company”. I see that change in tone as yet another indication of her desire to remove herself from the stigma associated with the job and to create, at least the impression, of pursuing what she describes as a “normal job”.

Summary

As this section illustrates, Hillbrow has both an implication on how the women ended up in the industry in the first place, but also on how they portray their role within it. The neighbourhood becomes a backdrop for the industry; equally, the reality of sex work in Hillbrow appears to imitate the reality of the neighbourhood as a whole, where people compete in their quest to either realize their dreams or simply make a way out of poverty. Similarly, the characteristics or perception of the neighbourhood have an impact on how the women see themselves and how they portray their job, with sex work gaining a different connotation when done in Hillbrow as compared to other suburbs throughout the city.

As much as Hillbrow is represented as influencing the women’s identity, so does the women’s representation impact on the perception of the downtown neighbourhood. These findings echo works by classics such as de Certeau and their idea of spaces as an extension of people and their operations within it (1984). The women interact with Hillbrow on an everyday basis, either while working, while volunteering at the clinic or while strolling through the neighbourhood. Each time their purpose affects how they represent themselves within that same yet changing space. The women represented their lives as very mobile, echoing literature which describes migrants’ lives as very fluid (Sigel, 2001; Polzer, 2008; Adepoju, 2006), leading to them having to recreate their identity and its representation on a continuous basis. Similarly, the idea of urban spaces and as an extension of the migrants’ lives being very mobile also support the women’s representation of a moving, fragmented and to some extent fragile space that is constantly reproduced by its residents (O’Shaughnessy, 2008; Lalli, 1992). The women’s representation of inner-city Johannesburg also echoed others’ description of the urban space as a dynamic and diverse area (Landau, 2009; Mpe, 2001; Leggett, 2003), in which the large migrant population has contributed to its diversity, yet created a number of developmental challenges at the same time, with people

fighting for jobs, housing, social services and other scarce resources (Vearey et al, 2009; Landau, 2006; Mpe, 2001; Beall et al, 2000).

Working within a profession that is both illegal and stigmatized, I see parallels between the space migrant women occupy and what Vearey refers to as “hidden spaces” (2010:37). While the women I spoke to stressed their desire to represent themselves as independent individuals in control of their lives, their agency is limited by the abuse and discrimination on part of the police and lack of a state-recognised support network. Instead, the women deliberately choose to keep their profession unknown and go about their job from spaces that are hidden and which they can at least partially control.

4.4.5 Methodology in (Self) Representation

The women I interviewed freely recounted the stories about their trajectories into sex work and their openness to talk about the rather sensitive subject surprised me at first (see Table 2:41). This was even more surprising when – at their suggestion – we conducted two of the interviews in a public space. I assume the fact that I was introduced to them via the Reproductive Health and HIV Research Unit (RHRU) partially eased the process and helped to create an environment of trust. At times I felt they were looking for validation that what they were doing was not a bad thing. Some of them frequently used religious references to look for some type of justification: “God knows why I am doing this” (Mary) and “I used to pray, please God help me so that I can get out because I know that you don’t want me to do this. I’m doing a sin. Just help me. Even today I pray that he helps me. I know one day he will help me” (Anna).

The language they used surprised me as within the same sentence they would jump from using eloquent English to being rather vulgar, with words like “fuck”, “suck” and “tits” used rather freely. I see it as a reflection of the language they are used to using every day. Overall, they described the industry very much in business terms: “I am doing this sex work business” (Pamela). They would sometimes refer to themselves in the third person, as if to distance themselves from what they were doing or who they were and to make it easier to describe some of the experiences we talked about: “She wanted to change her life, she was trying her best, she was going to school, but ends up losing hope” (Anna). Some of the women were very outspoken and straightforward from the first interview, while others opened up with consecutive sessions. It was difficult to sometimes get details on some of the experiences as they either slipped from the women’s memories or the women were only willing to share the general picture and needed some follow-up questions to reveal more. I insisted only so far as some of the experiences they were describing appeared to have been very traumatic.

The women often avoided eye contact; sometimes they would change the tone of their voice in what seemed to be an attempt at evoking sympathy. I was directly asked by one of the women if I could help her find another job. I have taken note of the silences, especially the prolonged one, where I felt the women sought to express something by not describing it. One such example was Mary's description of her last rape. Every time she arrived at details on which she did not want to elaborate, she would begin her sentence by: "I don't want to lie..." and then not say a word for a minute or two and change the topic altogether thereafter.

The women I interviewed clearly struggled with names such as "whore" used by others to refer to them, seeing it as both degrading and full of stigmas. This stands in contrast with other literature on the subject which shows women in sex work deliberately using derogatory labels and stigmatised words to refer to each other as a way of expressing solidarity, to exclude others and to add a new meaning and values to the terms (Nyangairi, 2010).

Summary

The tools used to create a representation are important in shaping that image. The women often used religious references to justify their involvement in the industry. The language used by the women was both harsh and gentle at the same time, once again underlining the duplicity in identities the women are battling with. Their use of derogatory words could be seen as a desire to mark their independence and power and a reflection of the fact that the women already believed to have "transgressed all social norms and may feel they have nothing to lose" (Nyangairi, 2010).

4.5 Conclusions

This discussion highlights the challenges migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg often face in navigating their way in the discourses around migration and sex work and in forming their identity within it. There is no one representation of a migrant sex worker in South Africa; the images depicted by the four women merely served as examples of the contradictions and paradoxes women in their position face in defining how they see themselves and how they represent that self to others. Their representation partially contradicts both the view of abolitionists who represent sex workers as victims of exploitation and that of proponents of sex worker rights who emphasize the women's choice to offer their bodies for sale. Instead, the discussion around the representation of the four women in this study highlighted the tension between those two views. It showed how the women represented themselves as both "heroes" and "victims of circumstances". It showed how they found their newly-found agency and autonomy limited by the illegal status of sex work in South Africa and the stigma attached to the industry both here and the places where they come from. This discussion further showed how

both migration and sex work afforded the women a chance to find their financial independence and a voice within a rather patriarchal society and assume a role traditionally only afforded to men. It highlighted how inner-city Johannesburg influenced the way those same women saw and presented themselves and how changing environments led to a change in their representation as well. Finally, it showed that while there are some parallels between the four women, there are also great differences, supporting the argument for research on migration and sex work that supports that diversity rather than treating migrant women in sex work as a homogenous group. In the following two chapters I will show how migrant women involved in sex work are represented in fictional work and look for parallels and contradictions between the two types of representation.

5. Research Findings & Analysis: Fiction

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I sought to discuss and analyse how the women I interviewed as part of this research saw and represented themselves. In this chapter, using examples of fiction – be it cinema, literature, poetry or theatre -- I will show how migrant women involved in sex work are represented by others and within fictional works in particular. I will then show how the women's self-representation and fictional representation either contrast or complement each other or both.

It is not my intention to offer a comprehensive analysis of the various types of migrant sex worker representation in fictional work available as this goes beyond the scope of this study. Instead, using examples of fictional work written or produced by African authors I highlight some of the 'character types' found within work produced by Africans or works which portray an example of the African migrant sex worker or the migrant sex worker within a Johannesburg inner-city setting in particular. I have set my analysis against the four underlying themes of this study: migration, urban, gender and sex work.

My analysis focuses on the way the character of the migrant sex worker is portrayed and to what extent the background/origin of the author/director/playwright had influenced that representation. I examine the characters and the storyline of each narrative and analyse the various tools used by the authors – be it language, timeline, conflict and others – to create their migrant sex worker representation.

5.2 The Stories

I looked at 11 works of fiction, ranging from works which specifically look at migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg or other cities and others which include references to sex work in an urban setting as part of a bigger story. While I initially identified a much broader selection of works from across the continent, my final choice was partially limited by what material could be sourced, as many of the works were out of print. I focused on works written by African authors and those which looked at sex work within a migration context. These included movements that were rural-urban, cross-border or between continents. In my analysis I gave greater attention to the Johannesburg-based works as they allowed for a better direct comparison with my interviews. These include Moele's *Room 207* (2006), Kleinboer's *Midnight Missionary* (2006), Grootboom's *Foreplay* (2009), Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001) and Junction Avenue Theatre Company's *Love, Crime and Johannesburg* (2000).

In the following table, I give a short overview of the different works, the perspective from which their story was told and an indication of how migrant sex workers were represented in each. I shall expand on this in my discussion that follows.

TITLE & AUTHOR	DATE	SETTING	NARRATOR	SUMMARY / THE STORY	REPRESENTATION OF MIGRANT SEX WORKERS
Novel					
<i>Midnight Missionary</i> by Kleinboer	2006	Inner-city Jo'burg	Told from a client's perspective / a male perspective	Recounts the story of a sex-mad Afrikaner man who tours the brothels in Hillbrow in search for company of black migrant sex workers.	The narrator describes a number of women, all from different countries from across Africa. Most are represented as migrants who engage in the industry as a means to make a living and support their families back home. The author's description of the women are very male, partially derogatory, focused on the women's physical attributes and her ability to perform during the sexual act.
<i>Welcome to our Hillbrow</i> by Phaswane Mpe	2001	Hillbrow, Jo'burg	Told in the second person	Refense moves to Johannesburg from a South African village and is confronted with xenophobia, crime and drug abuse which seem to plague the downtown neighbourhood.	Portrays sex workers as part of his representation of a neighbourhood. Author challenges perception of migrant sex workers as spreaders of HIV/AIDS. He also challenges perception of migrants as the source of all evil in Hillbrow. Sets his portrayal of a migrant sex worker against the "moral and physical decay" of Hillbrow.
<i>Room 207</i> by Kgebetli Moele	2006	Hillbrow, Jo'burg	Told from one of the protagonist's perspective; a limited omniscient narrator.	Six young men live together in a room in Hillbrow, from where they try to make their dreams in the "dream city" come true.	All women in the novel are referred to as "whores", although the meaning differs between derogatory to almost affectionate. Migrant sex workers are portrayed as women who engage in the profession to make ends meet. Not even a college degree could secure them a job. They are portrayed as seeking affection; one sex workers falls in love with one of the protagonists, infects him with AIDS.
<i>The Abandoned Baobab</i> by Ken Bugul	1982	Rural Senegal and Brussels, Belgium	Autobiography / a woman's perspective	A Senegalese woman moves to Belgium where her 'coming of age' becomes an exercise in confronting her negritude, feminism and colonial heritage.	The migrant woman makes a conscious choice to engage in sex work to challenge ideas of her black and African identity within a European context.
<i>On Black Sisters' Street</i> by Chika Unigwe	2009	Lagos, Nigeria and Antwerp, Belgium	An omniscient narrator; able to see into each of the four character's minds	Four Nigerian women are lured to Belgium by a pimp who promises them riches in Europe, but keeps them captive in Belgian brothels instead. When one woman is murdered, it forces the other to re-examine their lives and what lies ahead.	Each woman is represented as a victim of a ruthless pimp who forces them into sex work, with no option to escape. The one woman who tries to escape the brothel before paying off her debt, finishes dead. The other three women are portrayed as making peace with their fate and only manage to break out of sex work after paying off their debt.
<i>Beyond the Horizon</i> by Amma Darko	1991	Rural Nigeria and Germany	A limited omniscient narrator; tells the story from the woman's point of view.	A woman from rural Nigeria is lured into sex work in Germany by her greedy husband.	The woman takes revenge on her husband, but has sunk too deep into the profession to quit.
Poem					
<i>Song of Malaya</i> by Okot p'Bitek	1988	An African town	Told from a sex worker's perspective	The poem centres on a sex worker's plight and how she fights stigma attached to the job.	The sex worker ridicules the hypocrisy of African societies which condemn sex workers, yet often take advantages of their services at the same time.

Drama					
<i>Love, crime and Johannesburg</i> by Musical Junction Avenue Theatre Company	2000	Jo'burg	An objective narrator.	The play tells the story of once heroes of the struggle who now rob or buy banks. The story is a sober look at crime and politics in post-apartheid South Africa.	The entire city is portrayed as a "teenage whore", used and abused by men.
<i>Foreplay</i> by Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom	2009	A South African township	An objective narrator.	A series of sketches that look at ten different characters, linked by their need to fill their sexual desire.	The play portrays everyone as a "whore", in need of instant gratification in a society where violence and AIDS are part of everyday life. The sex worker is portrayed as fighter and avenger, who both receives the virus and spreads it as well.
Film					
<i>District 9</i> by Neill Blomkamp	2009	Jo'burg	An objective narrator.	The story tells of aliens living in a Johannesburg township and centres on the themes of xenophobia and social segregation in South Africa.	The sex workers in the movie are represented as Nigerian women, who even sell their services to aliens.
<i>Blood Diamonds</i> by Edward Zwick	2006	Sierra Leone	An objective narrator.	Set against the backdrop of the civil war in Sierra Leone, tells the story of a South African mercenary and a fisherman, whose fates are joined in a quest for a rare diamond. The movie exposes the blood diamond industry, where gems are used to finance conflicts.	Sex workers line up the streets of Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital and seek to lure clients (including the movie's protagonist) in the bright light of day. They insist they are "clean".

Table 3: Works of Fiction – An Overview.

It is important to note that I can only deduct from the information available, which in some of the works was limited, especially where migration and sex work were a marginal theme and not the focus of the work itself. This is why my discussion and analysis of the works may be dominated by some works which gave me more material to work with.

Some stories, such as Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* focus on portraying the women's trajectory into migration and into sex work (Darko, 1991; Unigwe, 2009), others represent migration and the sex work industry from a client's perspective without going into much detail about the why and how the women end up as migrants and in the profession (Kleinboer, 2006). Some use the sex migrant worker to draw a picture of a city, a neighbourhood (Mpe, 2001; Moele, 2006; Donaldson, 2010) or to make certain claims about society and its morals (p'Bitek, 1988; Grootboom, 2009). Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom's *Foreplay* – an adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's *La Ronde* – is a series of 10 interconnected scenes on South Africa's moral hypocrisy when it comes to sex (Grootboom, 2009). Films such as *District 9* and *Blood Diamonds* only briefly portray the migrant sex worker seeking to attract clients on the streets or townships of two African capitals, only to further emphasize the chaos and complexity

of an urban centre. Karin Eloff's *Stiletto* is a personal account of an Afrikaans girl's trajectory to becoming a stripper, then an erotic dancer and masseuse in an escort agency (Eloff, 2010). Finally, Ken Bugul's *The Abandoned Baobab* shows how a Senegalese woman gets involved in sex work in Belgium to gain a moment of attention that differs from the other moments of recognition where she is primarily seen as a black, colonized woman (Bugul, 1982).

No story is the same and it would be dangerous to generalize about the nature of fictional representation of migration and sex work in Africa as a result of these works as much as the women I spoke to represented four very distinct trajectories into migration and sex work. While there are some common themes that have emerged as a result of a comparison of these works, there are also clear differences in the way the authors portrayed the women, what tools they used to do so and what goal they appear to have wanted to achieve with their specific representation of the women's migration trajectories and the sex industry. Equally, the narrative authority between the different authors, poets and filmmakers differs in degree based on the research that preceded their work or the origin of the information that served as the basis of each specific portrayal. I will look at that specifically under the methodologies section.

5.3 Emerging Themes & Coding

The following themes and codes emerged from my analysis of the fictional works. While some were directly comparable to what I found in my analysis of my interviews, there were others which were specifically relevant to fictional work, primarily due to the tools and methodologies applied in creating their fictional representation.

THEME	DESCRIPTION & EXAMPLES
Migration and link to sex work	Migration & sex work as key concepts (<i>Midnight Missionary; Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street</i>) or as a means to illustrate a neighbourhood, society, 'the bigger picture' (<i>District 9, Welcome to Our Hillbrow, Room 207</i>) Migration / sex work as a survival strategy (<i>Room 207; Midnight Missionary</i>) women Migration / sex work as part of trafficking (<i>Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Migration as a precursor to sex work (<i>Beyond the Horizon; On Black Sisters' Street, Room 207</i>) Sex work and illegal migration (<i>Beyond the Horizon; On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Sex work and migration as temporary (<i>The Abandoned Baobab, Midnight Missionary</i>) vs permanent (<i>Beyond the Horizon, Song of Malaya, Foreplay</i>) Migration and sex work as choice: validation / test of cultural/racial/colonial background (<i>The Abandoned Baobab</i>) Lack of opportunities back home (<i>nearly all</i>) Migration to ensure anonymity in sex work (<i>nearly all</i>) Migration, sex work and post-colonial corruption / objectification of the black body
Role / Perception of migrant sex work	Migrant sex work as work (<i>Song of Malaya, On Black Sisters' Street, Beyond the Horizon, Welcome to Our Hillbrow, Foreplay, Room 207, Midnight Missionary</i>) Migrant sex work as a secret / double/triple life (<i>On Black Sisters' Street, Beyond the Horizon</i>) Migrant sex work as entertainment (<i>Whoring</i>) Migrant sex work as metaphor for society (<i>Love, Crime and Johannesburg; Song of Malaya</i>) Migrant sex work and road to entrepreneurship (<i>On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Migrant sex worker as rebel (<i>The Abandoned Baobab</i>)
Local / foreign	Mistrust between sex workers depending on origin (<i>On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Disregard of origin by clients (<i>Midnight Missionary</i>)
Managed Vulnerability	Sex work & few options for illegal migrant women (<i>Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Lack of protection from police, system because of illegal status (<i>Whoring; Beyond the Horizon</i>)

	Victims turn survivor (<i>Beyond the Horizon</i>) Women as physically weaker than men (<i>Beyond the Horizon</i>)
Migrant sex worker and gender roles	Migrant sex worker as provider, breadwinner (<i>Midnight Missionary, On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Migrant sex worker as victim (<i>Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Transition from victim to survivor and even avenger (<i>Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Representation of women who fight against abuse, objectification, commodification of their bodies (<i>The Abandoned Baobab</i>) Single-parenthood (<i>Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street, Midnight Missionary</i>) Migrant sex worker as victim of abuse, blackmail (<i>Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Portrayal of men as weak, pimps, abusive / changing ideas of what a man should be like (<i>Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street, Midnight Missionary, Whoring, Room 207, Foreplay</i>) Migrant sex worker and fulfillment of male fantasy (<i>Midnight Missionary</i>)
Autonomy / Agency	Agency in decision to become sex worker or its lack (<i>Beyond the Horizon/The Abandoned Baobab</i>) Rules in sex work Agency in maneuvering the system (<i>Beyond the Horizon, The Abandoned Baobab, Midnight Missionary; Foreplay</i>) Migrant sex work and independence / control of one's fate (<i>Room 207, Midnight Missionary, Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street</i>)
Migrant sex worker and networks	Mistrust between sex workers / Individuality (<i>On Black Sisters' Street, Beyond the Horizon</i>) Sharing in sex work (<i>Midnight Missionary</i>) Networks & ability to adapt to or leave sex work (<i>Beyond the Horizon, The Abandoned Baobab</i>) Networks, need for empathy – bonding in misery (<i>On Black Sisters' Street, Beyond the Horizon</i>)
Migrant sex worker and families / partner	Partner as pimp (<i>Beyond the Horizon</i>) Representation as good mothers/daughters (<i>Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street, Midnight Missionary</i>) Vulnerability of others as justification for engagement or perseverance in sex work (<i>Midnight Missionary, Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Lack of partner (<i>nearly all</i>)
Migrant sex worker and mobility	Mobility between brothels, clients (<i>Beyond the Horizon, Midnight Missionary</i>) Mobility as means to survive (<i>Beyond the Horizon</i>) Mobility as means to get better cash (<i>Foreplay</i>) Mobility as means to quit sex work ; Mobility into and out of sex work (<i>The Abandoned Baobab</i>)
Migration, sex work and shame	Shame as a luxury (<i>On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Shame as an obstacle to returning back home (<i>Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Battle with stigma associated with sex work back home (<i>all</i>)
Migration, sex work and health	Migrant sex work & drug abuse (<i>Beyond the Horizon, On Black Sisters' Street, Midnight Missionary</i>) Migrant sex worker and condom use or lack thereof (<i>Foreplay, Midnight Missionary</i>) Migrant sex worker and HIV/AIDS: support (<i>Room 207</i>) or reject it (<i>Welcome to Our Hillbrow</i>) Drugs as means to deal with burden of sex work (<i>Beyond the Horizon</i>) Sex workers as health conscious (<i>Beyond the Horizon</i>) Migrant sex worker and alcohol (<i>Midnight Missionary</i>) Clients and health (<i>Midnight Missionary</i>)
Urban space and sex work	Use of sex work / migration to portray society, its hypocrisy, loose morals: the city is a "teenage whore" (<i>Love, crime and Johannesburg</i>); "everyone is a whore" (<i>Foreplay</i>) Representation of neighbourhood or city via sex work (<i>Welcome to Our Hillbrow, Room 207, District 9, Blood Diamonds, Song of Malaya</i>)
Perspective / Narrative authority	Objective narrator: 'Objective' narration in films and drama, yet portraying the director's / playwright's point of view (<i>Foreplay; Love, Crime and Johannesburg; District 9; Blood Diamonds</i>) Second-person narrator (<i>Welcome to our Hillbrow</i>) told in the 2nd person – reader in the story First-person narrator (<i>Song of Malaya, Midnight Missionary</i>) Limited omniscient narrator (<i>Room 207; Beyond the Horizon</i>) Omniscient narrator (<i>On Black Sisters' Street</i>) Autobiography vs researched work (<i>Abandoned Baobab and Midnight Missionary</i> based on the authors' true story; <i>On Black Sisters' Street</i> based on the author's research; writer is Nigerian) The voice: the sex workers's perspective; the client's perspective; the male or female perspective
Timeline	One hour, one day, one month or a lifetime
Form	Cinema – powerful in images, sound, colours, Literature – powerful in words; let readers imagine Poetry – seeks to be more universal than a 'story', Drama – can be adopted in performance to fit
Storyline	Passive (<i>Beyond the Horizon</i>) vs Active (<i>The Abandoned Baobab</i>) Who wins? No real winners, bitter-sweet ending Possible resolution to character's conflict and lack thereof Recommendations
Language	Use of metaphors Use of local language Objectivity vs Subjectivity 'Male' language

Table 4: Themes in Fictional Work

5.4 Representation in Fiction: Discussion & Analysis

5.4.1 Migration and Sex Work

Most of the works I looked at represent women who engage in sex work as migrants. There are those who cross borders and those who leave their rural areas for the cities (see Table 4:67).

Migration, Sex Work and Victim-Survivors

In two of the works I looked at the women are represented as victims of trafficking. In Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* it is the husband who lures his wife, Mara, from a rural village in Ghana to a city in Germany to subsequently force her into prostitution⁸ to make a fortune for himself (Darko, 1991). Already back in her native Ghana Mara is portrayed as naïve and obedient, and as a woman who tolerates her husband's abuse and several cases of marital rape. When her husband moves to Germany and asks her to follow him, trusting Mara is depicted as a woman who emigrates with high expectations of making a fortune for herself and her extended family: "All was going to be golden for me there and, though I was going there poor, I would return with wealth and bring honour to Naka" (Darko, 1991:55). Instead, she is forced into selling her body instead, without ever seeing a cent of what she earns. The author creates an image of a woman who is traumatically silenced and sexually exploited in the brothels of the West. In Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, it is a pimp in Nigeria who with a promise of a job and money lures four women into working the red-light district of Antwerp, Belgium (Unigwe, 2009). In both novels the women are represented as victims of deception: Mara is drugged and half-conscious becomes the protagonist⁹ in a sex-orgy video which her husband later uses to blackmail her into becoming a sex worker. Unigwe's protagonists endure in the industry until they repay a Nigerian pimp 30,000 euros for exporting them to Europe, especially after one of them gets killed trying to escape. In a foreign country with no papers and no families to which to appeal for help, their options are presented as very limited: Once they arrive in the city, they find themselves trapped, with sex work seeming the only way out: "For an illegal woman like you, there is no other job in Germany, Mara.... Because you are too illegal and too black for any proper job, you get it?" (Darko, 1991:114). The women, however, do not remain victims forever. Instead, the authors portray the women as victims-survivors who at least try to offer resistance to the dominance of their pimp (Unigwe, 2009) or their abusive husbands (Darko, 1991). In the end Mara, and two other women involved who end up in the profession via a similar trajectory of deception and abuse, ironically choose sex work to take revenge, defy their partners' dominance and gain their financial independence.

⁸ I use 'prostitution' here to differentiate from sex work as the women were initially forced into selling their body. I later switch to 'sex work' to emphasise the transition they make to seeing it as work and a means of earning a living and where they make a conscious decision to pursue the profession.

⁹ I define protagonist as the main character in a work of fiction.

Migration, Sex Work as a Survival Strategy

Nearly all of the works I looked at portray the women's migration and engagement in sex work as a survival strategy (see Table 4:67). The women are shown as tempted to migrate and eventually engage in sex work by the promise of a better job and lifestyle and by the hope of being able to support their families back home (Darko, 1991; Unigwe, 2009). All of the works also portray the lack of economic opportunities in the women's place of origin, which motivates their migration and eventually leads to their involvement in sex work. Unigwe's portrayal of her four protagonists sheds light on the often difficult situation women find themselves in modern Nigeria and how that may lead to them trapped in the job of sex work: Sisi is a graduate unable to find work; Efe is a teenage mother struggling to raise her boy; Ama fled an abusive childhood and Joyce is abandoned by her boyfriend (Unigwe, 2009). The sex workers come from all spheres of society, ranging from village women to college graduates: "She had just told me that she was a graduate of that great institution of education and this night things was just a thing to keep her above water... The next day she came with proof that she was really a graduate of Wits. She said she was still looking for a job and a work permit. She was our neighbour from Swaziland" (Moele, 2006:116).

As in the interviews, the Johannesburg-based fiction equally places an emphasis on the survival mode, albeit the perspective in the representation appears different. While the women sought to emphasise their agency in providing for their families and deliberately choosing sex work as a way to do so, fiction focuses on the lack of circumstances and economic options that forced women into the profession. This suggests the authors' deliberate choice to focus the readers' or viewers' attention on the socio-political environment that leads to sex work rather than the women's individual trajectory into the profession. This may also suggest a means to seek to address some of the overreaching issues that underpin or lead to sex work in the first place. None of the women imagined that they could work as a sex worker; on the contrary, as examples throughout the novels, plays and films illustrate, for most the sex industry has always been an alien word, in dire contrast to the values and moral background they were brought up with (Darko, 1991; Unigwe, 2009; Moele, 2006; Eloff, 2010). This echoes the statements made by most of the women I interviewed, who rejected suggestions that they may have migrated to Johannesburg looking to engage in sex work, but instead represent their involvement in the profession as something that was forced on them by circumstances once they were already in the city. This, however, stands in contrast to other research that refers to women who deliberately and consciously leave home to engage in sex work and better their livelihood (Agustin, 2006). The authors seek to portray the women's predicament and their choice to engage in sex work as their only way of making a living:

"Some of the womenfolk bought their temporary freedom to roam the Hillbrow streets by dispensing under-waist bliss. They preferred to eke out a living here. Yes, they were

ostracized, they agreed; but when the police left them in peace, they could gather a thing or two to send back to their families at home. The foreign exchange rate really did favour them" (Mpe, 2001:21).

For some, it is precisely the fact of being a migrant and not having access to services, employment or other means of making a living that forces them into sex work (Kleinboer, 2006). Equally, the women's illegal status in some of the works is used to portray their lack of choices and possibilities to engage in a different line of work (Darko, 1991; Unigwe, 2009).

There are few mentions of men in the women's lives and if so, the men are portrayed as unable to provide for their families, and even force their wives into sex work to pay for their own riches and to support their mistresses (Darko, 1991). In most of the works the women are thus portrayed as single-mothers who take responsibility for their children and extended families. "She opens the passport again and shows me the little colour photograph of her dark baby, pasted onto page three. She indicates with gestures that the baby has to eat, she wants more money" (Kleinboer, 2006:57). Kleinboer provides few details, if any, about why the women his protagonist visits in the brothels in Hillbrow have come to South Africa or Hillbrow, or how they found their way into the industry. Given the novel's emphasis on the protagonist's own enjoyment of brothels and what they can offer, the women are thus portrayed without a past or without a past that would matter to the protagonist. However, the mention of various scars a number of the women have on their bodies shows that their past has not necessarily been easy. And while the women are hardly given a voice in the novel, the author uses his protagonist to signal that for many it is the only way to survive. "Francina didn't inherit anything. For a year she had a flat to stay in thanks to friends' support, but then had to move to the brothel to survive" (Kleinboer, 2006:91).

Among the works I looked at, it was Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Malaya* which lacked a specific reference to migration as the author uses the sex worker motif to ridicule the hypocrisy of morals within African societies as a whole rather than to look at a specific woman's story or provide details of why women end up in the profession in the first place (p'Bitek, 1988). While some of the fiction works focus on the sex worker's trajectory into the industry, thus allowing for a clear picture of their migratory patterns – be it rural-urban; Africa-Europe or other – others identify the sex workers as migrants but fail to go into detail why the women chose the career path in the first place (Kleinboer, 2006). Only by inference can one deduct what has led to the women choosing to come to the city where they now live and to sell their bodies for cash. However, the fact that all the authors place their migrant sex workers in an inner-city setting raises the perception that the women came to the city in search for better opportunities and sex work became the choice or decision they had to make to realize the improvement in livelihood they were looking for.

Migration and Anonymity in Sex Work

Even though the women seem to have been aware of sex work in their places of origin, none of them could imagine engaging in sex work in an environment where she could easily be recognized by family or friends (Darko, 1991; Unigwe, 2009; Kleinboer, 2006). The authors thus emphasise the importance of distance (see Table 4:67) in the women's decision to follow and persist in the profession despite their own apprehension and despite the fact that it contradicts their upbringing and moral values (Kleinboer, 2006; Grootboom, 2009; Darko, 1991; Unigwe, 2009). While the majority of the interviews led to the same conclusion, there was the case of Mary who openly admitted to being in the industry and did not seem to fear the potential repercussions that could have on her life. I initially understood her representation as an acknowledgment of both the fact that she may not ever leave the industry after being in it for the past 17 years and the fact that she may not have long to live being HIV positive. However, in our consecutive sessions she represented the job as temporary and emphasized her desire to leave the profession. Similarly, we spent a long time discussing what plans she had in store for herself and her children in the future. I thus understood her open acknowledgment as a small protest by someone who had been exposed to the stigma for over a decade and wanted to openly confront the accusations and stereotypes. That attitude, however, is not widely supported by literature on jurisdictions where sex work is illegal, where the fear of being persecuted trumps any wish to confront stigmas and stereotypes (Scambler, 2007; Pheterson, 1993).

In both the fictional works and the interviews, hardly any of the women was prepared to face the judgment of friends or family or directly confront the stigma associated with sex work. This shows, however, that the changing identity the women are confronted with is not only a result of their migratory pattern (Malkki, 1992) and their engagement in sex work, but also becomes a deliberate choice to create a double identity that will separate their now from their lives and identity back home (Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000).

Migration, Sex Work as Temporary vs Permanent Solution

The works differ in the way they portray migration and sex work as either a temporary or a permanent solution for their characters (see Table 4:67). In Kleinboer's novel, some of the women are portrayed as very pragmatic about why they have engaged in the world's oldest profession: "I now make money with my cunt, but one day I'll get a proper job, she said" (Kleinboer, 2006:200). For them, the job is shown as a temporary means to make a living and a transition until they manage to find something else. In the example of African women forced into prostitution in Europe, going back home and leaving the profession is portrayed as impossible. On the one hand, their pimps hold their passports or threaten to expose their involvement in the profession (Unigwe, 2009; Darko, 1991) On the other hand, the profession is also shown to have

taken its toll on the women's bodies and sanity, with years of selling their body, filled with drug and alcohol abuse, making it impossible for the women to quit and to return to their former self:

"I have decided to stop thinking about ever going home. I just don't belong there any longer. Moreover, I have this fear that haunts me day in and day out that if I show my face there one day, out of the blue that sex video [my husband] made of me clandestinely will show up there, too. Worse still, I am now to be seen on a couple more sex videos. Home will have to remain a distant place" (Darko, 1991:139).

Most of the works I looked at focus little on the women's way out of the profession and offer little to suggest if a way out exists. p'Bitek's poem seeks to justify the industry's existence on the back of rising demand from across the society: "Sister Prostitutes, wherever you are, I salute you, wealth and health to us all" (p'Bitek:1988:123). The sex worker in that poem appeals for support of her profession rather than arguing for a way out of it. Films such as *District 9* (2009) and *Blood Diamonds* (2006) weave the image of the migrant sex worker in their portrayal of two African cities, yet do not represent anything about the women's trajectory into sex work or their way out of it. Rather, their existence and livelihood on the streets of Johannesburg and Freetown, respectively, is accepted as the status quo. It is only Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) where the author portrays the women's exit from the industry. It needs to be noted, however, that the women do not quit the job when they want to, but rather wait until they pay off their pimp to be able to leave. In addition, while two of the women return home and open a school and a boutique, one decides to open her own brothel instead. Once again the author represents choices available to women who leave the industry as either limited or the promise of income possible from sex work as too tempting to resist.

The fictional works were able to cover a longer time period, which sometimes span over a woman's entire life. This made it possible for some authors to be explicit as to how temporary or permanent a woman's engagement in sex work might have been. In comparison, the interviews were much more explicit in the women's desire to portray their involvement in sex work as temporary only. Each spoke of trainings they were pursuing in order to find a way out of sex work or to use as an alibi in front of their families and friends. This is not to say that their involvement in the industry will turn out to be temporary as some of them have been in the profession for up to 17 years already. What it suggests, however, is an underlying desire to keep 'the door open'; to represent sex work as something the women are trying to escape and to continue to reject the possibility of sex work as a long-term livelihood choice for as long as they can or at least represent themselves as rejecting that option. This further emphasises the women's desire to portray sex work as a survival strategy rather than a livelihood choice. At the same time it backs up literature which refers to migrants who end up in the industry by chance (Phoenix, 2000), as opposed to those who deliberately migrate to get into sex work (Agustin, 2006; Scambler, 2007).

Migration, Sex Work and Xenophobia

Each of the authors approaches the theme of xenophobia in migration and sex work in a different way (see Table 4:67), either by condemning it or by declaring common stereotypes without seeking to prove or challenge them. In *Foreplay*, the playwright points to a different treatment of sex workers given their citizenship status: “because you’re a citizen of this country, I am willing to look at your transgression as ignorance merely” (Grootboom, 2009:73). In several of the works a Nigerian features as the pimp within the play, novel or film (Unigwe, 2009; District 9, 2009; Grootboom, 2009; Mpe, 2001; Moele, 2006). It may be that the playwrights/authors/directors play with the perception or stereotype that it is the foreigner men, or a Nigerian in particular, who pull the strings behind the industry. As much as behind sex work, Nigerians in those works are represented as the perpetrators behind other illegal business in the city: “These Nigerian brothers are only here to help further corrupt the rainbow nation, they can get you anything as long as you pay” (Moele, 2006:162). In *District 9*, Nigerians are portrayed as drug dealers, pimps and sex workers who go about their business with aliens in a Johannesburg township – an image which has caused great stir among the Nigerian community in South Africa and the government in Nigeria (*District 9*, 2009; BBC, 2010). Neither author goes to great lengths to back up his claims; they raise the impression that the attribution to Nigeria is based on stereotypes or common perception, rather than actual scientific knowledge. Only Mpe in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* seeks to challenge the perception of the foreign man being responsible for the crime and illegal activities found in the neighbourhood (2001). While he mentions common perceptions that it is the migrant women and other migrants who are held responsible for Hillbrow’s physical and moral decay, he seeks to challenge those stereotypes and expose the hypocrisy of people who create those statements in the first place:

“Your mother knew that all Hillbrow women were prostitutes, who spent their nights leaning against the walls of the giant buildings in which they conducted their trade of under-waist bliss; their human thighs, pasted against the brick-work, serving as both advertisements and sexual commodities...your mother had never been to Hillbrow” (Mpe, 2001:39).

He further points out that the “moral decay” of Hillbrow is not worse than that of the rural South African village of Tiragalong: “If you consider that the concentration of people in Hillbrow is dense, and work out the number of crimes in relation to the number of people, I tell you, you will find Tiragalong to be just as bad” (Mpe, 2001:18). He criticizes the hypocrisy of those living in Hillbrow who blame all evil on migrants, when in fact most of the inhabitants of Hillbrow are migrants – be it cross-border or internal – and many of the crimes could be traced back to the villages within South Africa. In the novel it is the girl from the village who in the end contracts HIV, which in turns leads to allegations by her fellow villagers who accuse her of being promiscuous and of sleeping with foreigners. Mpe also refers to the injustice afforded to foreigners and migrant sex workers by the police who take advantage of their precarious and often uncertain situation to elicit bribes,

often even ask to be paid via sexual favours, and the ignorance and disregard by others to that same maltreatment (Mpe, 2001).

The findings around mistrust between internal and cross-border migrants support some of the conclusions of my interviews that highlighted the general suspicions between domestic and foreign sex workers. While the fiction works provide a more general overview of xenophobia present in Johannesburg, the interviews focus it on the interactions between migrant sex workers in particular and allowed for a more close-up perspective. The fiction, however, goes a step further and challenges some of the stereotypes (e.g. Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*) while in the interviews they were represented as a status quo. The works also differ from the interviews in terms of the perspective: while fiction focused on xenophobia as a negative theme the society was grappling with, the women represented foreign sex workers in a positive light, highlighting their entrepreneurial spirit and their ability to get out of the business. It must be noted, however, that Kleinboer's *Midnight Missionary* rather refrained from making statements about the different nationalities present in the city's brothels; instead, the protagonist's neutral appreciation of that diversity seems to almost paint the picture of the diversity holding a particular allure for the protagonist.

Overall, however, both the fictional work and the interviews portrayed an image of Johannesburg that contained a number of parallels to the image of the city represented in research. The idea of Johannesburg as a multi-cultural urban setting with many social and economic challenges (Landau, 2006, 2009; Leggett, 2003; Vearey et al, 2009) can be found both within the fiction and the image depicted by the women in my interviews. While neither gives specific information about the number of sex workers in the inner-city or the HIV prevalence within the industry, each paint a picture of a culturally dynamic and disintegrated space, where people seek individual ways to navigate the city and compete for strained resources, especially jobs and housing. Thus both the interviews and fiction lend a simplified, yet accurate, representation of the city and thus can be interpreted as a valid, albeit partial and simplified (Dyer, 1993; Viljoen, 2004; Lewis et al, 2008; Bal & Boheemen, 1984), representation of the space.

Migration, Sex work and Mobility

In each of the works, the protagonists' lives are portrayed as very mobile (see Table 4:68). In *Midnight Missionary*, the protagonist – a client – tries to see a different woman each time and while he might visit some on more than one occasion, he is careful not to get attached as he says it would spoil the sex he is after (2006). The sex workers themselves move between clients, rooms within the brothel, between brothels. There is no commitment, neither do they mind if clients get passed around: "She lights a cigarette and says, 'It's all right, when you give to her,

you give to me as well” (Kleinboer, 2006:30). In Grootboom’s *Foreplay*, all characters are linked by loveless sexual encounters, depicting a society where violence and sex are as mobile and part of everyday life as is HIV/AIDS (2009). In other works, the women’s trajectory into sex work is a migration or mobility between different types of abuse, addictions and dangerous sexual behaviour (Darko, 1991; Bugul, 2008; Kleinboer, 2006; Unigwe, 2009; Grootboom, 2009). Mobility is portrayed as a key transition point for the protagonist in Darko’s *Beyond the Horizon* (1991). Sex worker Mara, who so far has never seen a cent of the money she earned as a sex worker, secretly acquires legal status by paying a German man to marry her, then moves to a different brothel at the other side of Germany, from where she can pursue the job and keep all the profits. The change in places allows her to cut her dependence on her abusive husband and gives her the opportunity to take revenge on the man by reporting him and his girlfriend to the authorities. Thus her mobility allows her a change in how she sees herself and her ability to take control of her life. Equally, the mobility, while it does not mean an end to her work as a sex worker, it gives her the economic independence to support herself and others. In comparison, authors like Unigwe (2009) represent mobility as key for the women’s ability to start afresh and show how the women use sex work as a road to entrepreneurship. Two of her protagonists return home in Nigeria, from where they run a school and a boutique. The past remains something they never talk about, showing how mobility allows them to create a new identity where they can represent themselves as shop owners or school principals, without having to openly acknowledge their past: “They would never talk about Ama’s years in Europe” (2009:279).

Mobility was also a key concept that came out of the interviews and out of the literature supporting this research. In each instance mobility is represented as a chance to start afresh; to create a new identity and to use mobility to reinvent oneself (Malkki, 1992). The change in frame of reference allows the women to create a new self when trying to gradually leave the industry, as much as it forces the women to reinvent themselves when first arriving in their new city and work (Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000). It is that mobility and ability to create a second identity which allows the women to create an emotional barrier and distinction between their life now and back home and between their existence as a sex worker and someone seeking to live a ‘normal life’.

Double Life, Double Identity

Nearly all of the women are represented as leading a double life and juggling between their identity as a sex worker and that of a good mother / good daughter. None of them would admit to being in the profession in their correspondence to their families back home; equally, their families would never ask about where the money came from that paid for the goods the women send home. Some of the authors represent this as a double standard amongst the families who are likely to accept their daughters’ engagement in a profession they would condemn if she were at

home because they are not witness to it and because it means the improvement of their own livelihoods: "Sometimes I think that my family suspect I'm in the trade but deliberately refrain from asking me because if they knew the truth and then took no action, not wanting to forfeit the luxuries they enjoy at my expense, they would indirectly become a party to my sins" (Darko, 1991:118). Leading a double life is not without consequences for the women's lives. Darko's protagonist Mara gets consumed by her life as a sex worker: "There is no turning back for me now. I am so much a whore now that I can no longer remember or imagine what being a non-whore is" (1991:139). Being far away from home allows the women to nurture that double identity. It is her migration to Europe which allows a Senegalese woman in Bugul's *The Abandoned Baobab* (2008) to explore a side of her she would not be allowed to do in her tradition-oriented home. It is thus that migration, and ultimately sex work as well, which become for the woman a way to find her own self.

The idea of a double life and identity also featured strongly in the interviews, where the women represented their struggle in needing to balance those two identities and lives. The women shied away of making a judgment about their families and did not reveal whether their loved ones were suspicious of the work they did as suggested in fiction. Instead their focus was on maintaining these two separate identities and preventing them from blending into each other as it happened with the fictional Mara. Having said that, some of the women did acknowledge that the job was having an impact on how they viewed men and relationships. Nicole in particular spoke of how money has for her become the primary factor guiding both her work and personal life. Both types of representation back up the literature that portrays migrants as leading dual lives "socially and economically" (Adepoju, 2006:38) and sex workers as women for whom juggling different identities is part of everyday life (Ghos, 2003; Sanders, 2005; Riccio, 2005). It further emphasises how key this double identity is to the women's ability to put a distance between their lives as mothers, wives and daughters and that as sex workers (Sanders, 2004; Nyangairi, 2010).

Summary

The discussion above shows some of the difference in representation of migrant women involved in sex work found in fiction and how they compare with the way the women represented themselves. While the migration theme plays a role in nearly all of the fictional works I looked at, each author/director/playwright approaches it differently. In most of the works, the migrant women involved in sex work are portrayed as survivors. While initially they may appear as victims of abuse, deceit and circumstances (Unigwe, 2009; Darko, 1991; Moele, 2006; Kleinboer, 2006), they become champions of their own fate and take responsibility for their own plight and ultimately – to a varying degree – succeed. In some works the women are represented as victims of trafficking (Unigwe, 2009; Darko, 1991) who then turn their involvement in the profession to sex

work and a means to earn a living. In others they are shown as making conscious choices and decisions to sell their bodies for cash in order to make ends meet and provide for themselves and their families (Moele, 2006; Kleinboer, 2006). The last echoes findings from the interviews in which the women clearly depicted their involvement in sex work as a survival strategy. Authors use the migration sex worker theme to reflect on limited opportunities for the women in their places of origin, but also to show the limited choice women find in the place they have migrated to, be it due to their illegal status (Unigwe, 2009; Darko, 1991) or because of a general lack of opportunities and dire competition for jobs and resources (Kleinboer, 2006; Moele, 2006). This picture is supported by what the women disclosed in the interviews as well; they use the lack of resources and jobs to represent the idea of being forced by circumstances.

Some fictional works choose to paint a rather negative picture of migrant women – be it based on conviction or as a mean to challenge common stereotypes. To do so, some refer to migrant women as “makwerekwere” (Mpe, 2001:4), a slang word used for foreigners, especially illegal immigrants. “He was often seen with Makwerekwere women, hanging onto his arms and dazzling him with sugar-coated kisses that were sure to destroy any man, let alone an impressionable youngster like him” (Mpe, 2001:3). Migrant women involved in sex work are blamed for spreading diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and for corrupting the cities’ morals (Mpe, 2001; Moele, 2006). Others, such as Kleinboer, are neutral or even positive in the way migration features as part of a sex worker’s identity. While the protagonist mentions where the different women he visits might come from, he does not do so in a derogatory manner, but rather thrives on the diversity of women he is able to choose from.

The characters found in those works of fiction are very complex and the works reflect the challenges migrant women involved in sex work face in creating their own identity within the industry and between their “normal” and their “sex worker” life. The characters’ battle between their conviction of doing something right to support their families and the knowledge of following a profession they could never admit to at home. In addition, Bugul’s novel creates yet another layer of representation by portraying a woman who actively chooses sex work as a way of finding herself (1991). These findings support literature which highlights some of the tensions, and contradictions in the way these women construct an identity between the discourses of “good and bad women” (Nyangairi, 2010:110) and how they recognize their own paradoxical being and construct an identity and representation thereof which accommodates those contradictions (Worrall, 2000). Finally, the women, both in fiction and in the interviews, were represented as women with a plan, supporting the view of sex work as a tool for empowerment and a means to fight poverty (Agustin, 2006; Sanders, 2005).

5.4.2 Migration, Sex work and Gender

As much as the works are a representation of migrant women involved in sex work, so they are a testimony to women's changing role within societies and their families as well (see Table 4:68).

Migration, Sex Work and Victim turn Survivor

The women in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* come from very traditional, rural households where providing for the family would be the responsibility of men. Darko initially represents her protagonist as naïve and obedient: Mara, a woman from a Ghanaian village, gets sold off for a few animals and some other items to a man who takes her to the city to have her run his household for him. He never shows himself with his new wife in public, but secretly courts another woman. Mara initially accepts her fate and does everything to please her husband as that is what she was taught to do, even when the man beats her and she falls victim to two cases of marital rape. She even accepts her husband going alone to Europe and leaving her behind with two sons. The man eventually brings Mara over to Germany where he first introduces her as his 'sister' to his new German girlfriend and later forces Mara into prostitution as a means to pay for his well-being and fortune.

The author initially portrays Mara as a victim, a woman who accepts her fate as being trapped and dependent on her husband. Ashamed of the work she's been forced to do, she fears humiliation from her village, should she try to escape. The author uses this to portray the battle African women face when forced into prostitution in Europe, where they are sexually exploited yet cannot rebel because of their illegal status. Equally, it portrays women as battling with the challenge of having to follow a profession they find morally repulsive. But eventually Darko allows Mara to transform into a survivor; she "wakes up" to realise that since her body is being used, she should profit from it as well (Darko, 1991:119). It is then when her engagement in prostitution changes to conscious sex work.

"My eyebrows have been plucked thin. I have mastered the use of make-up, so that my lips are never without their scarlet taint. And I have received into me the rigid tools of many men and accompanied them on sinful rides through the back doors of heaven and returned with them back to earth, spent men. I am no longer green and you know it. As for the morals of life my mother brought me up by, I have cemented them with coal tar in my conscience. If the gods of Naka intended me to live by them, they should have made sure I was married to a man who loved me and who appreciated the values I was brought up with. I lived by these values until I could no longer do so. The rot has gone too deep for me to return to the old me. And that is why, Kaye, I am going to do the films and the stage shows and all there is to it. But I want every pfennig of what I make to come to me!" (Darko, 1991:131).

This becomes the turning point for Mara and shows the author's deliberate choice not to have her character dismissed as a helpless victim, but rather as someone who obtains agency and control of her body and mind. Mara increases her number of customers to raise money to pay for a

German to marry her and obtain legal status. She then secretly removes herself to another brothel on the other side of the country and from there pursues the profession. In a manner of revenge, she gets her husband reported to the authorities.

While Mara does not manage to leave the profession, she is successful in turning her fate to her advantage. She is represented as making a full transition from a woman who accepts abuse on part of her husband, to one who actively seeks to benefit from selling her body. The author challenges tradition and reverses the role of a caring mother and obedient wife assigned to Mara in the society she comes from. Despite the humiliation and pain she experiences while selling her body in brothels in Germany, she is represented as someone who reconstructs her own private space and financial independence. Her story both portrays and resists the objectification of the black female body both in home Ghana and in Europe by depicting a woman who turns sex work from a victim's fate to a woman's active mean for survival. In addition, Mara and two other women in the story find sex work as the only means to gain revenge, to assert themselves and gain their independence they would otherwise be unable to reach. In the end, however, Darko's protagonist is limited in her ability to escape the sex work world; rather she accepts that after many years of selling her body, a life as a cocaine-abusing sex worker in exile is the price she has to pay for her agency and ability to provide for those she left behind. As Maria Frias put it, the women in Darko's novel "are on top but they might dangerously and disastrously start sinking lower and lower into utter self-destruction and irrevocable madness" (Frias, 2002:12). The protagonists in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* follow a similar pattern: there are four Nigerian women, lured to work a red-light district in Belgium by the promise of riches in Europe. As much as Mara, the four protagonists are portrayed as having to pay a price to maintain or gain their agency and cut their dependence on men.

In both the interviews and fiction, migration and sex work are portrayed as having a profound impact on the women's lives and their role within their respective families and societies. Equally, sex work and migration are portrayed as changing the women's perception of men: in both fiction and interviews they were portrayed as weak, cold-hearted and abusive. While in fiction their role of provider is exchanged for that of pimps, drunks, murders, drug-dealers and rapists, the women I spoke to preferred not to speak about them and represented men as not being very present in their lives or families. The portrayal of men as weak helps emphasise the strength of the women's characters and again helps them retain their autonomy, a view supported by literature (Nyangairi, 2010). This change of roles also goes parallel with the women's move from an often rural to an urban setting and illustrates the view of how women and men assume different roles depending on their environment or how environments shape who the men and women become (Kerkin, 2004; Sanders, 2005). Where there are opportunities for longer-term attachments, the sex

workers choose to avoid them; relationships between sex workers and both men and women are portrayed as very fragile, full of mistrust and uncertainty. As Unigwe's novel illustrates, the women mistrust even each other and only the death of one of their co-workers forces them to open up and confide in each other (2009).

Migration, Sex Work and Agency

Each of the writers, film directors and playwrights are very careful not to portray their sex workers as victims, but to underline their survival mode and show the women as characters who make choices for which there are consequences (see Table 4:68). Darko's protagonist develops her agency and turns forced prostitution into sex work, by using the profession to her benefit and that of others (1991). Unigwe's protagonists, despite being forced into the profession, ultimately use sex work to open up their own business and become their own boss (2009). Yet Unigwe makes a point of showing that the newly-found agency in sex work is constrained as well: the one sex worker who tries to escape gets killed, making the other three women realize that they have to pay off their debt to the pimp before they can leave the profession for good. Other sex workers within the novels find and reaffirm their agency by establishing rules for how they go about their work and how they represent within it: "I fuck with my shoes on, she says. I make the rules here" (Kleinboer, 2006:59).

Grootboom seeks to show the human or even conniving side of his play's sex worker. The fact that she chooses 'ecstasy' as her nickname shows how she either identifies with the character or hides the real her behind the nickname. She offers sex to the character of the soldier for free, because as she says "you protect us and our country...In my books, you deserve much more than free pussy" (Grootboom, 2009:17). Despite the profession she is involved in, the sex worker demands respect: "Since well you're not paying, the least you can do is treat me like a lady" (Grootboom, 2009:19). She makes a distinction between sex and sexual desires and other feelings. As she explains to the soldier, "all the senses – from sense of pain to sense of smell to common sense... they all dies... only once sense comes alive" (Grootboom, 2009:19). Her profession is a lie or an illusion, she says. "Do you want the pussy or do you want the truth?" she asks the soldier. The playwright clearly plays with the idea of agency in the character of the sex worker. It is her who ultimately robs the soldier; she's also the one who passes on the HIV. And while the soldier feels he has the upper hand, the sex worker comes out the clear winner from the battle of wits. She describes herself as a soldier and her vagina as her weapon, ultimately revealing her opinion of men. "Women, all over, even those who are not prostitutes, end up using their cunts as bargaining chips... as weapons..." (Grootboom, 2009:21). And while the soldier "pushes her violently off him", speaks down to her "imagine me having a whore for a girlfriend", it

is she who holds the upper hand at the end of the scene, having gotten away with the man's cash.

The self-representation of the women I spoke to also contradicted the abolitionist view which portrays women as victims and vulnerable. As in fiction, the women sought to underline their agency; to portray themselves as independent individuals who made a conscious choice to enter the industry. The emphasis on agency allows the women to control their workplace and to protect themselves from getting too emotionally involved – an observation echoed throughout the fictional work. They also make a clear distinction between sex and love. The idea of the body as a bargaining weapon (Grootboom, 2009) can be mirrored by the women's representation of a constructed identity which they use to reaffirm their power and control and their desire to block themselves from getting emotionally involved. These findings support other observations of tactics migrant women in sex work employ to retain their autonomy and create a safety barrier between themselves and an emotionally-charged work (Nyangairi, 2010; Sanders, 2005; Agustin, 2005).

Migration, Sex Work and Coming of Age

Ken Bugul's portrayal in *The Abandoned Baobab* stands in dire contrast to Unigwe's and Darko's stories, with a protagonist who voluntarily chooses to offer her body for money as part of her coming of age (2008). For Bugul's character migration and sex work become a means to deal with her post-colonial identity and a way to find her own identity as a Black woman within a Western society: "They desired me, I pleased them; prostitution provided me with a moment of attention, a recognition different from the one that identified me daily with what I didn't want to be. Prostitute to the white man, one of the sides of ambiguity missing" (Bugul, 1991:106). Bugul's protagonist struggles with the fact of being objectified after she is told that being black is an asset and she should "exploit that" (Bugul, 1991:101). Equally Kleinboer tries to show that while the majority of migrant sex workers may have been forced into the profession by circumstances, a few others do it by choice: "Not all of them are poor victims. Some of them simply want to be prostitutes, even if only for a while. Their sexuality is their own; they won't let themselves be limited by corset or convention" (Kleinboer, 2006:14). Both these authors thus represent the women as what Campbell calls the "adventuress... she is the woman who uses prostitution to escape from boredom and frustration, to explore her own psyche, to fulfil her sexual desires and fantasies" (Campbell, 2006:249). Bugul's protagonist and the women Kleinboer allures to defy the moral values they were brought up with which allow them one partner only; instead they use sex work to challenge those prescribed norms. Bugul's novel – an autobiography – caused a stir when first published in 1982, because as one reviewer mentions "not only do these details include information about her sexuality, drug use, and prostitution, they also reverse stereotypical

images of African mothers and grandmothers as nurturing figures, and of African adolescent girls as asexual virgins” (Garane, 2008:163). Bugul challenges traditional roles assigned to women in Senegal by recounting her experiences with sex work, drug abuse, an abortion and an affair with a woman – all seemingly alien to the Islamic culture she comes from. As Bugul herself said in an interview, the body for her is a means of communicating, and her trajectory into sex work shows her lack of connection with people in Belgium where she feels as an outsider due to her black skin. As she says, her protagonist’s “total loss of markers causes her to lose her body to prostitution too” (Mensah, 1999:1). It is in that context that the authors use sex work to portray a woman’s coming of age and both migration and sex work are represented as a means of finding one’s identity and challenging traditional roles prescribed to women: “I was equally intoxicated by my other self, which enjoyed these moments I would so much want to be true, moments in which one literally commits suicide in illusion” (2008:108).

The concept of migration and sex work as a women’s quest to find herself is found in one example of fiction only and was not supported by findings from my interviews. Bugul’s bold disclosure which challenges gender norms in her country and brings the discussion around sexuality in Africa to the forefront is still rather unusual. The women I interviewed instead were very keen to represent sex work as something that circumstances forced them into and which they would like to exit, if given the opportunity. For Bugul it is rather a test, even a game, at playing with the idea of the commoditised black body and how that affects how she sees herself.

Migration, Sex Work and the Male Perspective

The way women are represented in the various works depends on the point of view of the author and seems to also be linked to his or her sex (see Table 4:68). I will look at that in detail in the methodology section. Kleinboer’s *Midnight Missionary* does not go into much detail when presenting the women that entertain him. The communication between the protagonist and the sex workers is very limited, at least judging by what the protagonist let us see. Communication seems to matter little to the sex-mad Afrikaner man, who sometimes picks women with hardly any English at all. (Kleinboer, 2006). The author appears to follow a routine whenever he introduces a new woman: the girl in question is being eyed by the protagonist and he lists her attributes and deficiencies. His tone sounds rather degrading, limiting a woman’s value to mere physical characteristics, yet in other parts of the novel he lets through that “prostitutes aren’t simply tollgates” (Kleinboer, 2006:25). The protagonist seeks to reaffirm his authority with the women, although even he admits that some of it is make-believe. “We discussed the women as if they were prey. ‘Have you chosen your victim?’ Even though he and I are probably the victims, losing our money as we do” (Kleinboer, 2006:19). The fact that the protagonist has a girlfriend back home while he goes on his sex worker quest, may provide some answers to the question often

asked why married men go astray or why they don't leave their partners but prefer to cheat behind their back. "I don't feel so guilty that she'll notice it. As long as I'm not caught out. I'll rather cheat on her discreetly than leave her. I'm still attached to her and want her to think I'm faithful to her. Sex with her is different, not a wild fuck. It's intense and frantic as well, but there's more tenderness" (Kleinboer, 2006:205). Although he mentions each woman by her first name, the protagonist then describes them all by their origin and their physical features that relate to the sexual act, be it breasts, legs, skin, teeth, gums, eyes and hair. "She has large tits and nice legs, full buttocks. A gap between her front teeth. She's from Swaziland" (Kleinboer, 2006:10). Based on their appearance, the protagonist decides whether they will suffice to satisfy his sexual desires: "Beautiful, slim body. The most beautiful and firm breast one can wish for" (Kleinboer, 2006:59) or "Her hips are smallish, but I've decided she'll do" (Kleinboer, 2006:64) or "Her eyes are almonds, and her body is soft. She is a blowjob queen" (2006:139). Sometimes when a woman surprises him, he goes further in describing her character traits: "She's rather tough. She's got a cellphone and a cheeky confidence" (Kleinboer, 2006:59). The protagonist's use of mere physical characteristics to describe the women he visits creates the representation of a migrant sex worker as an object of male fantasy. The reader finds out little about who the women are, what they aspire to and what their trajectory into the profession might have been. Instead, Kleinboer represents the women as objects of his protagonist's desire by emphasising what would be important to his protagonist and his protagonist's sexual satisfaction rather than focusing on the women themselves.

Moele's *Room 207*, written from one of the male protagonist's perspective uses very strong and derogatory language to describe women, often referring to them as 'whores' (2006). The term is used interchangeably for both women who engage in sex work and those who do not. Even though the women in the novel "are chasing their own sets of dreams in dream city" (Moele, 2006:16), their characters are not very well developed and seem to only exist as sex objects or dependents for the six protagonists: "I use and abuse every female and leave them crying. How long has Tebogo mothered and wifed me? But I have always used her. Worse, I even call her a whore and she is the mother of my first-born child" (Moele, 2006:88). Even despite being abused, ignored or cheated on, the women profess their never-ending love for their men. The women who engage in sex work in the novel are sometimes ironically referred to as "angels of the night" (Moele, 2006:117). The novel seems to classify sex workers as second-class people, with ample reflection needed to see them as people equal to the protagonists, all of whom struggle to keep above water in the streets of Hillbrow. "They too are people, the same as you and me, with hopeful dreams. I once hated them more than you do but I came to see that they are human beings too" (Moele, 2006:66). While there are some steady relationships between women and men in the novel, most of them are very casual. Like Kleinboer's, this novel also represents the

migrant sex worker from a predominantly male perspective. She is not necessarily presented as a woman, but rather a means to make a male fantasy come true. The novel seeks to depict women who are not complete without their male match: "...she asked, 'Can I kiss you?'. He smiled, thinking that he was good. No, he was perfect, to make an angel of the night feel like a woman again" (Moele, 2006:117). These two novels clearly contradict the other works which put great emphasis on depicting the women's agency, their fight for independence and their quest for survival via sex work. These two works also greatly contradict the way the women I interviewed represented themselves where the focus was placed on the women's agency and their superiority over men, rather than the role of someone whose purpose in life was to satisfy and please men.

Summary

As this discussion illustrates, migration and sex work are represented in fiction as having a profound impact on women's role within society and their responsibility within their own families. Women are either represented as victims who eventually become survivors, breadwinners and makers of their own fate. Others are represented as independent women who make conscious choices to engage in sex work and use the trade to find their own identity and their place within societies with pre-set notions about the role of women. Yet others portray women as objects of male fantasy, without little emphasis on the women themselves and their trajectory into migration and sex work. As these examples show, migration and sex work make gender roles become a rather fluid phenomenon, and turn women into individuals who not only move between clients and brothels but also between who they are and what they see their role in society as being.

5.4.3 Migration, Sex work and Fictional Representation

The discussions above focused on the role of migration and gender in the fictional representation of women involved in sex work. In the following section I will focus on fictional representation of sex work in particular (see Table 4:67).

Sex Work as Work

Many of the works I looked at represented sex work as work. Some authors do not go into much detail about the women's trajectory into sex work, maybe because it appears irrelevant for the message of the work as a whole (p'Bitek, 1988; Grootboom, 2009; Kleinboer, 2006; Moele, 2006). Still, the women are portrayed as working in the industry for the sake of making a living and to provide for their children and extended families. Most of the women do not appear to have become involved in the industry out of choice: Some fall victim to trafficking after they are lured to a foreign land with a promise of riches by a manipulative pimp (Unigwe, 2009) or an abusive husband (Darko, 1991). They are forced into the profession by the fact of being illegal migrants in a country which affords them no other means of earning a living. The women in both novels

transition from seeing prostitution as something they detest and degrading to their pragmatic way of viewing it as sex work, as a means to make a living (Darko, 1991) and a way to establish themselves with another job (Unigwe, 2009). Thus, rather than quitting the profession or seeking to escape, the women use sex work to find their financial independence and, as in the case of Darko's protagonist, to take revenge on those who forced her into the industry in the first place. Only Bugul's protagonist makes a conscious choice to temporarily become a sex worker. The woman does not see sex work as work as she has no need for the extra income. Instead, she experiments with sex work in her quest for her 'true self' (Bugul, 2008). The fiction largely reflects findings from the interviews where all the women represented sex work as work and put a lot of emphasis to differentiate between their job and that of a prostitute. In both cases the language of money is quite prevalent and allows the women to situate the job as work, but also to justify why for some it has become too difficult to quit.

Sex Work, Drugs and Health

Drug abuse and other forms of addiction feature in all of the works I looked at (see Table 4:68), either as a precursor to being engaged in sex work (Bugul, 2008) or as a means to deal with the trauma of the profession (Unigwe, 2009; Darko, 1991). Kleinboer's protagonist portrays alcohol and cigarettes as common partners to sex work: "I'd guess more than 90 percent of prostitutes smoke," (Kleinboer, 2006:22). The protagonist indulges in alcohol as much as he does with the women. He uses alcohol as a prelude to get some women into bed. Similarly, the protagonist's playing with the possibility of contracting HIV, shows how the disease or fear of it is prevalent in all his moves within both the brothels and at home, yet the risk is represented as worth taking.

This is in clear contradiction to statements made by the women I interviewed who took great care to represent themselves as very health-conscious and aware of the risks attached to the industry. All women rejected ever having used drugs. Instead, they painted a picture of women who look not only after themselves but also others. Seeing the contradiction between the two types of representation made me re-evaluate what was said by the women and question whether that was the truth. Given that the women's representation is based on their conscious choice of how they would like to be perceived and represented, there could have been a deliberate desire to represent themselves as someone free from drugs or as someone who seeks to stay away from addictions.

Health is an underlying theme in each one of the works. Some works represent sex workers as spreading HIV/AIDS and other diseases; others challenge that notion and question the overall loose morals of society (p'Bitek, 1988; Moele, 2006; Kleinboer, 2006; Grootboom, 2009). "How do you know it was I, Who gave IT to you anyway?" asks the sex worker (p'Bitek, 1988:137).

Some of the works entirely avoid touching on the issue as it is not central to the story line (Unigwe, 2009; Darko, 1991).

The discussion around sex work and HIV/AIDS is very present in all the South Africa-based works. Grootboom's *Foreplay* starts with the sex worker taking drugs and popping the red bubblegum – used throughout the play as an indication of HIV/AIDS. Throughout the play, HIV is passed on from character to character, yet it is the sex worker who allegedly started it in the first place. Yet the fact that none of the characters uses a condom, despite a growing presence of HIV/AIDS, shows the dismissing attitude to the disease. As the soldier puts it, "I figure, if I get AIDS, it won't kill me... a bullet will get me long before AIDS can". Also in Moele's *Room 207*, one of the protagonists dies after contracting HIV. Although it is not clear whether he acquired it from the sex worker he fell in love with or other sexual partners before her, the other protagonists in the novel seem to assume that it was the sex worker who carries the blame (Moele, 2006). Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* directly seeks to contradict that notion and challenges common prejudice that both sex workers and foreigners are the spreaders of the killer disease by including a South African who is in the end diagnosed HIV positive (Mpe, 2001). In Kleinboer's novel, as much as in other writings, the theme of 'clean vs dirty' plays a key role and is closely linked to the discussion around HIV/AIDS. The protagonist mentions each time if a condom was part of the transaction. "The rubber bag had caught the sperm; the condom was intact. Relief" (Kleinboer, 2006:15). He washes himself each time after the act and examines the hygiene of each girl before choosing her: "Her gums are stained in places, but it looks like natural stains, not disease.... The alcohol will sterilize her mouth, I tell myself" (Kleinboer, 2006:42). While the author says little about the sex workers' attitude to health and HIV/AIDS, he seeks to portray his protagonist as a health-conscious individual who is aware of the risks and takes precaution to protect himself. Kleinboer's protagonist would love to have sex without protection, yet does not dare taking the risk. Even with his girlfriend at home he is limited to using protection as she is living with HIV. Once again, it is not the migrant sex worker, but a local South African who is portrayed as positive.

The discussion around HIV/AIDS and safe sex was also very prominent in my interviews with the four women. Each insisted on always practicing safe sex, yet complained about clients' refusal to use a condom. Each women represented herself as someone who not only insisted on condoms but also refused to continue with a client should he refused to use one. At the same time the women referred to other sex workers who they said did not use condoms or who would agree to engage in sex without condoms if they were offered enough incentive. Both the fiction works and the interviews needs to be reflected against research which points to the high HIV/AIDS prevalence among sex workers in Hillbrow (RHRU, 1998; Wojcicki & Malala, 2001; Pettifor et al,

2000; Dunkle et al, 2005; Rees et al, 2000). While research is much more explicit about the high risk practices among sex workers in Hillbrow, the women I spoke to in contrast were very keen on portraying themselves as very health-conscious. Only one of them admitted to being HIV positive, while the other three said they were getting tested regularly and were negative. On the other hand, literature, fiction and my interviews all support claims of clients initiating high-risk behaviour and forcing women to engage in sexual activities without condoms. Taking into account the fact that all the women I spoke to were linked to the RHRU and participated in health-related courses at the clinic supports research which advocates for the need for sex work-focused health initiatives. These could help increase awareness among sex workers and ease their access to health services in the city and thus help reduce rate of infections within the industry; these should also target the client population for greater success (Wojcicki & Malala, 2001; Rees et al, 2000; Pettifor et al, 2000).

Sex Work as Metaphor for Society

While most of the works I looked at presented a specific story, three of the works use the sex worker image to portray society as a whole (see Table 4:68). p'Bitek's *Song of Malaya* uses the sex worker motif to ridicule the hypocrisy of society, which condemns her profession in the light of day, but seeks her services at night (p'Bitek, 1988). Once again, the poem portrays the picture of a woman forced into the industry by circumstances – be it social, political or economic – who criticizes the moralists, including her family members, who preach against the trade in public but take advantage of it otherwise. The poem does not really offer a solution to the sex worker's dilemma; it rather seeks to justify the trade's existence and maybe even its importance by the long list of clientele seeking her favours at night.

Another use of the sex worker motif to portray society as a whole can be found in Grootboom's *Foreplay*. Grootboom defines the sex as either those who “fuck around” (2009:67) or girls “of no consequence”, whose sexual desires break any moral barriers. The business tone of the industry – seen both in the women's approach to their work and the tone they use to describe it – can also be found within this play. The politician sums it up, saying to the sex worker, “you're just a capitalist bitch... who sees even her own cunt as a capitalist tool...” (Grootboom, 2009:73), yet it is him who clearly uses others to advance his goals. The woman herself has learnt to separate her emotions from her work. This comes across clearly in the final scene where the woman describes her feeling of having been raped. She still takes claim of her dignity, saying “all those times I've been raped, I didn't rape myself” (Grootboom, 2009:77). The play ends with the idea that “everybody is a fucking whore” (Grootboom, 2009:78). While the society might judge the sex worker, the primitive sexual desire or the “pleasure principle” (2009:78) is core to any human being; everyone uses others for their pleasure. And while society might look down on sex

workers, the true perpetrators who abuse and exploit – here in the form of the preacher and the corrupt politician – get away unscathed. The play is simple, yet utterly provocative. Like with p'Bitek's poem, it portrays society's moral hypocrisy when it comes to sex. It mocks people whom we see in positions of power and authority – like the pastor or the politician – but who carry out the worst forms of social ills and abuse others, even kill, when no-one is looking. At the same time the sex worker – whom society tends to judge and look down upon – comes across as a powerful, confident and independent woman, who even despite being physically abused, in her clever and conniving way keeps her dignity and agency as well.

The Junction Avenue Theatre Company's *Love, Crime and Johannesburg* (2000) uses the image of a woman and a "whore" to describe the city. Using stereotypes that speak for patriarchy and masculinity, this metaphor represents Johannesburg as something that could be possessed, used and abandoned at will (Mekusi, 2009):

"Why is a city always a woman
And because she's a woman, almost always a whore
A man can possess her, he can love and caress her
But don't be fooled, when the chips are down, she's gone!
....
Jozi belonged to a pimp by the time she was ten
What can you expect she's a city made for men
She's known so many guys in her short and bold career
The gal is going crazy with gonorrhoea" (LCJ, 2000:41-42).

Thus the sex worker metaphor represents Johannesburg as a place where people use and abuse; as a place "where dreams are made and broken down" (LCJ, 2000:2). Contrary to other images of the sex worker found in fiction, this representation portrays the woman in rather derogatory terms, void of any agency, but there to fulfil masculine needs.

Migration, Sex Work, Shame & Religion

One of the things that Chika Unigwe learnt from researching and writing *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) is that "shame is a luxury" (Tmhogirl, 2008:1). Similarly, the protagonists in her novel and most of the other works I looked at reject the image of the fallen women and present their work as a constant battle between what they need to do to support their families and the stigma attached to the industry:

"Even when he puts me in pain and spits upon me and calls me a nigger fool I still offer him my crimson smile and pretend he's just called me a princess, for I've got a job to do, and I've got to put my all in it. But like I said, I may be dirty, old and overused but I can still feel emotions. And that is why I cry sometimes. And when I've got my crying to do, I sit here alone before my large oval mirror and stare painfully at this bit of garbage that once used to be me and I cry" (Darko, 1991:3)

Almost all of the works portrayed the women working in the profession far away from home partially to avoid being stigmatized by their families and friends (see Table 4:68). Only p'Bitek's poem places his protagonist in her own neighbourhood where he uses that proximity to her family and the fact that the sex worker's own brother visits the brothels, yet condemns her at the same time, to ridicule the hypocrisy of society's morals: "You no longer speak with me, and when our eyes meet they are quickly averted. It may be with hate or maybe with shame? ... Son of my mother, tell me, where were you two nights ago soon after the bars were closed?" (p'Bitek, 1988:175-76). There are other examples within the works where the women occasionally seek to prove that they had no other choice than engaging in the profession, including the college graduate turn sex worker in Moele's *Room 207* who insists on proving to one of the protagonist that she was forced onto the streets despite her degree (2006). Others simply accept that this is what they have to do and even find opportunities within sex work as can be seen in one of Unigwe's protagonist's choice to set up her own brothel, yet again pointing to the women's matter-of-fact approach to the industry (Unigwe, 2009). Similarly the women I interviewed were struggling with the stigma associated with the industry but felt powerless in confronting them, given the secretive and illegal nature of the industry.

Some of the authors use religion to expose the double standards within societies in which their works are placed. There are several scenes within Grootboom's play where sex and God are linked: "God is a fucking pervert! And all of mankind, nothing but his whores..." (Grootboom, 2009:31). Another of these correlations is exemplified in the character of the pastor who preaches the word of God, yet personifies the corruption within one's character at the same time. As he says, "... inappropriate physical involvement outside marriage... people call it moral failure and in turn demand that those preachers step down from moral leadership... but I call it proof of pastoral humanness...." The religious undertone continues in the pastor's seduction scene of the underage schoolgirl, where religious values compete with his sexual desires. The corrupt politician separates the sex worker from God by saying "considering your line of work, God has long given up on you" (Grootboom, 2009:73). Set in a South African setting, the playwright dismisses the taboos around sex; on the contrary, he slaps it in his audiences' face. The moral, political and social corruptions are as vivid as is the red bubblegum passing from character to character.

Summary

Most of these works seem to accept that sex work exists and provide little as a means for their characters to leave the industry or minimize its harm. Sex work is represented as work and as the women's livelihood choice to support their families. The women are represented as battling with their desire to be recognized as providers for their families, yet being branded by society as doing

something that is morally wrong. Rather than accept the stigma attached to the industry, the authors challenge the double standards found in societies and ridicule those who condemn sex workers yet use their services at the same time.

5.4.4 Migration, Sex work and Urban Space

The discussions above focused on the way sex work is represented in fiction. In the following section I will focus on the role of urban space in shaping that fictional representation.

Urban Space and Culture Shock

In all of the works I looked at, the women are represented as getting involved in the sex work industry within an urban setting (see Table 4:68). Be it Freetown, Antwerp, Hamburg, Johannesburg or an unidentified city, each time it is an urban space that frames the women's involvement in the profession. The urban centres are portrayed as spaces removed from the places where the women originally come from; the culture shock of a new place is intensified by the contrast the cities portray to the often rural areas the women originate from (Unigwe, 2009; p'Bitek, 1988; Mpe, 2001; Moele, 2006). In Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1991) protagonist Mara moves from a village with mud houses to a city in Germany where she is immediately confronted with a porn movie and a man who tries to sexually abuse her on a train. Naïve Mara is represented as shocked; the incidents are portrayed as her transition between her "primitiveness back home" in rural Africa and European "civilization" in urban Germany (1991:62): "It was a shock for me, my first shock, my first horror. And yet, my first lesson too. It began to dawn on me that I was in a completely new society where the values were different from those at home" (1991:62). At that point Mara is still ignorant of what fate lies ahead of her but the transition from rural to urban sets the stage for her initiation into the industry and the humiliation that will accompany her entrance into sex work. Becoming a sex worker would have been impossible for the Ghanaian woman back home where sex work and pornography are not only illegal but where the moral framework she grew up with would have been too strong to ignore. The urban space, however, whose contrast is intensified by the fact of being in a different country, makes the transition to sex work possible. This clearly reflects what Timotijevic and Breakwell (2000) said about people's need to reassess and reconstruct their identity if the new social context makes it impossible for a person to continue living according to standards he or she was brought up with. Urban space thus allows writers, directors and playwrights to place their protagonists within an environment and profession that stands in dire contrast to where they come from and still appear plausible. While the urban spaces found in the works I looked at differ in their political and socio-economic background, there are some similarities, especially when looking at the places where sex work takes place in particular. The places are usually identified as very crowded, scarcely lit and usually run-down:

“The street where I lived was the street of prostitution. Girls in cars with the interior lights on, girls on the street corners, skirts hiked up, enormously high heels, girls sauntering along, window-shopping, girls whose look of despair gave chase to the man racked by the kind of desire that neither wife, nor child, nor work succeeds in satisfying” (Bugul, 2008:103).

There are differences between spaces such as Johannesburg where sex work is illegal and places such as Antwerp where the profession is legally recognized as work. In Johannesburg, the portrayal of the sex work industry is set against the backdrop of run-down areas where other forms of crimes can be found as well. In Antwerp, the sex workers are portrayed as standing in window shops in the midst of one of the city's main streets, openly attracting clients who happen to pass by. Even within the same city, the perception or portrayal of the industry can change depending on the suburb. Donaldson differentiates between an “upmarket club” in Johannesburg's northern suburb of Sandton and “the sordid squalor of the inner city brothels and the soulless grind of the average Hillbrow streetwalker” (2010:93). As much as the location influences how much the women can charge for their services, so does the location influence how the women see and ultimately represent themselves. Bugul's protagonist receives a mink cape worth 30,000 francs¹⁰ for sleeping with a man (2008); Kleinboer's protagonist speaks about paying the women he visits between 50-80 rand for a sexual act.

Migration, Sex Work and Hillbrow

In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Mpe refers to Hillbrow as full of “milk and honey and bile, all brewing in the depths of our collective consciousness” (2001:41), illustrating the complexities and paradoxes of the neighbourhood. Hillbrow is a melting pot of cultures and nationalities, and the different works go into great detail to portray that diversity within the downtown neighbourhood. It is that intensity and its notoriety that appears to hold a special allure for writers, playwrights and film directors. The neighbourhood is portrayed as full of paradoxes, where those living within it are able to succeed and fail at the same time. Moele (2006) sarcastically describes the neighbourhood and Johannesburg in general as a “dream city” where “dreams die each and every second, as each and every second dreams are born. However beyond counting the dreams, they all have one thing in common: money. Respect and worship are the ultimate goals; everybody here is running away from poverty” (Moele, 2006: 19). It is in that context that migrant women are portrayed as ending up as sex workers in Hillbrow – seeking to escape that same poverty. Sex work is portrayed as the women's way of finding their own, albeit fluid, space within the city. This mirrors observation of African cities which describe them as “not entirely rigid but still offer the potential for the inhabitants to reconstitute their identities and lives and redefine their alienating city spaces in accordance with their needs” (Manase, 2005:89).

¹⁰ 30,000 francs in 2011 converts to around 7,300 rand. Please note the novel was first published in 1982.

Lefebvre's (1991) and de Certeau's (1984) idea of urban spaces as socially-produced places is found in the fictional representation of Hillbrow as well: migrants navigate that space, find their way of making a living – be it through sex work or other means – and thus ultimately define the make up of the neighbourhood. Migrants are represented as using sex work to establish their agency within a rather crowded and fragmented space. The various works also represent Hillbrow as a space with inhabitants whose identity is split between the place where they originate and their new home in the city. As in the case of the migrant sex workers, they battle with the competing ideologies, norms and rules and their desire to establish their own role within that confusing space and rather fragmented space.

Hillbrow and Crime, Violence, Police

Images of poverty, drug abuse and decay seem to compete for prominence in the fictional representation of the downtown area: “walk carefully and think fast; this is Johannesburg, you are either fast or dead” (Moele, 2006:69). The rule of law does not necessarily apply to Hillbrow or has been replaced by arbitrary agreements, the authors say: “Get a member of the police, or a sympathetic South African companion, to help you organize a false identity document – for a nominal fee” (Mpe, 2001:21). Migrants are set against the backdrop of that fluid environment where they can navigate and find a place for themselves without necessarily being legally entitled to it. This is how the women also navigate their way into sex work, a profession deemed illegal but accepted and tolerated within the context of a place like Hillbrow. The police treatment afforded to migrants and sex workers in Hillbrow is not friendly and rules are bent at the officers' whim (Mpe, 2001).

Hillbrow is presented as a crowded and chaotic place: “The locality of just over one square kilometer, according to official records; and according to its inhabitants, at least twice as big and teeming with countless people” (Mpe, 2001:1). It is the density of the place that is represented as partially contributing to the widely spread violence and people pursuing a number of informal and sometimes illegal activities. The migrant women's involvement in sex work is thus represented as an extension of the character or nature of the inner-city itself. The authors differ in the way they represent the neighbourhood or in the way that said representation is perceived. As an example, Mpe's portrayal of Hillbrow is seen by some as an image of a fragmented space which leads to “dysfunctional personal and societal relationships” (Manase, 2005:100); others see his portrayal as celebrating the city as “the site of an ideal of cultural globalization” (Hunt, n.d.:104).

Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* seeks to contradict a common perception that it is the foreigners who bring the violence and corruption to Johannesburg: “Quite a large percentage of our home relatives who get killed in Hillbrow are in fact killed by other relatives and friends – people who

bring their home grudges with them to Jo'burg. That's what makes Hillbrow so corrupt" (Mpe, 18). Mpe also uses his work to contradict the perception that it is only black people who corrupt the neighbourhood, adding that white sex workers, white drug dealers and white criminals could be found there as well. (Mpe, 2001). He compares Hillbrow with other neighbourhoods or villages within Johannesburg and outside of the city, stating that the place is indeed "no worse" (Mpe, 2001:18).

Moele's *Room 207*, the story of six young men who struggle to realize their dreams in the "dream city", is a similar portrayal of an urban space filled with contradictions and people fighting for space and resources (Moele, 2006:19). All six men live together in a room in a run-down building at the centre of their neighbourhood. By day they seek to make ends meet; by night they party, buy sex, and get involved in corruption. The novel paints an image of a place where dreams are born but hardly ever fulfilled. It is a place where even college graduates can become forced to become a sex worker. Moele's portrayal of the neighbourhood feels very real and intimate. The dirt, mice, broken windows, used condoms, broken bottles and vomit all paint the picture of a place which for many is like a dead-end street; a place where people get involved in many dubious activities to make it work. The protagonists as much as the sex workers represented within the novel are street-smart, something that appears necessary to survive in the downtown area. They have a love-hate relationship with the place, the neighbourhood becomes a drug they cannot get enough of, yet it is a place they cannot wait to leave behind at the same time.

Summary

The sex industry is often concentrated within urban centres and Johannesburg's Hillbrow is no different. In that regard, the portrayal of the sex industry within the works focused on Johannesburg provides a glimpse of the life in the downtown neighbourhood, as much as the description and representation of the neighbourhood provide a backdrop – be it social or economic – for the sex industry.

The fictional representation largely echoed findings from the interviews which represented women as very mobile individuals whose engagement with the urban space of inner-city Johannesburg led to a constant creation and re-evaluation of their identities within the city and their representation thereof (Howarth, 2002; Timotjevic & Breakwell, 2000). Some of the fictional works and the interviews showed how a change in setting affected a women's representation and how the women sometimes actively sought a change in environment to be able to see and represent herself differently and to get away from stigma and judgment related to the downtown neighbourhood of Hillbrow. Both fiction and the interviews also supported academic literature which portrayed the neighbourhood as a crowded space with challenging living conditions and

where the presence of sex work was both a reaction to its economic and social make up, but also a contributor to some of its challenges (Leggett, 2002; COHRE, 2005; Wafer et al, 2008; Rees et al, 2000; Pettifor et al, 2000).

5.4.5 Methodology in Fictional Representation

Each one of the authors has a different way of telling the migrant sex worker story. Their points of view are different; the timeline of the stories and their structure differ; each use a different language and other tools to illustrate or convey their message (see Table 4:68).

Male vs Female Representation of Migrant Sex Work

When depicting a delicate subject such as sex work, the question of credibility arises as well. Feminist film maker Michelle Citron has said: “I would argue that a man can’t make a film about a woman now. I don’t think they should and I don’t think they can. It’s dishonest. Those films are really about themselves, not women, yet they never acknowledge that” (Citron, 1978:104). I would both agree and disagree with that statement. Any fictional representation, be it film, novel or poem about a migrant sex worker will differ when written or directed by either a woman or man, and it will differ from one written or directed by a sex worker herself. That does not mean that the other is less valid but rather provides a different representation of the industry.

Kleinboer’s *Midnight Missionary* is a fascinating example in that regard. The novel is a bizarre account, partly autobiographical, by a narrator who claims to be one of the last white people living in Yeoville. What is fascinating about the novel is the author’s vivid, naked portrayal of a man’s view of the world of sex workers, drugs and alcohol that seem to be thriving in all corners of Hillbrow. The novel paints a picture of the life in Hillbrow from a white man’s perspective and how it feels to be the neighbourhood’s white minority. All of the images of sex workers drawn up in the novel are clearly representations from a man’s perspective. It thus shows a point of view on the sex industry rarely researched or represented. There is little material that looks at the men frequenting the sex workers, and if so, it does portray the clients as the sex workers see them. In *Midnight Missionary*, however, everything is represented the way the man supposedly sees and experiences it. While the protagonist occasionally recounts what the women did or said, it raises the question about the meaning or intention of those said words as they are translated by what he perceives their meaning to be. One example are the comments the protagonist chooses to relay from the women he visited, as it is mainly to bolster his manhood and ego: “You fucked me nice, she said” (Kleinboer, 2006:85) or “You know how to fuck, she told me” (Kleinboer, 2006:107). Not one of the sex workers is portrayed as ever having complained. The language used in the novel is very direct, at points vulgar, and ultimately male. To a large extent it ignores the emotional factor often analysed within other novels, but rather seeks to portray the sex scenes, the women

and the industry in a very graphic and honest way that both appals and fascinates. While I have only read the novel in the English translation, the original text was written in Afrikaans. I believe the contrast of the author's graphic sex scenes and Afrikaans – a language in the South African context often associated with bible stories, clear moral boundaries and right-wing politics – creates a representation of the industry that is both disturbing and enticing at the same time. The author seeks to push that boundary by using numerous Bible references throughout the book to contradict his Calvinistic upbringing with his engagement in a stigmatized industry. The openness in which the author describes the sex scenes – from the anticipation and build up to the event to its purely physical enjoyment – may be seen as a rebellious move in a society where talking openly about sexuality is a big taboo.

Kleinboer's story, as the novel is more focused on presenting the present-day client experience of the protagonist than a transition for the sex workers themselves (Kleinboer, 2006). That in itself serves as a fascinating portrayal of the industry as it focuses on a part of the profession rarely portrayed in detail: the clients. Kleinboer's protagonist seems to thrive on being able to choose among women from across the continent. The protagonist visits the brothels during all possible hours, during lunch breaks, in the morning, in the evening and spends all his money on sex. "I've found my niche, my little paradise that embraces me. In a brothel," he says (Kleinboer, 2006:19). He even admits that the addiction is a way to avoid having to face problems at home with his estranged girlfriend who refuses to have intercourse with him the way he would like to. Sometimes he visits the brothels just for the sake of it. "Sometimes my heart's not in it; I simply go through the motions. But at other times..." (Kleinboer, 2006:121). The women in the novel are represented as means for the man's sexual pleasure, yet others are portrayed as his "girlfriends" (Kleinboer, 2006:118) or "friends" (Kleinboer, 2006:79). Kleinboer represents the women as someone he could establish a sense of trust: "While I was taking a bath, she fell asleep on the bed. I felt that she trusted me; she wasn't afraid I'd steal the money I'd given her and sneak away. I'll visit her again" (Kleinboer, 2006:95). He shows throughout, however, that this is an industry where bargaining and business is part of everyday life: "She asks R150, but when I offer R80, she nods and begins to undress" (Kleinboer, 2006:201).

As these examples illustrate, the choice of words could be seen as distinctively male and to some extent gives an insider view of a man's perspective on the sex industry. One could dismiss his comments, claims or language as chauvinistic, but I believe it does add another perspective that should not be ignored, but rather be used to complement the works written/directed by female authors.

Fictional Representation and Research

The second question that arises when analyzing the methodology is the work that preceded the creation of each work. At least two of the works are – at least partly – autobiographical. Bugul's coming of age novel is an autobiography of the author, Marietou M'Baye, who uses the penname to describe her journey from Senegal to Belgium and her quest for her post-colonial identity. Kleinboer's novel is supposed to be partially based on the writer's own experience, although it is unclear which parts of the work are fictional and which ones are not. The autobiographical aspect of their stories serves to create a very vivid testimony of the industry. Their subjective, very personal and intimate representation of their individual experience becomes a very powerful statement without being representative of all other sex workers of that time and place.

All other works are based on the authors' research or observations. Unigwe is said to have walked around the red-light district of Antwerp "in a mini-skirt and thigh-high boots" to carry out her research (Evaristo, 2009:1). Unigwe says she the women did not believe her that she was a writer, but rather mistook her for a "new girl, who wanted information" (Otas, 2009:2). She did not bother trying to convince them otherwise, as it made it easier to get information that way. Being Nigerian is likely to have helped her get access to the women, with whom she could converse in the local language and with whom she shared a common background. Still, what they told Unigwe needs to be understood as yet another representation of the women's lives and her fictional story is a representation of that representation. Works such as Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and Grootboom's *Foreplay* seem to clearly stem from both author's observation of society and a specific neighbourhood in particular. The fact that there are clear similarities between all the Johannesburg-based works could serve as a mean to validate some of the assumptions made. As an example, Mpe, Moele and Kleinboer give a rather similar portrayal of everyday life in Hillbrow, even though the stories and message of each work differ entirely.

Fictional Representation and Story Structure

Some of the works tell a linear story which has a beginning, a development, a climax and an end. Darko's and Unigwe's novels are good example of that. Both novels represent the women's trajectories into sex work and their life in and out of the industry. The two works focus on the reasons for why the women ended up as sex workers and how they found their agency through the journey they travel. Other works such as Kleinboer's *Midnight Missionary* give a snapshot of the Afrikaner man's experience within the Hillbrow-based sex industry. Mpe and Moele depict images of the industry as part of a larger story on the life in Hillbrow. Here the sex workers are not the focus, but rather help illustrate the reality of the downtown neighbourhood. Different yet again are works such as p'Bitke's poem and Grootboom's play, which do not recount a specific

storyline, but use the sex worker metaphor to make statements about society and its morals as a whole.

Fictional Representation and Perspective

The different authors chose different points of view to present their fictional account and that choice affects how the fiction's message is perceived by those reading or viewing it. Two works are an autobiography (Kleinboer, 2006; Bugul, 2008), allowing the reader to become witness to a person's private thoughts. The reader follows the action, sees migration and the sex work industry as those two authors choose to present it. There are other works which use the omniscient narrator who understands all the action going on and has access to each character's thoughts. Found in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) it allows the reader to follow the women's thought process, their choices and emotional transitions while engaging in the industry. It allows the reader to understand how three of the protagonists react to their colleagues death and choices that follow that reaction. The two movies I looked at give no access to a character's thorough and we see only what the camera shows us. There is limited objectivity in that, however, as the choice or emphasis of certain sequences over others is at the director's discretion (*District 9*; 2009; *Blood Diamonds*, 2006). This is how we see in both movies a short sequence of sex workers trying to lure the clients, yet we find out little about their thoughts, motivations and objectives. An interesting example in the choice of points of view is Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001). The author makes use of the second-person narrator, thus indirectly forcing his readers to reconsider their own attitudes towards migrants, sex workers and Hillbrow. Already the title of the novel seeks to universalize the message of the novel that Hillbrow can be found elsewhere as well, that "we are all foreigners, that home is not home for any one of us, that we are all makwerekwere" (Kim, 2010:3).

Summary

As this section illustrates, the methodology is a key element in creating a fictional representation as it affects both the voice and the meaning of the transmitted message. Each work's individual point of view impacts the credibility of the work and may be perceived as favouring the male or female perspective on migration and the sex work industry. The structure equally plays a role in determining the author's ultimate goal: to portray an individual story with a beginning, a climax and an end or instead portray a metaphor for the society as a whole.

5.5 Conclusions

There is no one single fictional representation of the migrant woman involved in sex work. As this chapter illustrates, there are clear differences in how the various authors choose to portray both migration and the industry. Some works represent the women as survivors; those who cross

borders or leave their villages in search for a better living for themselves and their families. There are those represented as victims of trafficking who gradually make a transition to women involved in sex work, who actively take control of their lives, gain financial independence and even execute revenge. Yet others use the migrant sex worker motif to represent and ridicule society as a whole, but exposing its double standards and moral hypocrisy. Each time traditional gender roles are being challenged or reconstructed and the women define a new self for themselves within the urban space.

The characters found in those works of fiction are very complex and the works reflect the challenges migrant women involved in sex work face in creating their own identity within the industry, between their “normal” and their “sex worker” life and between their life they had in places from which they originate and the inner-city environment they are now living in.

The fictional works both support and defy stereotypes about migrants and sex workers. Some authors challenge the notion of migrants held responsible for all evil found in Hillbrow; similarly they reject the notion of migrants and sex workers being the spreaders of HIV. Others are very clear in reaffirming common perceptions of xenophobia, crime and violence within the inner-city neighbourhood, yet provide little proof for their claim. Each of those fictional representations portrays migrants as individuals navigating the fragmented spaces within an African inner-city and their trajectory into sex work as their way of establishing their space within it.

There are clear parallels between the works of fiction and the way the women I interviewed represented themselves. In both cases migration and sex work are represented as having a profound impact on a woman’s role within society. While in the interviews all women represented themselves as survivors who make a choice to enter sex work to make ends meet, there are several examples found in fiction where women were represented as an object of male fantasy and created to fulfil a man’s needs. In both types of representation women are found to be very mobile, not only within their job, but also geographically, and between different ways of seeing and representing themselves. Both fiction and the interviews highlighted what impact migration and sex work had on the women’s lives and their role within their families and societies. Both also illustrated how gender roles were challenged and often reversed as a result of their migratory pattern and their engagement in sex work.

Both types of representation accept that migration and sex work exist, without providing a clear exit solution for the women involved. While some fiction represented sex work as a permanent solution, partially by being able to tell the women’s whole life story, the women I interviewed put great emphasis in portraying their involvement in sex work as temporary only. Both times women

are represented as battling with the desire to be recognized as the provider in their families and the fact of being stigmatized by society at large, thus showcasing their challenge in trying to form an identity between the discourse of good and bad women. Equally, both fiction and the interviews provided examples of some of the schemes the women used to retain their autonomy and create a distance between themselves and an emotionally-charged job. While the women in the interviews largely accepted that fate, some of the fictional work showed authors' efforts to challenge some of the society's double standards and condemn those who use sex workers yet complain at the same time. Ultimately, both types of representation represented migrant sex workers as women with a plan, and thus depict sex work as an empowerment tool and a way to fight poverty. Each time sex work is represented as work, and the women each time put great emphasis to differentiate between their job and that of a prostitute.

There were discrepancies in the way fiction described the women's attitude to health as opposed to what the women told me in the interviews. While my interviewees sought to be seen as very health-conscious and even educating others via their volunteering at the clinic, the fictional works depicted the image of an industry where drug abuse, other addictions and HIV were common.

Each type of representation is constructed against the background of the urban space of inner-city Johannesburg. Each time the women are portrayed as navigating a very fluid space. Their lives are very mobile and the women actively choose to move within the city and beyond to have the option to see and represent themselves differently. Doing so, they also impact on the representation of the downtown area and construct an image of Hillbrow as a place where identities are created, reconstructed and tested against the representation by others. Both the fiction and the women I spoke to depict inner-city Johannesburg as a diverse and multi-cultural space which is battling many social and economic challenges. Each type of representation also referred to xenophobia, either in general terms or when referring to attitudes between sex workers in particular.

Fiction and my interviews differed in the methodologies used to create a representation. While some fictional works told the story from the sex workers' perspective and could be seen in parallel to my interviews, others used the client's point of view or an omniscient narrator to recount the story. The language used in fiction was often more graphic than the words used by the women I spoke to. The novels and films sought to engage at an emotional level and to keep one's interest through a consistent story line, often mixing primary research with a fictional storyline to do so. This was different in the interviews where I was sought to gather facts, observe behaviour, and on was often forced to jump between topics to gain a more comprehensive picture of the women's stories. The fictional accounts allowed me to follow a woman's or a client's thought process and

to witness their transitions in life. During my interviews, on the other hand, I was limited by what the women were willing to share at that given moment and what they could recall from experiences that might go back some time. This is not to say that one account was necessarily more comprehensive than other as the women's selection in my interviews could be paralleled with the selection done by a playwright or novelist. I would rather argue that it is the comparison of one with the other that allowed me to challenge statements made, find parallels and contradictions, ask questions and understand the advantages and limitations of each account.

6. Research Findings & Analysis: The Play

6.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters I sought to discuss and analyse how the women I interviewed as part of this research saw and represented themselves. I then looked at how migrant women involved in sex work are represented by others and within fictional works in particular and how that representation compares with their own representation. In this chapter, using the example of a play I wrote based on the same interviews, I analyse in detail the methodology of translating a 'real life' story into fiction and the challenges and opportunities such an exercise affords.

The goal of writing *The Ostrich Feather Duster* was to explore the idea of representation and how representation by others in fiction – be it film, drama or novels --- compares with the way we represent ourselves. My aim was to draw parallels and examine the differences between my own representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg and compare that with the way those said women saw and represented themselves. The project was a learning exercise of translating the information I had gathered through the collection of my primary data (e.g. interviews) into a fictional dramatic piece. I also wanted to experiment with various dramatic tools (words, action, lights, sound and others) to portray a glimpse of the life of migrants involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg to better understand the challenges, opportunities and especially effectiveness of using each.

I began writing the play in August 2010, as soon as I had begun with my interviews. Auditions and rehearsal for the play happened the following month, with the production opening in early October that same year. I based the play on the original interviews I conducted with four migrant sex workers working in inner-city Johannesburg or surrounding areas and all the background research I conducted as part of this study. The women I interviewed had a chance to evaluate for themselves the success or failure of the play in portraying their lives by attending one of the performances in October. Their and the audiences' reactions – collected via focus group discussions and questionnaires – were a chance for me to examine how we – directors, writers or playwrights – choose to represent others and the consequences thereof.

6.2 The Play¹¹

6.2.1 The Story

The play tells the story of four migrant women and their trajectories into sex work in inner-city Johannesburg. It is a collection of monologues about the city, each narrated from a migrant sex worker's perspective. Each woman represents one of the character types identified through the interviews: the business woman, the mother, the fugitive and the avenger. Each story highlights different social phenomena such as survival, single-parenthood, networks, double identity, agency and others which also came through during the interviews and the larger scope of this study. I also use the play to represent the women's perspective on topics such as sexuality, gender, migration, status, urban space and everyday life in an African city, which all were found to impact the way the women see and ultimately represent themselves. I use the migrant sex worker as a lens, mirror image, a re-presenter of the city and ultimately paint the image of the city as a sex worker itself.

6.2.2 The Setting

The play is set in three locations in inner-city Johannesburg: a brothel room, a room and a street whose set up was informed by the interviews and my own observations of the streets. I chose

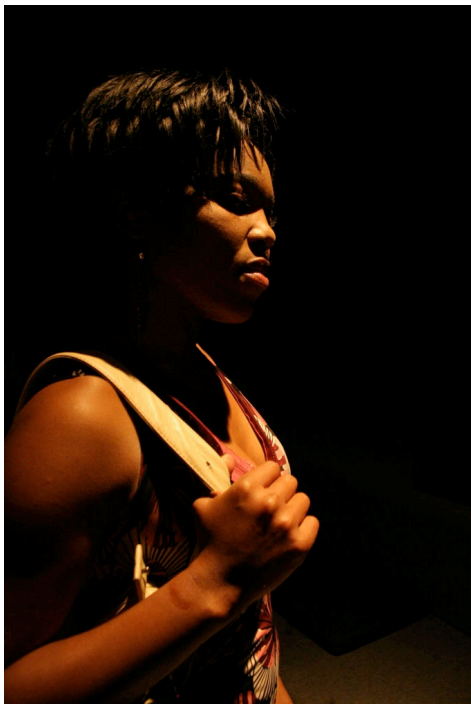


Photo 1: Nozipho Gamede as The Fugitive in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*. © A. Rinaldi 2010

those three locations to emphasise how the women's representation of themselves and sex work was affected by the location they were in. Choosing those three allowed me to navigate between their representation at home (room), at work but away from the public eye (brothel room) and on the street. The play's time span reaches from the late afternoon hours to early morning which allowed me to depict the women's changing representation from nighttime to daylight.

6.2.3 The Ostrich Feather Duster Metaphor

My choice to use the ostrich feather duster metaphor as an underlying theme for the play was first of all an attempt to localize the play within Johannesburg. An ostrich feather duster is a truly South African product, with the original dusters invented by a broom factory manager in Johannesburg in 1903. In addition,

¹¹ A copy of the play has been attached as an appendix.

however, I saw many parallels between the lives of a migrant sex worker as identified throughout the interviews and that of an ostrich: both have their feathers plucked over and over again and used for someone else's need or pleasure; both keep on running around the farm the next day.

The ostrich feather duster is a cleaning product, sometimes criticized for spreading dirt and dust rather than actually cleaning it. As my research revealed, a sex worker is often represented by others as spreading diseases and shame. In this play I use this metaphor to show four women who do everything to keep themselves 'clean' despite the job they are engaging in: one woman repeatedly cleans her vagina to make sure she can perform after 20 years on the job; another woman seeks to clean herself of her past and her abusive father; yet another woman seeks to clean herself of the judgment of others and her own self-doubts about the job; finally, the last woman, via her volunteering job, helps other sex workers keep themselves clean, although being HIV-positive she can do nothing to completely clean herself.

6.2.4 The Characters

The play centred on four characters, each based on themes identified during my interviews. Rather than basing each character on one of the women I interviewed, I took bits and pieces from each interview to create four different personalities and stories which, based on my research, I felt represented well migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg. As this overview will show, each of the four characters is very complex and a number of the themes that emerged from the interviews are incorporated across those stories. All four women are migrants, with two who crossed borders and two who moved to Johannesburg from elsewhere in South Africa. Apart from the themes identified, I also sought to imitate the women's way of speaking, expressions they used and mannerisms to make my fictional representation as representative as possible. None of the women were given proper names. Instead, by identifying them through their primary characteristic I wanted to link to some of the themes and reoccurring character types found among the women. In the following section I present a short overview of the four characters and include sections from the play (see parts in italics) to illustrate how I represented some of the themes described.

The Migrant Business Woman

This woman has been in the industry for the past 20 years. She has come to terms with the job, sees it purely as a business venture and is very rational about it. Everything about her: her language, her actions, her words are very business-like and often expressed in monetary terms.

"... this no sex... but fuck, fuck, fuck... that's right. I never think... no, no, no... I count... (Laughs) all the time... and when they produce, they pay... you have to make them produce... that's right, the more the better... I tell them: I'm principled... you rent my equipment, I set the price... and it gotta be right... and don't come negotiating here like I'm a market lady! This no fake... That's right... no messing around with me down there..."

if you want the original thing, you pay. Nobody will pay for a synthetic feather duster... but they give you double for an ostrich one... that's right... I know how much I cost...of course I do... after 20 years, I've done my accounts..."

The character is focused on keeping her vagina happy and healthy as it is the equipment she is using every day. The health of the vagina will determine how long she can stay in the job. Simultaneously, that same vagina becomes her only family and friend.

"He was rough, that one, wasn't he? And quick, too, he? (Giggles). Never would have thought... with that little thing there... (Giggles) ... Four times... bang... bang... bang... I know you're hurting...I know... Twenty years next week... who would have thought... Eish...Trust me, it was worth it...it's ok. It will pass. It always does. And we got him working, too... didn't we? (Giggles loudly.) Did you have fun? Never had anyone complain yet...! If I didn't stop him, he would have gone again... (Giggles). My lord! That was like a machine! We don't want to let them wear us out, right? We have some time to go yet. No point just wasting our energy with just one... And he will be back. They always come back. And they like you... (Laughs). You're ripe like a tomato... They think they can do more than they pay for. But I know... I know when it's time...I don't even have to check the watch anymore...They will beg... say you didn't do anything... but you did, my darling, I know you did. I was there, remember? I was there..."

Working in a Hillbrow brothel, she wants to ascertain her control of her life and the choices she has made. Only the recollection of her mother – who was responsible for her starting in the business in the first place – shows the vulnerability of the character.

"Everything has a price these days...I would know, wouldn't I? I told my mother after 10 years...to celebrate the anniversary, I guess...(Giggles nervously) she slapped me... she could hit hard...(Touches her cheek, stares; holds her breath) I could see myself in her eyes and that probably bothered her more than anything else. She didn't manage to keep her emotions from firing across her face. (Laughs) Not that she really tried. Was it disappointment? Disgust? Guilt? Probably all of it mixed in a pot. For the next five years, she would ask me to shower every night, every time I got back home...Even bought me that smelly yellow-brownish soap...you rub it in and the dirt digs deeper into your pores... Told me to rub it in well; said it would "wash EVERYTHING away". She couldn't kill me down there. Lord no! Twenty years gone and I can still produce... I can still produce..."



Photo 2: Mary Theru as The Business Woman in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*. © A. Rinaldi 2010



Photo 3: Nozipho Gamede as The Fugitive in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*. © A. Rinaldi 2010

The Fugitive

This character is a younger woman who grew up on an ostrich farm in South Africa's Western Cape province. After being abused by her father, she fled to Johannesburg, where she has been trying to find a job, but with no avail. She has several boyfriends, who help her out whenever she needs money. Being in a city far away from home gives her distance

from her abusive father and allows her to keep several boyfriends – something her mother would not have approved of. She is studying during the day, hoping to become a teacher one day and being able to go back to the farm to show her father that she is no longer the vulnerable girl she once was.

I sought to make this character simpler and more naïve compared to the other women. She does not openly acknowledge to be a sex worker, but rather hides behind the idea of having several boyfriends who support her whenever she needs quick money. The idea of several boyfriends also points to a theme I noticed of sex workers needing affection, yet struggling to maintain a stable relationship with one person only.

"Sometimes my two boyfriends are away... they go see their wives and children back home...I understand... I go see my other boyfriend then... he lives close to my school... sometimes he waits for me... he looks nice, very clean. Mpho said I should use the plastic thing more often, was very angry. But this is not like that. Not like the ladies there..."

This character tries to clean herself of her past and the memories of the abusive father:

"...Mpho says I look like a city girl. Not like me...No, not like me..."

At the same time she lives with the image or hope that one day she will be able to prove to him that she is strong and able to defeat the shadows of the past:

"But my teacher says I'll soon be very so-phis-ti-ca-ted... And strong. He gotta believe that, me, sophisticated and strong..."

In the end, it is the father who finds her in the city and rapes her once again. She gives up on her family, destroys the letters she was writing to her mother back home. She wishes, that like an ostrich which is about to have his feather plucked, she could pull a big brown sack over her head.

“...why did he come? Farm not enough? No ostriches to chase? Lay eggs? Run after? Grab? Strangle? Pushed me into the back seat...seat full of cigarette butts...climbed on top... No problem, I thought... no problem... it's ok. I have a sack... big one... thick...very thick... It's nice. Nice bag. Big brown bag...”

The Mother

This woman is in the job because she has two small children to feed and take care of, yet her day job as a domestic worker does not pay the bills. She moved to Johannesburg from outside South Africa hoping for a secure and what she calls a “decent” job, yet was forced to walk the streets instead. She hopes to be able to get out of the profession as soon as she can find another job. She has never told any of her family or friends about the job and does everything to make sure nobody finds out about the real her.

“I hate when they stop right in front of me, in those big flashy cars... when they roll down the window... Don't look me into the eyes, I pray. But they don't. Never... It's done.”

The love for her children and the burden of the responsibility she carries comes through in her various speeches:

“What if they saw me? Would their little eyes understand?”

This character clearly struggles with standing on the streets; it is a reality she has yet to come to terms with. She tries to fit into a world she feels clearly uncomfortable with. This is partly why I decided to cast the part with a white women – and there are white sex workers to be found in Hillbrow – to further play with the idea of someone who feels they do not belong, not just socially, but also racially. As I did not interview white sex workers myself, it was my choice as a playwright/director to use one of the tools available in drama – in this case ability to cast cross-racially – to further emphasize a point I was trying to make. I believe it was that choice to cast a white woman in that role that raised questions among the audience for whom the fact that white women could also be found working the streets of Hillbrow was an unknown.

“They say it's a catwalk but often I do trip over myself. (Straightens up, puts her chest out) We are no strip club

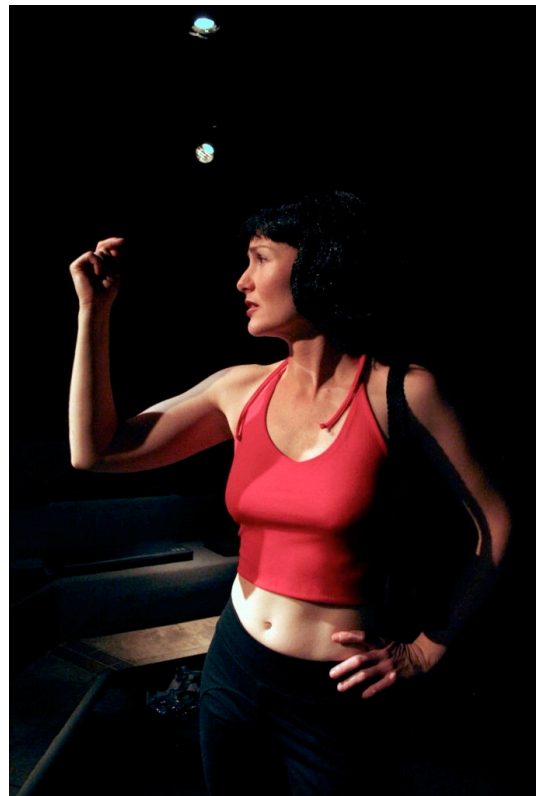


Photo 4: Janet King as The Mother in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*. © A. Rinaldi 2010

stars... I've got the legs and the body... but it's a competitive market..."

This character wears a wig to conceal who she really is. Only when the wig falls off during the act and a client looks straight at her, does she find her peace with the job she now does.

"... 'So this is how you look like', he said. (Laughs nervously) He smiled. I couldn't get my eyes off that hair... hanging there... naked... bare. I just looked at him... at me, in his eyes. He said he liked it... me, I mean... I didn't believe him... How could I believe him? He offered to help me put it back on. Slid the pins back on... One by one... (Wipes away a tear) I don't even know his name ... We sat there for some 20 minutes ... not a word... (Takes a deep breath) I never used fake hair again..."

The Avenger

This character is a woman in her late 20s. She has been a sex worker since she turned 15. After being infected with HIV, she decided to volunteer in a clinic that works with sex workers, to try help others and through that, at least psychologically, heal herself. She has three children, but none of them live with her.

I have chosen this character to reveal the main metaphor in the play:

"The birds... they are never harmed... when they pluck feathers out of their skin, I mean. At least that is what they told us at the factory. So we don't feel bad... that they use them one, two, three, four, five times... over and over... to make those feather sticks. They are nice, the sticks... They put sacks over their heads to keep them calm... I saw a picture of it... brown bags on skinny necks... funny it is... they run, and run, and run... but they get them... take feathers... the loose ones... One, two three... It's not nice. No, not nice... Definitely not. Do they feel it? They must. Does it hurt? Maybe they used to that now ... Then they let them free... they get to run around... naked. That must be nice, very nice. Then their feathers grow back... It's ok. Until it's feather time. Again..."

This was a difficult character to portray, someone who lives in between the recognition that she is slowly dying and someone who wants to help others to not end up like her. She did not become HIV positive because of her fault, but rather

because of the abuse by one of her clients:



Photo 5: Tebogo Makokoe as The Avenger in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*. © A. Rinaldi 2010

"Last year I had a guy touching me while I was still fiddling with the plastic. By the time I took it out of the wrapper, he had already pushed in. No questions, no protests. It was done. And it was done forever. We provide the rubbers, but they prefer to flush life down the gutter and drag me along for the ride."

As a result, she has become disillusioned with the world of men and while she does everything to protect or keep clean her fellow sex workers, she has no pity for men.

"Now when they refuse I let them produce... I let them push in... skin on skin... (Stares) They think that because I'm not all bones and skin that I'm clean. Pure. I want them to share my price. I don't care anymore... I'm so bored... I give girls a box each...take them to exams at the clinic... nobody can say THEY are irresponsible..."

6.2.5 Themes

There are various themes pertinent to the migration and sex work debate in South Africa and Johannesburg in particular that I sought to portray through the play. While some of the themes are portrayed through the examples of the individual characters, here are some other issues I sought to highlight.

Migration, Sex Work and Survival / Work

All four characters within the play are migrants, both internal and cross-border ones. They all came to Johannesburg in search for better opportunities and a means to support their families. They became sex workers after failing to secure other jobs that would pay them sufficiently to provide for their loved ones. Two of the characters are single mothers. None of them has a partner who helps provide for their families and the women have accepted the responsibility for their children as solely their own.



"The young girls... you gotta make sure it doesn't break them... they have to see men for what they are...they live off you if they can... that's right...the ladies have to be serious about this business... gotta ask the right price... play the game... (Laughs) Gotta invest in your inventory, that's right ..."

Photo 6: Janet King (left) and Tebogo Makokoe in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*. © A. Rinaldi 2010

Migration, Sex Work and Shame

The women's battle with the stigma occasionally comes through in the monologues. While they may portray themselves as survivors and those who found a way to support themselves and others, the feeling of being looked down upon, especially by those in their families, is sometimes too strong to ignore.

"She didn't manage to keep her emotions from firing across her face. (Laughs) Not that she really tried. Was it disappointment? Disgust? Guilt? Probably all of it mixed in a pot. For the next five years, she would ask me to shower every night, every time I got back home... Even bought me that smelly yellow-brownish soap... you rub it in and the dirt digs deeper into your pores... Told me to rub it in well; said it would "wash EVERYTHING away". She couldn't kill me down there. Lord no! Twenty years gone and I can still produce... I can still produce..."

I contrast that battle with stigma imposed by society by showing how one of the characters is completely at ease with her own sexuality by letting her perform a cleaning ritual of her vagina at the start of the play. The cleaning ceremony ends with the women smelling her vagina:

"(Puts her hand down her skirt, smells her fingers)... Only I know how you need to smell, only I do... that's right, I do..."



Photo 7: Mary Theru in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*. © A. Rinaldi 2010

Migration, Sex Work and the 'Gold Digger'

Focusing on the profits and what the money could buy was one way the women I interviewed justified their decision to migrate and to engage in sex work.

"No pleasure, no... this no sex... but fuck, fuck, fuck... that's right. I never think... no, no, no... I count... (Laughs) all the time... and when they produce, they pay... you have to make them produce... that's right, the more the better..."

Agency and Rules

All four characters emphasise their agency in what they do, not only by showing how they manage to look after themselves, but also by setting rules in what they accept as part of their job and what not.

"I tell them: I'm principled... you rent my equipment, I set the price... and it gotta be right... and don't come negotiating here like I'm a market lady! This no fake... That's right... no messing around with me down there... if you want the original thing, you pay. Nobody will pay for a synthetic feather duster... but they give you double for an

ostrich one... that's right... I know how much I cost...of course I do... after 20 years, I've done my accounts..."

Double Life, Double Identity

Each one of the women leads a double life: one on the job and the other outside of it. The women are shown changing their outfits throughout the show, further to emphasise the distinction between their work and private life. They also seek to create different identities for the women they portray to their families and friends and to the women they represent in front of their clients and fellow sex workers.

"I'm on 6th most of the time these days. They don't know me here, god help me...I come here and I blend in... Short, tight skirt... some cleavage... (Looks away, takes a few steps, shouts seductively) Hello honey, should we give it a shot tonight? (Throws a kiss, turns back to the audience). I show what I've got to offer and they forget to ask about me. Their eyes on my skin... I'm like these walls around here... hard, cold; it's quiet at night, yet this place is alive, hectic, loud...Can they hear me scream? God knows why I'm doing this, he knows...Does he look down on me sometimes? What if they saw me? Would their little eyes understand?"

Hidden Pride

Some of the sex workers I spoke to took pride in the work they did and the satisfaction they could give to their clients. I sought to reflect that in one of the characters within the play as well:

"(Counts notes) 120, 140, 160, 180... not bad... We enjoyed that fuck, didn't we? (Laughs out loud). And what noise we made! (Giggles)..."

Migration, Sex Work and Urban Space

I sought to recreate the space of inner-city Johannesburg in a variety of ways. There were the obvious visual identifiers in the form of street signs and names of shops referred to by the characters throughout the show. I also used recorded radio announcements pertinent to the sex work debate within Johannesburg which were aired during the show. In addition, each character's



Photo 8: Janet King (left) and Mary Theru in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*. © A. Rinaldi 2010

story was localized within the socio-economic context of the city via references within their monologues, including lack of jobs, xenophobia towards migrants, corruption, violence on part of the police and others.

Migration, Sex Work and HIV/AIDS

Three of the characters are represented as very health-conscious. They are aware of the risks of the job and insist on using condoms with each of their clients. One even volunteers at the local clinic to educate other sex workers about the risks of the job. Still, one of the women has numerous boyfriends and she rarely uses condoms because as she says her boyfriends “seem clean”. Part of the theme is the women’s attitude to HIV, and the fact that many sex workers battle with the ignorance of their clients, other women or the general public.

“But some ladies don’t seem to mind. They think you take the pill and it’s gone. You take a hot shower and you’re clean. Spotless. Safe. Isn’t that what some of the papers preach?”

Migration, Sex Work and Xenophobia

Another theme is that of xenophobia among sex workers and their differing ideas when it comes to origins of their clients.

“My own rainbow nation right there... Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe...East Africa... and even some Chinese here and there... but the locals bite... report us, get us fined... or locked up... We take their jobs, go for 20 rand less... that’s what they say at least. But THEY like us... (Laughs) we know how to warm a bed, they say... we’re no passive dolls... they ask for us... I like the foreigners...(Laughs) we’re both stranded on this island... Both in no man’s land (Giggles). Don’t touch a Zulu though. Eish... they are rough! Don’t know how to treat a lady! Have too many of them already...”

Migration, Sex Work and Managed Vulnerability

Placing two characters in a brothel and two on the streets, I also wanted to portray the differences between the lives of each group. While the ladies working the streets have to deal with violence and abuse by both clients and the police, the girls in the brothel find more security in the house, yet have to give up part of their profits for that.



Photo 9: Janet King in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*. © A. Rinaldi 2010

“Eish...The ladies of the street...Look at them...! They don’t look after themselves...they let their equipment rot... My lord... they let it become them... The street, you know, it takes a lot out of them. They’re right there, under that bright eerie light... Everyone can see them; they kill you down there... and if that’s lost, what else is left? In a hotel, it’s different... more private...(Laughs) You give a name, and nobody asks... You walk in, say who you are and get down to business...”

One important aspect to look at was the treatment by the police. I have used the strongest character among the four – the Business Woman – to show that even someone who is in control of her life and has come to terms with the job has to bow to the authority of the police, primarily because of her profession deemed illegal.

“Had to pay double to get him off me tonight... that scum... Money ain’t doing the trick anymore... what are they going to ask for next? Every Sunday, there he is ... that’s what you do on night duty these days ... Routine police check, he says, and heads straight for my room...(Laughs bitterly) that sleazy thing... but he knows where the meat is juicy enough... talking no use anymore... had me locked up twice when I told him my mind... Rights my ass, he said...”

Migration, Sex Work and Clients

The play also seeks to look at what type of men make the client mix these days and how that may differ from preconceptions of what type of person would visit a brothel or hire a sex worker.

“The sweet man with a ring on his fingers, the decent one... The one that puts a knife to your throat, slices you... drops you in the bushes and walks away. Have I paid enough? Can you make me pay more? Can’t you face who you are? Is that why? They want to kill you because you’ve made them do the worst thing on earth...”

6.3 Play Production

6.3.1 Casting & Acting



Photo 10: Nozipho Gamede, Mary Theru, Janet King, Tebogo Makokoe in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*. © A. Rinaldi 2010

I invited both women from the University of the Witwatersrand and those outside to try out for the show. In addition to calling for auditions via posters and email announcements, I asked the RHRU to inquire among the sex workers they work with if any of the women were interested in trying out. In

the end, three sex workers and seven other women auditioned. In the end I cast two sex workers in my show, although one of them had to be replaced after a week of rehearsals due to personal reasons.

The auditions proved to be an interesting experience at representation or how women interpreted and sought to portray the monologues I had written. Some of those unfamiliar with the profession grappled with the intensity of some of the text; some were too young and too fragile to portray some of the more mature characters I had in mind. Some added depth to the stories which went beyond what I had imagined. The three sex workers who auditioned were very confident. As one told me “acting is part of my life”. Interestingly enough, none of them would stick to the text I gave them to read and prepare. They all chose to portray a scene which only vaguely resembled what I had written. One of the women, whom I asked to describe the character in the scene she was asked to portray, immediately assumed the first person to describe the character, making me wonder to what extent the scene resembled her own life.

Almost all of the women who auditioned had little or no prior acting experience. The limited pool of talent made it difficult to cast the show the way I had initially imagined. I cast three black woman and one white to play with the perceptions of who nowadays are the sex workers in South Africa. When casting the show, I was hoping to get an ethnic diversity among the cast, but in the end, I had to opt for three South Africans and one Kenyan. However, with the former coming from different parts of the country I could still at least illustrate the rural-to-urban migratory patterns I had in mind. In addition, my Kenyan actress did allow me to play with the strong xenophobic attitudes found among sex workers or between them and the general public.



Photo 11: Nozipho Gamede (left) and Janet King in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*.
© A. Rinaldi 2010

6.3.2 Sex Worker Representing a Fictional Sex Worker

The sex worker who ended up playing one of the fictional characters I created is one of the women I interviewed as part of this research.

Representation versus Real Life

I intentionally did not cast her in the role that most resembled her own story, but assigned her a character that would give her space to play with the idea of representation and what acting a certain type of sex worker might mean. Already during the auditions it was clear to me that the girl would not necessarily offer the most effective acting performance and there would be limits to how much I could guide or train her. Still, I did like the freshness and natural presence that the performer offered, the way she interpreted the written text and the contrast she offered in comparison to the other women in the ensemble. The choice also became an interesting experiment in how someone who knows the industry in and out manages or chooses to portray that said reality. While her role differed from her representation of herself, I could see her own story gradually being weaved into the character assigned to her. She used her own background and trajectory into sex work to create the character's past. She was bold in the language she used and the way she portrayed the character on stage. She was the only one in the ensemble who voluntarily decided to change her clothes on stage, even though that had her standing in front of the audience in only a see-through slip. It made me realize how comfortable she was with her body, even though this was her first time of performing on stage. She had no hesitation in engaging the audience in her performances by sitting on various men's laps throughout the show. Her acting was not particularly strong and she struggled to keep to the script, which in the end I cut considerably to ensure that she could get from the start to the end. Having said that, however, several audience members reflected on her performance as being particularly "touching" and "real".

Sex Worker in a Theatre Ensemble

The woman's interaction with the ensemble was another test in representation. She never disclosed being a sex worker, and



Photo 12: Mary Theru (left) and Tebogo Makokoe in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*. © A. Rinaldi 2010

the other women never guessed. She always listened to others telling her how women in the industry are likely to dress, walk and talk, but would rarely offer suggestions of her own. Whenever she spoke about the past, all she would say is “there are things I have done that I am not proud of, but God will forgive me”. The four women grew quite close, despite clear socio-economic differences between all of them. All this time the sex worker represented herself as a woman from a town in South Africa’s KwaZulu Natal province, a mother of two, in-between jobs, with an underlying passion to one day become a professional actress. She spoke of her pride of being able to provide for her two children. She recounted stories of her movements within South Africa and between a number of jobs. She spoke about being a volunteer at the clinic and helping sex workers keep themselves healthy and clean. Every time she came for a rehearsal she was dressed up for going out and wearing full make up. Only in the course of the rehearsals did it become clear that she was someone not accustomed to holding a regular job: she often appeared late for rehearsal, sometimes she missed them altogether. She never called to cancel, nor did she ever have a valid reason when I inquired about her whereabouts. Despite a number



Photo 13: Mary Theru in the Wits Theatre production of *The Ostrich Feather Duster*.
© A. Rinaldi 2010

of explanations about the importance of the final two rehearsals, she missed one of them. She would not respond to calls and messages; all her explanation was “I don’t know how to deal with problems and I knew you would be angry with me”. She clearly seemed to struggle with the idea of an organized and structured working environment and the idea of deadlines, appointments and rehearsals was a foreign concept to her. At the same time, she constantly spoke of courses and interviews she was attending in the hope to find a full-time job.

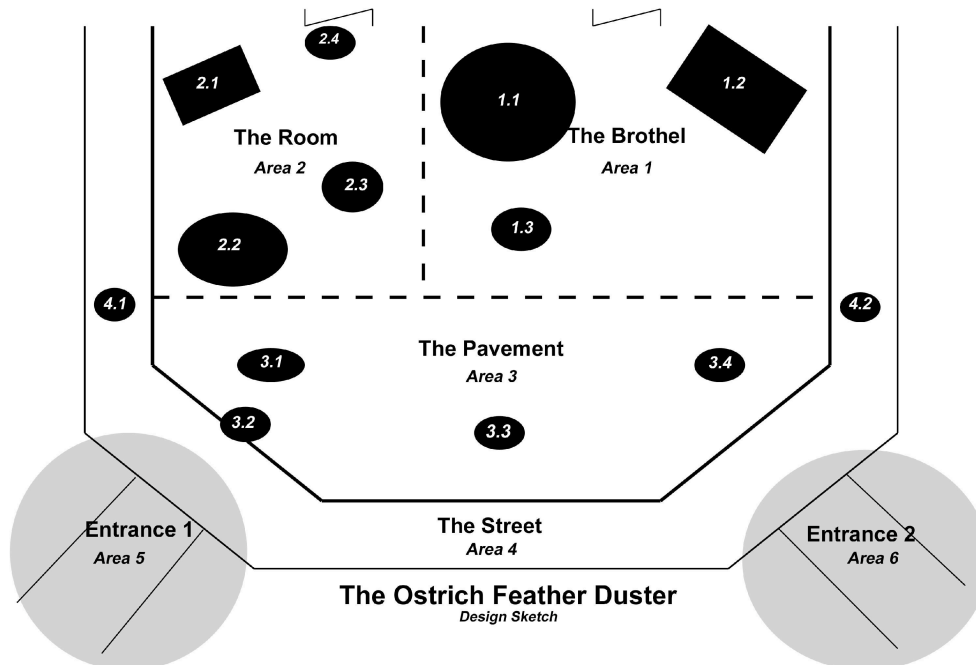
6.3.3 Venue/Set/Lights/Sound/Costumes

Beyond creating four characters based on my interviews and themes identified in the course of this research, I needed to create a visual and audio representation of the migrant sex worker world within inner-city Johannesburg.

Venue and Set

I decided to use an amphitheatre stage to present this production. The space between the stage and the audience became the street; I put the room, the brothel and the pavement area all on the

same stage, with very fluid dividers – this to indicate the very mobile and fluid nature of a sex worker's life, where the different spaces (and realities) often overlap.



Graphic 2: The *Ostrich Feather Duster* Design Sketch

I used different types of lighting to transition between indoors and outdoors and between light and day. I also made use of colour gels and different light screens with patterns to create shadows, different intensities of light and to create a mood that would reflect the various environments the women work and live in. In my visual portrayal I relied on the description provided by the sex workers as I had no opportunity to observe the brothels myself. I relied on my own observation of the streets of inner-city Johannesburg to portray the outdoor spaces. I localized the space to inner-city Johannesburg by using some of the key concepts identified by the women and which I myself observed within the city, including street signs, trash, crowdedness, and a generally subdued mood.

Sound

I used original music for this production and had lined up a composer to work with me to re-create the sounds of the city. As with lights, the sound was more 'dirty' than polished; in selected music pieces the influence of the various African cultures present in the city shone through. The mood of the music pieces varied depending on the scene: some were melancholic, others full of energy etc to accentuate the different stages of a sex worker's daily life and the city as well. The composition also drew on different African rhythms to hint on the multicultural influences of the city. I also put together a radio recording of news related to sex work – fear of trafficking ahead of

the 2010 soccer World Cup, a sex worker winning her case in court against her employer who unlawfully dismissed her and others – to further localize the show.

Costumes

The contemporary costumes worked well in illustrating the various stages in a sex worker's daily life. They also allowed me to portray the various roles the women assumed during the day, for example as a college woman or a cleaning lady.

6.4 Reactions

Fiction seeks to reach out to large audiences and part of its strength lies in the emotional response it manages to evoke. To be able to assess the effectiveness of a fictional representation, one needs to analyse the reaction to that specific work, to see what was understood and what was not; to see what confused, shocked or irritated; to see what was credible and what seemed fantasy; to see what grabbed and engaged and what bored. To analyse the reaction to my experiment I sought feedback from the sex workers whom I interviewed. They came to see one of the performances and we discussed their reactions through a focus group organized immediately after the performance. I also asked audience members to fill out a questionnaire to gather their feedback. Finally, I also collected feedback from the women who participated in this production both via short questionnaires and individual interviews.

6.4.1 Sex workers' reactions

Three of the sex workers I interviewed came to see the show on the opening night. They had little idea what to expect. For all of them, this was the first time they attended a theatrical performance

Accuracy

The women said they were touched by the accuracy of the representation, listing specific examples of phrases, actions, costumes, visual elements they felt matched the reality they know or which they represented in the interviews. They easily recognized the parts, stories, gestures and other characteristics that were taken from their own specific examples.

“For someone who does not work in the industry, who does not understand the industry, they may not understand. But for me it was touching. Because that's the life I know. It was a little funny as well. All these things, we've experienced them...”

Flashbacks, Parallels and Selective Memory

When asked what stood out the most or reminded them of their own experiences, the women immediately pointed to their most difficult moments in their life as a sex worker. One mentioned the rape scene, while another pointed to the xenophobia between sex workers. Another

mentioned being called names by local girls on the streets as something they could immediately identify with.

“The white girl when she was raped, when she was raped... That was something I remembered. First I heard her screaming... that she was raped... then I saw her crawling in... I saw that something was wrong...”

The women managed to observe and recall a lot of the detail portrayed in the show, which to me suggested that they could clearly follow the story line and found parallels to their own experiences.

“These stories are something we can identify with. ‘Destroying our marriages, bringing diseases’... these are the things we hear all the time. And the clients are the ones who don’t want to use the condoms....”

Each woman seemed to remember most details for the stories or parts which were linked to their own experiences. When recalling some of the scenes, the women unintentionally changed parts of the script to fit what they had gone through. That process of selective memory was a reflection of how a person’s background and past experiences affect his or her perception of the information that they are confronted with.

Awareness Campaigns

The women believed that a show such as this should be used to spread awareness about the sex work industry and to eliminate preconceptions about women who work in the profession:

“It will show people who have no idea... People think that sex workers are doing this job because they like it. That’s what people think. That they have a choice. They don’t know that you have families to feed. We also have to take care of us and most of us are not educated. And who’s going to employ me? I want to be a manager, but who’s going to employ me? Which office am I going to work in?”

The discussion soon turned into a debate about the merits of the profession and the misconceptions among the general public. I was surprised by the heated discussion that emerged which to some extent stood in contrast to the more laid-back discussions we had on the topics in the individual interviews. One woman sought to defend herself against perceptions of sex workers being lazy:

“Most people take sex workers as people who don’t know work, that we don’t want to work. We use our money like anyone does: like a nurse, a soldier... and they have to know that sex working is part of business. We do it to look after our families. If people see it, they will know it and get educated”

Another also saw the play as a way to campaigns for sex workers’ rights and the decriminalization of the industry.

“There was a point somewhere that we need rights as anyone else; that we need to be treated as any other workers, so that if you get beaten, you can go to police. Now if you are a sex worker, you can’t go to the police because what you are doing is illegal. But if it was illegalized we would have rights like any other person. But now we are... we are just

treated like dogs, like dirt... the World Cup police would say that they would clean the streets. We are dirty. That's how they were treating us. The streets were dirty because of us. They were trying to clean them of us. Even though we were just doing our business there. That's why they are saying we are dirty. But we are not dirty..."

The play did spark a debate among the women about the value of a fictional representation as opposed to non-fictional awareness programmes. They agreed that the play would have a longer-lasting effect than other campaign materials such as pamphlets. They also believed the play was engaging on an emotional level and even entertaining at times, making it easier for the audience to engage with the issues and to reflect on the information presented:

"After they've seen the drama, it will get stuck in their brain. If you just give pamphlets for people to read, people just read the heading and throw the paper away, but they need to be taught first, then you can engage them emotionally."

The play seemed to evoke some strong reactions, even making the women remember stereotyping or stigmas not portrayed in the play itself. One woman mentioned people who accuse sex workers of recruiting girls from villages and trafficking them into the cities once they are too old to work in the industry themselves:

"But that's not true. If you're taking someone's kids, that could happen to your kids as well. So why should I take someone else's kids? I must think of that kid as my own kid. That's not true..."

I found it interesting that they all believed that the play might be difficult to understand by someone who is not working in the industry or that it may be misinterpreted for material used in pro-sex work campaigns.

"If the person is not a prostitute, they will think that we are trying to promote. They will think that we are trying to encourage people to venture into this business, not knowing that we will be trying to teach them, that it's about business, along with the awareness of using a condom..."

Different Experiences

The women began arguing about the section that presented sex workers as health conscious and unwilling to jeopardize their health for the sake of a bigger pay. While one woman agreed with that statement and said "there is no one more protective of her body than a sex worker", the other two disagreed. They said some women "can't refuse if a customer puts a certain amount on the table" and they would do it "knowing that they are spreading the disease. She doesn't mind". Both however, immediately followed that statement with an assurance that they themselves would never do it. This heated reaction made me realize that even when the audience does not agree with a fictional representation, seeing the opposite portrayed makes them reassess or re-examine their own beliefs and perceptions. Viewing the play sparked a discussion among the women but also led to them representing themselves in images slightly different from the ones they presented in the interviews. The women felt the need to react to what was presented on stage,

thus supporting the idea of how identities are constructed “through and against representations” (Howarth, 2002:20). As this example shows, the representation in the play forced a chain reaction that led to them portraying themselves either in line or contrary to what they saw on stage.

Next Time

The women had no concrete suggestions about what they would have portrayed differently. I presume this was partially because this was the first time they were exposed to the dramatic form and they were still processing the emotional experience they were confronted with. It could have been also that they feared criticizing something I put so much energy into. The fact that they found so many parallels with their own experience convinced me that the show managed to provide at least a fair representation of what they see and present the industry to be.

6.4.2 Cast reactions

The goal of asking the cast for feedback was to assess the impact a process of creating a fictional representation can have on those participating in that experiment. I was hoping to be able to analyse what impact the project would have on their understanding of the sex work industry and their attitude towards it.

Unknown Territory

All cast members said the show exposed them to an industry they knew little about in the past or it showed a side of the industry they never considered: “I did not realize that most sex workers were usually doing another job or trying to get out of the business in some way or another,” one of them said. Another said it gave her a three-dimensional perspective on the industry: “I understood that there was more to being in the industry than just short skirts and high heels; I think I am less judgmental now”. The women said the show taught them empathy:

“You have to find the humanity in each character and for me that’s what I took away from the play -- a glimpse at the humanity of sex work. It’s knowing that the stories of the women in the play are not entirely fictitious, they are based on research and lived experience. These women are mothers and daughters and friends, girlfriends. They are not mindless and faceless victims or villains.”

Self-Consciousness

They most struggled with portraying some of the intimate parts of their characters, especially the woman who had to perform a cleaning ritual of her vagina at the start of the show. “I had to get over my self-consciousness very quickly. My character was very pragmatic about what she does and she does not have issues with accessing her sexuality or with her body,” she said.

Visceral Effect

Each suggested for the show to be shown in other places and for the sex work theme to be explored via other visual and performance media. Being actors, they felt a drama performance added more intimacy than reading an academic analysis would have. “Performance has a much more tangible, visceral effect,” one said.

6.4.3 Audience reactions

Asking the audience for feedback was yet another way to assess the effectiveness of the fictional presentation. I wanted to analyse the reactions it evoked and test how it challenged or reaffirmed preconceived notions about the industry. I conducted a short survey with some 15 randomly selected audience members about their reactions.

Challenging Subject

The audience said the show was “thought-provoking and challenging” and handled a very heavy topic in a balanced and sensitive manner. They thought the monologues gave them an insight into the mind and psyche of sex workers: They said they valued the variety of characters included in the show, and especially pointed out the character of the Business Woman who they say “stopped the sex workers from seeming overly victimized”. They complimented the actresses for their courage to take their clothes off in front of the audience: “Prostitutes have to be like that; they leave their own personalities at the door.”

Language, Intimacy

One audience member said the language – which I tried to base as much as possible on my interviews – was “too crude”: “Very explicit and at times I felt they could have used double-entendres to soften the blow a bit. I did wonder if sex workers really ‘tell it like it is’ like that. It felt uncomfortable at time”. Several audience members were shocked by the opening scene in which one woman was presented cleaning her vagina: “One thing I took from it was that women will do anything to survive and they can be strong if they choose to be, even if they are at the bottom of the food chain,” one person said.

Heterogeneous Group

Some audience members said the show was a reminder not to box sex workers, but rather see them as a heterogeneous group with individual stories. Several reacted to seeing one of the characters pursuing a job as a domestic cleaner during the day and on her nights off: This made them “ashamed of my preconceived perception, ordinary people doing a job. Not what I had in my head previously”. Another added: “It reminded me that these women are real people who have to take on this role just to survive.”

'Cheap' Costumes

The audience seemed to agree with my choice of costumes; some because it reconfirmed their idea that sex workers dressed "cheap". The comment was interesting in that it raised questions about which types of representation teach or enlighten more, those that reconfirm preconceived notions or those that contradict. It also shows that readers/viewers of a fictional work often look for confirmation of their own beliefs and may dismiss other representation without challenging their own perceptions.

Representation as Prevention

Each agreed that the sex worker story should be told to all groups of society: "Society needs to know that a girl needs to be supported at home and at school so that she can avoid that kind of lifestyle. If we as a society want to stop girls from going to prostitution, we need to understand why they end up there in the first place," one said. Another said the story should be told to give respect to the women who have to make that choice: "The public need to hear the story and plight of the sex worker, consider the risks they take every day". Many believed the use of drama as a medium to portray the industry allowed the different personalities and personal stories to emerge and allowed for "greater personal impact/reflection". They urged the use of other audio-visual tools to do the same and suggested to portray the same show from a client's point of view.

6.4.4 Other feedback

I received positive feedback from people involved in sex work research or those who work with sex workers on an everyday basis because they felt the production highlighted issues at the heart of the sex work debate such as HIV/AIDS, xenophobia, public health and abuse. Some members of the theater public, on the contrary, did question my casting choices, my visual elements and raised questions about the realist treatment of the play. The various comments were a good test for me to see what parts of the production worked and why and for what audience and what could be done differently to convince others. It also showed me how reactions differed based on what background the people watching it were coming from. Equally it made me realize that fictional representation will never be universally accepted and that its effectiveness will always depend on the recipient's subjective reaction. This is not to undermine the value of fictional representation, but rather acknowledge that there are limits to the uniformity of the message it seeks to convey.

6.5 Conclusions

The goal of writing *The Ostrich Feather Duster* was to explore the idea of representation in praxis and to examine how a fictional representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg compares with the way those same women represent ourselves. The play was a

valuable exercise in that it allowed me to test first-hand whether the women whose stories served as the basis for the play could in fact identify with the performance portrayed on stage.

As this chapter illustrates, the play was consistent with the interviews in the themes that it sought to represent. While the characters were adapted and the women's stories were moulded into a fictional portrayal, the underlying themes were the same. The play also sought to imitate the language, mannerism and expressions the women used throughout the interviews. The sound was used to replicate that found in an African urban setting and Johannesburg in particular. Last but not least, the set was adopted to portray the urban space of Johannesburg which underlines the sex work industry and reflects it.

The sex workers who attended one of the performances saw clear parallels between their own story and the play. They easily recognized the themes and the messages I sought to portray. They felt emotionally engaged and moved; the scenes that contradicted their own experiences sparked a debate about what is the 'truth'. They agreed there was a clear role for a fictional representation of the industry to engage, inform and fight misconceptions about the profession and the women working within it. Their comments were echoed by other audience members and from the cast, who agreed there was purpose and strength in portraying a serious, heavy topic on stage.

This is not to say that the play had no flaws. On the contrary, there are many things I would do differently or which can be strengthened to make the representation more concise, targeted and clear. In the end, however, I did manage to draw parallels and examine the differences between my own representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg and the woman's own portrayal. The play also gave me a chance to play with words, gestures, sounds and my ostrich feather duster metaphor to represent the complexity of the themes I took away from the interviews in an artistic, creative yet informative way.

7. Fictional vs self-representation: Final Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This research sought to answer how self-representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg compares with the way those same women are represented by others and authors of fictional work in particular. The study first explored the ways in which migrant women involved in sex work construct their identity in the context of urban space and how they represent that identity to others. This research further examined how the women are represented in Johannesburg-based fiction and what methods are applied to construct that representation.

Methodologies used to create each type of representation became a key aspect of this study. I examined how the migrant women that were part of this study positioned their representation within the context of inner-city Johannesburg, its specific socio-economic characteristics, but also within the context of a particular discourse on migration and sex work they were either familiar with or with which they identified. Similarly I examined how fictional authors used literary or other tools -- be it perspective, voice, setting and characterization -- to create a certain type of representation. Writing and producing a play based on my interviews with migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg then became a test in how these methodologies can be combined, translated or juxtaposed; the experiment allowed me to test first-hand how the women reacted to a fictional representation of what they said and how that reaction led to the construction of yet another image and identity.

This research did not seek to determine which was the more 'valid' or 'true' type of representation and as my findings show, I do not believe there is an answer to that nor that it is possible to have one or a true representation. On the contrary, I sought to examine whether fictional representation could inform academic work and vice versa, whether these two forms could complement each other and be used to test assumptions and theories. My conclusion is that they can and should.

7.2 Final Conclusions

There are clear similarities between the interviews and the works of fiction as much as there are distinct differences as well. This paper has been arranged in a way that each of the last three sections sheds light on different conclusions in response to my research questions. Given the great detail in which they are discussed in the previous sections, I only list here a set of overall conclusions that seek to answer the questions this study was organized around. I then briefly

place the findings in the wider literature on representation and some of the key themes around truth, knowledge, and methodologies that both informed and prompted this study.

- Self-representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg and fictional representation of that same group **compare, compliment and contradict**
- Self-representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg and fictional representation **should be used to test each other**
- **Identifying methodologies** in self-representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg and fictional representation of that same group is key to understanding both **processes, their implications, challenges and opportunities**
- Fictional representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg is **a valid form of representation**
- Fictional representation of migration can and **should be used to complement** academic work on the subject
- **Research comparing** self-representation of migration and its fictional representation can and should be pursued in research

Knowledge, Truth, Narrative Authority in Representation and Tools

The concepts of knowledge, truth and narrative authority are some of the main underlying themes that inform this research. Both the interviews and fictional works communicate knowledge; each approach uses different tools and methodologies to disseminate that knowledge; Each form of representation sets the discourse around migrant women involved in sex work in the specific social and political climate of inner-city Johannesburg and Hillbrow in particular. Each assumes an authority on the subject matter, either based on primary research, personal experience, fictional translation or all of the above. Neither of these forms of representation can claim to be a complete reflection of the truth; as literature illustrates this would be a futile endeavour (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Gaillard & Weinberger, 1984; Bal & Boheemen, 1984; Viljoen, 2004). Instead, each represents a valid picture or representation of that reality (Lewis et al, 2008; Viljoen, 2004). The comparison of the two forms of representation identifies sufficient similarities to lend credibility to both. In both, themes such as survival strategy, agency, labelling, xenophobia, shame, gender roles and urban space emerge as key concepts identified via two totally opposite methods of representing. This is not to say that the conclusions were identical. On the contrary, on occasion they even stood in dire contrast to each other. Thus, however, allowed me to test the theses against each other, reflect on their validity and the methods applied in their creation. Having a fictional novel written entirely from a client's point of view, for example, allowed for insight into a perspective on the industry rarely found in research. Comparing the two methods gave me a chance to test assumptions: I conducted parts of my interviews using findings and

themes I found in fiction and vice versa. Each prompted ideas, questions and points of views that may not have been obvious otherwise.

Having said that, one needs to keep in mind what purpose each form of representation is supposed to serve. One should not look at fiction for data generalisable in the scientific sense; neither should one look at academic data to provoke, touch on an emotional level and make the viewer or reader part of the representation construction. Each form of representation should be analysed with its merits and flaws in mind. Fictional work can be an influential way to attract audiences, engage and inform. It can provoke and be a way of addressing an audience which traditionally does not follow the debates on migration or sex work. Yet that representation should not come at the expense of crucial facts or lead to the wrong perception of what one is seeking to portray. Equally, academia should not dismiss lessons learnt through fictional work but rather critically engage with said examples to test their own scholarly assumptions and vice versa.

As this study illustrates, fictional and self-representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg compare, contradict and ultimately complement.

7.3 Recommendations & Further Research

As my findings illustrate, fictional portrayal of migration should not be dismissed as an author's fantasy, as it is often based on thorough research, even personal experiences, and may serve to support findings found in academic research. Even in cases where the two contradict, can they be used to test assumptions made or to complement each other to provide a more comprehensive view on the industry.

This research is not exhaustive but rather selectively provides an attempt at comparing two different approaches of representation which were rarely tested against each other. Much more in that direction could be done. To start, one could deepen the observation of the women in their work place as this would mean relying less on what the women choose to represent in interviews and instead gather comparative data firsthand. I focused my research on women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg only, but there is need for research on how that representation differs from that of women in other parts of the country, the continent and beyond. Further research could address the differences and similarities in the women's experiences and how fiction born in those societies chooses to portray them. There are a number of fictional works I came across only late in my research which could be explored in further studies on the subject.

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9. Appendices

9.1 Ethics approval

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Division of the Deputy Registrar (Research)

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON MEDICAL)

R14/49 Flak

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER H100 831

PROJECT

Fictional representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner cit
Johannesburg: how does self representation compare

INVESTIGATORS

Ms A Flak

DEPARTMENT

Information system

DATE CONSIDERED

13.08.2010

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE*

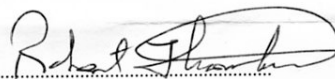
Approve Unconditionally

NOTE:

Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE 12.12.2010

CHAIRPERSON


(Professor R Thornton)

cc: Supervisor : Ms J Vearey

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to a completion of a yearly progress report.**


Signature

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES

9.2 Verbal Consent and Audio Taping Forms

Consent Form (Verbal)

Title of research project:	Fictional representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg: how does self-representation compare?
Names of researcher:	Agnieszka Flak
Department/research group address:	Forced Migration Studies Programme, Wits University, 1 Jan Smuts Avenue, Braamfontein, Johannesburg 2000
Telephone:	082 768 1100
Email:	agnieszka.flak@gmail.com

➤ **RESEARCHER: please read through the consent form with the participant**

Nature of the research:

Interviews with 3-5 migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg to determine how they see and represent themselves and how they see others representing them.

Participant's involvement:

Consent to participate in 3 individual interviews of about 1 hour each.

What is involved:

Your participation in this study will include the following:

- A series of 3 interviews about your migration history, your path into sex work and your present life (personal and professional)
- A discussion on how you see yourself within the migrant community in Johannesburg and within your work environment
- A discussion on how you believe others see and represent you
- Each interview will last about 1 ½ hours
- The interviews will be used for an analysis of how sex workers in inner-city Johannesburg see themselves. They will also form the basis for a fictional drama representation of sex workers in the city.

Do note that I will keep your personal information confidential.

Risks:

There are very few risks in participating in this study. I will ask you some personal questions about your life and work. You may experience some discomfort in discussing some of the topics in the interview. But, you may find it helpful to talk about these issues with someone. If for any reason you are uncomfortable you can skip a question or chose to stop the interview at any time. If any of the topics discussed in the interview upset you, I can refer you to a counselor that you can talk with further.

Benefits:

You may not receive any direct benefit from participating in this study. But, this research will help us understand how migrant sex workers in inner-city Johannesburg see themselves and how that compares with the representation of your work and yourselves by others, especially within the work of literature, drama and film.

Costs:

There are no direct costs associated with this research project.

Reimbursement:

You will receive food vouchers to the value of a R50 for each visit.

- **RESEARCHER:** please read through this carefully with the participant
- I agree to participate in this research project.
- I have read/been read this consent form and the information it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions about them.
- I agree to my responses being used for research on condition my privacy is respected, subject to the following:
 - I understand that my personal details will be used in aggregate form only, so that I will not be personally identifiable.
- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this project.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage.

PARTICIPANT:

Printed Name of Participant	Date
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Person who sought consent (researcher)

- I, Agnieszka Flak, herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the above study and has given verbal consent to participate in the study.

Printed Name	Signature	Date
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Audio Taping Verbal Informed Consent Form

I give my consent to be audio taped during the interviews. I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understand that my identity will be kept confidential. The researcher has explained to me that the tapes will be typed up and used only for the purposes of the study “**Fictional representation of migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg: how does self-representation compare?**”

I understand that after the tapes will be kept for 2 years after publication, or for 6 years if no publication results.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw this consent at any time.

PARTICIPANT:

Printed Name of Participant

Date

Person who sought consent (researcher)

- **I, Agnieszka Flak, herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the use of audio taping for the above study and has given verbal consent to the interviews being recorded.**

Printed Name

Signature

Date

9.3 The Play: The Ostrich Feather Duster

by Agnieszka Flak; September 2010

CHARACTERS

- Woman 1 (W1): The Business Woman. Woman in her early 40s. Has been a sex worker for the past 20 years. Works in a brothel in Hillbrow. Has come to terms with the job, sees it as a business and is very rational about it. Wants to ascertain her control of her life and the choices she's made. Concerned about keeping her vagina happy & healthy.
- Woman 2 (W2): The Fugitive. Woman in her early 20s from a village, appears younger. Has been abused as a child. Has had several boyfriends at the same time for the last 6 months, on an occasional basis, whenever she needed quick money. She studies during the day. Wants to break away with her past in the village and leave, but needs money to do that.
- Woman 3 (W3): The Mother. Woman in her early 30s. Works as a domestic worker during the day, at night she turns to the streets. Has two small kids to take care of. Has been a sex worker on and off for the past year. Wants to get out of the profession as soon as she can find another job and never have anyone find out about it.
- Woman 4 (W4): The Avenger. Woman in her late 20s. Has been a sex worker since she turned 15. Wants to help other sex workers and through that, at least psychologically, heal herself. Has three kids, two small ones and one nearly high-school age. None stay with her. Is HIV positive. Works as a volunteer for a clinic which attends to sex workers.

Each woman has a different way or vehicle for dealing with or expressing her inner thoughts. W1 meditates while she performs cleaning rituals for her vagina. W2 writes letters to her mother back in the village which she never sends. W3 talks to a photograph of her kids, their toys/clothes. W4 talks about other sex workers she visits/consults as part of her clinic volunteering job.

SETTING

Johannesburg, 2010

Three different locations: the street, the brothel room, and a room in a home.

OPENING SCENE

In the blackout, a recording with the following lines is being played (pre-recorded by the actors), mixed with scene sounds and parts of the music theme. All phrases partly overlap each other.

- W4: The birds are never harmed...
W1: This is business, my business...
W3: It made her feel like a princess...
W2: I look like a city girl now, not like me...
W1: That was like a machine...
W4: They hate using the bag...
W3: The sweet man with a ring on his finger, the decent one...
W2: I plucked one of the feathers... that first night...
W4: You don't go to sleep until the place is clean...
W1: You've got to invest in your inventory, that's right...

W2: I have a sack... big one, very thick... that's nice...
W3: I couldn't get my eyes of that hair...
W4: The birds are never harmed...

To the background of soft music, all four women are introduced. Each scene should last around 2-3 minutes. Whenever a new scene is introduced, the other continues in the background.

Light fades in on a room in a brothel. The room has a bed, a bean bag, a stool and a drawer. W4 is sleeping in the bed. Blankets on the other are neatly folded, with a small stool next to it. Lights focus on the bean bag and the stool and W1 coming in, while the bed is half-way lit.

W1 walks in, dressed in a simple gown, carrying a bucket/pot with steaming water and a towel under her arm. She's humming to the tune underlying the scene. She puts the pot down on the floor, places the stool more centre; moves up to the drawer and takes out various cleaning utensils and glass flasks with liquids out of the draw of her nightstand. She sits down on the stool, in front of the steaming water and gets ready to perform a cleaning ritual for her vagina.

Focus in light changes, with W4 fully lit, while the light on W1 goes down half-way.

W4 stirs hearing the other woman. Looks across, gets up and slowly gets dressed. She makes her bed, neatly folding all blankets and puts a teddy bear on top. She takes out a sheet out of her drawer and skims over it. Takes out several condom boxes from underneath her bed and begins arranging them neatly on one side of the room, counts, and ticks of numbers in her table.

Lights go down half-way on W4 and slowly fade in on W3. Scene in a room with toys and clothes spread across the floor. There is a small desk, with a picture frame and a mirror.

W3 walks in the room, dressed in a maid's apron/gown. She smiles and starts picking up the toys on the floor.

W2 walks into the same room, dressed in a school uniform. Drops her books on the desk, and begins undressing. Dressed in a slip she takes out a piece of paper and starts writing a letter.

Lights goes down to half-way on W2 as well. The scenes continue for another 10-15 seconds and fade out to blackout. Light fades in back on W1, still in the middle of her cleaning ritual. Music fades out.

SCENE 1: MY HAPPY VAGINA / THE PINK DRESS / THE FARM / THE CONDOMS

W1 takes one of the flasks, looks at the label, puts it away. Takes another, smiles, puts some drops of the liquid into the pot with boiling water. Then sits on the edge of her stool, just above the pot. Makes herself comfortable.

W1: Eish... come on... work with me here...No, no... not like that...(Readjusts on the stool, then relaxes). Oh yeah, that's it...that's nice... very nice... (Laughs, takes a pause, breathes in) He was rough, that one, wasn't he? And quick, too, he? (Giggles). Never would have thought... with that little thing there... (Giggles) ... Four times... bang... bang... bang... I know you're hurting...I know... Twenty years next week... who would have thought... Eish...Trust me, it was worth it...it's ok. It will pass. It always does. And we got him working, too... didn't we? (Giggles loudly.) Did you have fun? Never had anyone complain yet...! If I didn't stop him, he would have gone again... (Giggles). My lord! That was like a machine! We don't want to let them wear us out, right? We have some time to go yet. No point just wasting our energy with just one... And he will be back. They always come back. And they like you... (Laughs). You're ripe like a tomato... They think they can do more than they pay for. But I know... I know when it's time...I don't even have to check the watch anymore...They will beg... say you didn't do anything... but you did, my darling, I know you did. I was there, remember? I was there... (Giggles)

Lights go half-way on W1 and come up on W2, who sits in a slip at her desk, takes out a piece of paper, and starts writing.

W2: Hello Mamma...how is the farm? Did you get the letter I sent? (Looks at the pile of letters in front of her which she never sent). How can I send them if I can't put anything in

them...Not yet, but soon...How's baba? Does he miss me? I bet he does, I bet he does... And my birds? Any eggs yet? Have they lost their feathers yet? They don't mind, I know... but I'm not there to hold them... they know I had to leave...(To insert a few sentence in her home language saying things she wouldn't say in the letter) I still have the duster you gave me... keeps my room clean, just like you showed me. Not easy to keep clean here, though... all dust and dirt, brown around the window... can't close it...it smells too... not like the farm... everywhere... all over you, face, body... down there, in your private parts... But my room is nice, nobody follows me here... (Again, formulates a few sentences in her home language; thinking about what to write down) School is nice though... not far... I can walk there... the teacher is nice too. She treats me nice. Says I'll be a good teacher one day. I can go and teach everywhere. Maybe even in the city. You just wait... Mpho helped me find a job, so I can make money and help you. You can soon tell people in the village that I help you...you can tell him too... I bought a phone last week. A nice phone... I will get money and buy one for you, too, and we can speak. That would be nice. I can tell you about the city... not about the job, it's an ok job, but not a nice job. But my phone is nice, and the shirt I bought, and the skirt!... Mpho says I look like a city girl. Not like me...No, not like me...(She folds the letter and puts it into an envelope and places it next to all the other letters already on her desk, but never sent).

Lights come up fully on the W3, putting away her kids toys and folding their clothes. Takes one of the shirts into her hand.

W3: She came running towards me the moment I stepped through the door tonight...There was a hole in her dress, her favourite dress, she said. Could I fix it, she asked? It was that pink dress... (Smiles softly) There are pretty little flowers stitched along the hem, some blue and orange, others red and green. (Gets up, takes the pile of clothes and puts them away near the clothes rack) She said it made her feel like a princess. She would make a pirouette in front of me every time she put it on, tiptoeing with her little feet in a circle. Her smile was as bright as the fabric, and she would throw her hands up in the air and twirl and fall into my arms. (Laughs sadly; sits back down) She never questioned where I got it from. And even if she knew it came from the charity shop down the road, I don't think it would have mattered. She never wondered why we didn't have to sit on the pavement of the road crossing anymore and 'play sad'. At least she didn't ask. (She gets up, takes off the maid gown, crosses to the desk and changes into high heels, short skirt. She stares at the mirror, pauses, and then puts on a wig. Smiles seductively, gets up, and examines her reflection) Every time I would get ready to venture out into the night I think of that pink dress... and that smile... (Throws a glance at where the toys lay before, then walks out).

Lights fade on W3 and cross-fade to W4 sitting on her bed with a sheet of paper in her hand, gets off the bed and reorganizes the boxes of condoms next to the wall.

W4: We went to Hillbrow Inn today, Hotel Diplomat tomorrow. They all look the same... dark, even during the day. Curtains drawn in. Shade is good though...No mirrors. Sofas, loads of them... colourful, bright cushions... Women squashed next to each other... like in a queue in front of the butcher... (Laughs) Nothing matches... nobody cares... I don't care... not anymore... the women don't match either...that's what makes this business run, I guess...we locals don't mix with the foreigners... it's no good...only causes trouble... Each keeps to her spot in the corner... her hotel... her street... I spoke to a few of the girls today... Pamela was there too... seemed clean now. I check on her once in a while. She even comes to the clinic now. Once a week, I think. But we still bring them condoms. Just in case. They wanted the entire boxes today. Next time we need to bring more. One, two, three, four... (counts till 8)... I like going there. Now... not then. Same yellow wallpaper, same brown couch. The nurse says I can come along whenever I want to. She's nice. She says nice things, calls you sweetie... (Smiles) Says I can help coz I know business... though I'm bored of business now... go only Friday, Saturday, Sunday... that's enough...yes, that's enough! But this is nice. We go to the clinic, talk about rushes... talk about fluids... The ladies want to talk to me, about their private parts... Tell me when it itches...where it itches... show me too... I tell them where to go. We bring condoms so they don't need to go if they not want to. Though I hope they do. Some are shy, young girls... although probably older than me. Not like me. 2000, 2001, 2002 baby... 2004, 2005, 2006...baby again... 2008, 2009...And again... but tomorrow I can go to

clinic and we go to Hotel Diplomat. *(Counts off the hours)* Seven, eight, nine...yeap, at nine we go. That will be nice. Very nice.

SCENE 2: AT WORK

Lights cross fade to a scene on the street, with street sounds in the background. Two women walk the street, pass by each other, notice each other for a moment only and then continue in their respective directions.

W3: *(Walks in, waves in the direction she's coming from; counts a few notes, puts them into her bra)* I'm on 6th most of the time these days. They don't know me here, god help me...I come here and I blend in... Short, tight skirt... some cleavage... *(Looks away, takes a few steps, shouts seductively)* Hello honey, should we give it a shot tonight? *(Throws a kiss, turns back to the audience)*. I show what I've got to offer and they forget to ask about me. Their eyes on my skin... I'm like these walls around here... hard, cold; it's quiet at night, yet this place is alive, hectic, loud...Can they hear me scream? God knows why I'm doing this, he knows...Does he look down on me sometimes? What if they saw me? Would their little eyes understand? *(Looks away in a different direction, takes a few steps, shouts seductively)* Come to me, baby! I know you want me! I recognize that car... You know you loved it last time! I know you like them petite! *(Turns back to the audience)*. Each night I wonder whether I'll get some... I don't want to be refused... yet I hate when they stop right in front of me, in those big flashy cars... when they roll down the window... *(Smiles; leans over)* Don't look me into the eyes, I pray. But they don't. Never... *(Leans over)* It's done. Will I see them again? What if I don't get back...? *(Looks away in yet a different direction, takes a few steps, leans over, adjusts her boobs... laughs seductively... walks back)*. They say it's a catwalk but often I do trip over myself. *(Straightens up, puts her chest out)* We are no strip club stars... I've got the legs and the body... but it's a competitive market. Look at her. *(Points towards W2)*. Some like them young, fresh, juicy meat so they can savour you all night long... I go for the quick turns... easier that way... it's a free market... no benefits, but no deductions either. Nobody telling me how I need to dress or when I need to show up. No hours sitting around for nothing. Nobody telling me that it's time to pay up... I come, get it done, and that's it. Sometimes I do just stay home... *(Takes out a picture of her kids out of her bra)* they love it when I do... Then I'll be standing here again. *(Smiles)*

W2 crosses to W3 and asks her to light her cigarette. Walks back to her own spot.

W2: It's nice when it's quiet like this... reminds me of the farm... there you can hear the fields ... the ostriches don't make much noise at night... unless you chase them like we sometimes did... Then they run, and run... fast like the wind *(Laughs)*. I couldn't stop that fast... He caught up with me each time... he was faster than me...and when I hid in the barn, he knew where to find me... Momma said she liked the city. Teaches you about life, how to dress, walk... speak. You are no village girl anymore... It teaches you not to run anymore... I hid on the truck carrying the feathers from the farm to the factory in Joburg. Easy to squeeze between the bulks of feathers, so soft... they did not want me at the factory, though. Had too many village folk working for them already, they said... Wouldn't have paid much anyway... Here it's better... I don't have to hide anymore... Now the ostriches come after me... each night... and they bite, they bite... *(Laughs; says a few sentences about her farm in her home language)* Each night I put some money away... not much... it might be 60 or 80 rand... maybe a bit more... Have to buy schoolbooks as well, so there is not much left... But my teacher says I'll soon be very so-phi-sti-ca-ted. That's right. So-phis-ti-ca-ted... And strong... He gotta believe that, me so-phi-sti-ca-ted and strong....Told one of my boyfriends tonight. He laughed, liked it too, I think. Gave me 20 rand more. Have to invest in my job, he said. Pay for phone, skirts, room... that costs! Sometimes I spend more than I get, but Mpho said I gotta invest... Soon I can send momma some money in a letter... They will all know I'm smart. That's right... and useful. Like my momma's feather duster. Though I plucked one of the feathers, that first night I stood here... don't think she will mind... he wouldn't care...

W3 crosses to where the invisible clients are... Negotiates. After a few seconds she walks back to her spot. Lights come up on the brothel as well. W1 crosses to watch the street ladies from her 'window'. The next two monologues should be partly overlapping.

W3: It's not the white man from Yeoville anymore. Now the black man spends his well earned money on this. They are younger these days. They don't want to do the flowers or morning phone call, don't want to get involved. The married ones ask for what they can't get at home. If his wife is old, he wants young; if she is petite, he's screaming for the curves. Some ask for those who are expecting, want to suckle their milk...He becomes another kid...But doesn't want to talk about mine. But the foreigners ask you questions. About me...that's not right. Messes you up in your mind... When I'm at home, I'm me. When I'm out here, I'm not here... something I can sell...I'm no good to work at a factory, they say... too petite... can't handle the weights, they say. Say I'm too delicate to do the cleaning jobs... at least the ones which pay well. They won't take me for any other job without certificates... and god knows when I'll be able to go back home and retrieve those... But I'm petite enough to do this... delicate enough to get paid well, too (*Laughs nervously*)...I need to take care of my body for them... although I would want to slap it, shake it... flush alcohol down its throat... drug it till its unconscious... I take vitamins instead. Eat papayas, oranges... chew on carrots. It's a circle and I've yet to find the hidden exit. The ostrich runs around blind, trapped by a fence...I get locked up in a prison cell for doing it... have to keep on running in circles to be able to pay the fine... who's got that damn lock?

W1: It's not only the girl from the townships anymore... These days most of them finish matric and come here to do their maturity exam. My own rainbow nation right there... Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe...East Africa... and even some Chinese here and there... but the locals bite... report us, get us fined... or locked up... We take their jobs, go for 20 rand less... that's what they say at least. But THEY like us... (*Laughs*) we know how to warm a bed, they say... we're no passive dolls... they ask for us... I like the foreigners...(*Laughs*) we're both stranded on this island... Both in no man's land (*Giggles*). Don't touch a Zulu though. Eish... they are rough! Don't know how to treat a lady! Have too many of them already...! My mother's new husband came here one night. I took him straight upstairs. Paid me handsomely, too. He will never tell... shame that is...

W1 crosses to her bean beg, counts money, the other bed is disorganized but empty.

W1: 120, 140, 160, 180... not bad... We enjoyed that fuck, didn't we? (*Laughs out loud*). And what noise we made! (*Giggles*). Eish... (*Looks over to the other bed*) Why did she leave the room? Doesn't she know this is just business? These sentimental little things... Maybe we can teach her something, too. (*Giggles*) Or maybe we could do it all together next time. (*Laughs, cannot contain herself*) Yeap, that's right. Gotta get it out...then it's ok...I tell ya! Out, out, out...My lord! No pleasure, no... this no sex... but fuck, fuck, fuck... that's right. I never think... no, no, no... I count... (*Laughs*) all the time... and when they produce, they pay... you have to make them produce... that's right, the more the better... I tell them: I'm principled... you rent my equipment, I set the price... and it gotta be right... and don't come negotiating here like I'm a market lady! This no fake... That's right... no messing around with me down there... if you want the original thing, you pay. Nobody will pay for a synthetic feather duster... but they give you double for an ostrich one... that's right... I know how much I cost...of course I do... after 20 years, I've done my accounts... (*Gets up from the bed, takes a few steps, stops, puts her hand down her skirt, smells her fingers*)... Only I know how you need to smell, only I do...that's right, I do... (*Walks off*)

W4 crosses into the room. Looks around. When she doesn't see anyone, crosses to her bed, gets under the blanket, clings to her teddy bear. Meanwhile, lights also comes on out on the street. W3 is lying on the floor, her clothes ripped and bag contents spread across the floor. She has some blood coming out of her lips. The following two monologues are said simultaneously and partly overlapping.

W4: The birds... they are never harmed... when they pluck feathers out of their skin, I mean. At least that is what they told us at the factory. So we don't feel bad... that they use them one, two, three, four, five times... over and over... to make those feather sticks. They are nice, the sticks... They put sacks over their heads to keep them calm... I saw a picture of it... brown bags on skinny necks... funny it is... they run, and run, and run...but they get

them... take feathers... the loose ones... One, two three... It's not nice. No, not nice... Definitely not. Do they feel it? They must. Does it hurt? Maybe they used to that now ... Then they let them free... they get to run around... naked. That must be nice, very nice. Then their feathers grow back...It's ok. Until it's feather time. Again...

W3: Is that it? Is that what you wanted??? You think you can break me??? Try again. Harder... I said, harder! You understand? I deserved it... isn't that what you said? I was asking for it... begging for it... Women like me, you said... that's right... women like me... Us fallen women and the likes of you... I get it. The sweet man with a ring on his fingers, the decent one... The one that puts a knife to your throat, slices you... drops you in the bushes and walks away. Have I paid enough? Can you make me pay more? Can't you face who you are? Is that why? They want to kill you because you've made them do the worst thing on earth... Look me into the eye, you hear me? I want you to see your reflection! Movies make you fantasise, imagine things that don't exist... Yet you will do everything to prove me wrong... is that it? You ask for a child... don't you think we don't have kids? Blindfold me, drag me along the floor, cut me up... you beat her at home and you'll get locked up. With me, it's all a free ride... is that why? Give me the rough-looking ones. Yes, give me those that don't lie...Let me rub scar on scar... They have it written all over them, strangle me... but that's ok. I don't tell anyone... The police will lock you up or you have to let them have a go at you, too... Or you pay cash on top of that. I could carry that feather duster and wipe it across that face... *(Wipes with an imaginary feather duster, breaks the wood in the air)* I could never strike deep enough...

Lights go halfway on W3 and fades out as it fades in on the brothel. W1 sits on her bed, gets up, walks towards where W3 disappeared.

W1: Eish...The ladies of the street...Look at them...! They don't look after themselves...they let their equipment rot... My lord... they let it become them... The street, you know, it takes a lot out of them. They're right there, under that bright eerie light... Everyone can see them; they kill you down there... and if that's lost, what else is left? In a hotel, it's different... more private...*(Laughs)* You give a name, and nobody asks... You walk in, say who you are and get down to business. This is no sex. It's cash, remember... you've got to remember that... I get four times as much as in my last job... Try to beat that... *(Laughs)* especially when you need that quick buck... They take some of my money, but I can scream if they jump to my throat and try choking me ... A family-type affair... yeap, that's right. We share clients, profits, beds and secrets... The young girls... you gotta make sure it doesn't break them... they have to see men for what they are...they live off you if they can... that's right...the ladies have to be serious about this business... gotta ask the right price... play the game... *(Laughs)* Gotta invest in your inventory, that's right ... *(Walks off, while W4 comes in, starts counting her boxes again)*

W4 comes in. She looks at the piles of condoms in her room. Takes one of the boxes and starts taking the condoms out, one by one and arranges them on her bed. Light fades in on W2 sitting down at her desk. Takes another piece of paper. Doesn't start writing though.

W2: Tonight I'll go see my boyfriend. He's nice... He lives far though... I'll probably stay the night. We like sharing a bed...and when he touches me... it's nice. Mpho said I should use the plastic thing more often, was very angry ... but this is not like that. Not like the ladies...*(Giggles)*

W4: They hate using the bag, especially the married ones... Never think of their wives or families... don't give a damn about mine... Some of them have never used a rubber before. Don't even know how to slide it on...And telling us that we are the HIV parasites. All this talking and educating is just a waste of their time. Seventy, 80, 90...100 rand more if you do it without, they say...*(Screams out)* This is my body!

W2: Tomorrow I'll see my other boyfriend.... The one downtown... He gives me some change for taxis... He gives me some food, as well...He treats me nice... Doesn't mind that I'm no local girl... He asked me to move in with him, but I don't want to... He would want me to drink lots of beer... and then I forget to go home... Sometimes he can't... you know... he is a bit old... maybe that's why *(Giggles)* and I have to help. Rub it, rub it... and then it explodes. *(Giggles)*

- W4: But some ladies don't seem to mind. They think you take the pill and it's gone. You take a hot shower and you're clean. Spotless. Safe. Isn't that what some of the papers preach? Last year I had a guy touching me while I was still fiddling with the plastic. By the time I took it out of the wrapper, he had already pushed in. No questions, no protests. It was done. And it was done forever. We provide the rubbers, but they prefer to flush life down the gutter and drag me along for the ride. Would the ostrich have run? Would he have kicked the picker in the gut? Caught his member in the beak? I want my brown bag...
- W2: Sometimes my two boyfriends are away... they go see their wives and children back home...I understand... I go see my other boyfriend then... he lives close to my school... sometimes he waits for me... he looks nice... very clean... Mpho would not understand... It's not like the ladies there... *(Walks off)*
- W4: Now when they refuse I let them produce... I let them push in... skin on skin... *(Stares)* They think that because I'm not all bones and skin that I'm clean. Pure. I want them to share my price. I don't care anymore... I'm so bored... I give girls a box each...take them to exams at the clinic... nobody can say THEY are irresponsible...

SCENE 3: THE WIG / THE SLAP / THE CLEANING

Light cross fades to W3 sitting down on 'the street'. She's holding her wig in her hand.

- W3: Twenty minutes and we were done. We did it on the front seat of his car...One of these old, spacious cars... A mustang, I think. You find many of those around here... they say the weather is conducive to that... *(Smiles)* He wanted me to take him in my mouth... and put another 100 in my bra. I took him once... twice... he produced... When I straightened up, my wig got stuck on his shirt button and slid off... *(Touches her bare head and freezes)* He took it into his hands, adjusted the frenzy hair... and looked at me... straight at ME...'So this is how you look like', he said. *(Laughs nervously)* He smiled. I couldn't get my eyes off that hair...hanging there... naked... bare. I just looked at him... at me, in his eyes. He said he liked it...me, I mean... I didn't believe him... How could I believe him? He offered to help me put it back on. Slid the pins back on... One by one... *(Wipes away a tear)* I don't even know his name ... We sat there for some 20 minutes ... not a word... *(Takes a deep breath)* I never used fake hair again... *(Walks off)*

Light cross-fades to W1 sitting on her bed and also comes up half-way on the other room. Second room fully lit when W2 walks in, clothes and hair messy.

- W1: Had to pay double to get him off me tonight... that scum... Money ain't doing the trick anymore... what are they going to ask for next? Every Sunday, there he is ... that's what you do on night duty these days ... Routine police check, he says, and heads straight for my room...*(Laughs)* that sleazy thing... but he knows where the meat is juicy enough... talking no use anymore... had me locked up twice when I told him my mind... Rights my ass, he said... *(Laughs)*
- W2: No idea how he found me... but that grin... dragged me to his car... that same red, rusty car ... said I had fun enough... why did he come? Farm not enough? No ostriches to chase? Lay eggs? Run after? Grab? Strangle? Pushed me into the back seat...seat full of cigarette butts...climbed on top... No problem, I thought... no problem... it's ok. I have a sack... big one... thick...very thick... It's nice. Nice bag. Big brown bag...
- W1: Everything has a price these days...I would know, wouldn't I? I told my mother after 10 years...to celebrate the anniversary, I guess...*(Giggles nervously)* she slapped me... she could hit hard...*(Touches her cheek, stares; holds her breath)* I could see myself in her eyes and that probably bothered her more than anything else. She didn't manage to keep her emotions from firing across her face. *(Laughs)* Not that she really tried. Was it disappointment? Disgust? Guilt? Probably all of it mixed in a pot. For the next five years, she would ask me to shower every night, every time I got back home...Even bought me that smelly yellow-brownish soap...you rub it in and the dirt digs deeper into your pores... Told me to rub it in well; said it would "wash EVERYTHING away". She couldn't kill me

down there. Lord no! Twenty years gone and I can still produce... I can still produce...
(Sits back down on her bean bag).

W2 Stares out into the audience; takes all the letters she's written and rips them to pieces, leans on desk and falls asleep. W4 walks in, goes around the brothel, brings new sheets, changes the bed.

W4: I'm up until 2 a.m. every night. Sometimes longer. I stay around, clean the place and do laundry. Just the way my mother taught me, you don't go to sleep until the place is clean... no, you don't go to sleep until the place is clean...

SCENE 4: OFF WORK

Lights and music cross-fade to the next day, it's early morning hours.... We see four women each in her initial location. W1 is repeating her cleaning ritual; W2 is waking up and changes back to her school clothes; takes her books and heads out; W4 takes out 8 boxes of the condoms and walks out; W3 walks out with a cleaning car or a bucket with some ostrich feather dusters sticking out of it. W2, W3 and W4 cross each other but don't seem to notice. Loud street noise comes through. They can hear a radio announcing a raid in a brothel and a story about sex workers being miffed at missing out on the World Cup party. W3 pushes the cart across the stage; stops once in a while, looks around. Walks off. Lights out, final music on.