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**THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STREET-BASED SEX WORKERS IN  
WOODSTOCK, CAPE TOWN**

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Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Visual  
Studies at Stellenbosch University



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April 2019

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“However much we are affected by the things of the world, however deeply they may stir and stimulate us, they become human for us only when we can discuss them with our fellows. Whatever cannot become the object of discourse - the truly sublime, the truly horrible or the uncanny - may find human voice through which to sound into the world, but it is not exactly human. We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human.”

Hannah Arendt (1974:25)

## **SUMMARY**

This study presents 'Participatory Action' based research, combined with first person narration and lived experiences, that was conducted with street-based sex workers, based in Woodstock, Cape Town, between 2015 and 2017. The study commences with a historical account of sex work in Cape Town and the ensuing legislation that governed it, together with a brief overview of contemporary legislation regarding sex work. As I demonstrate, the lack of personal narrative afforded to sex workers coincides with forms of censorship that pervade state archives and that largely exclude sex workers from public memory. Secondly, attention is drawn to the importance of having the opportunity to narrate personal experiences and autobiographical accounts in the public domain in an attempt to destabilise stereotypes and myths around sex workers. Sarah Pink's (2007) methodology of 'walking with participants' is important in this regard, as it informs the collaborative research that I conducted. As this study demonstrates, this collaboration between myself and the sex workers who participated in this study allows for a space where alternative discourses on sex work can potentially contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the identity and living environments of sex workers.

## **OPSOMMING**

Hierdie is 'n studie wat fokus op 'deelneemende aksie navorsing' en behels straatgebaseerde sekswerkers en hulle geleefde ervarings en outobiografiese herringeringe wat tussen 2015 en 2017 in Woodstock, Kaapstad opgeneem is. Die studie begin met 'n historiese oorsig van sekswerk in Kaapstad en die daaropvolgende wetgewing wat dit reguleer, asook 'n kort oorsig van huidige wetgewing rakende sekswerk.

Soos die studie demonstreer, val die gebrek aan persoonlike narratiewe van sekswerkers saam met vorms van sensuur uit die staatsargiewe, wat sekswerkers grootliks uit die openbare geheue uitsluit. Tweedens word aandag gevestig op die belangrikheid om die geleentheid te skep om persoonlike ervarings en outobiografiese stories in die openbare domein te vertel in 'n poging om stereotipes en mites rondom sekswerkers te aan te vat. Sarah Pink (2007) se metodologie van 'loop met deelnemers' is belangrik in hierdie verband, en pas in by die samewerkende navorsing wat ek gedoen het. Soos hierdie studie demonstreer, kan die samewerking tussen myself en die sekswerkers wat aan hierdie studie deelgeneem het, 'n ruimte skep waar alternatiewe diskoerse oor sekswerk moontlik kan bydra tot 'n meer nuanseerde begrip van die identiteit en leefomgewings van sekswerkers.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated with much appreciation and love to my family and friends, especially my mom, thank you for your unwavering support and belief.

To Jeleze, thank you for the ocean, the mountains, the walks, our space and our dreams.

“And the wild, the wild is calling...let us go” (Service 2006:12)

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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I would like to give a special acknowledgement to SWEAT (Sex Workers Education and Advocacy task Force), and to the feminist collective that opened up your doors and fearlessly shared your stories and experiences with me, thank you.

In particular Gavin, Guilam and Lee, with whom I walked many streets and had long conversations, thank you for trusting the process and for giving selflessly, so much of yourselves.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

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1. Decrim - Is a colloquial term used by sex workers and activists who are fighting to have sex work in South Africa decriminalised.
2. FAKA - A cultural movement by Fela Gucci and Desire Marea.
3. GALA - Gala is a centre for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) culture and education in South Africa.
4. PAR - Participatory Action research
5. RHRU - Reproductive Health and Research Unit of the Witwatersrand University in South Africa.
6. SSU - Strategic surveillance unit.
7. SWEAT - Sex Workers Education and Advocacy task Force.
8. WCTU - Women's Christian Temperance Union

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 Background and aims of the study

This study is an investigation into the subjectivity of street-based sex workers from the perspective of their experiences in/of 'social spacialisation' (Lefebvre & Donald-Smith 1991:23).<sup>1</sup> With the focus on places identified by sex workers in Woodstock, and framed within a partly phenomenological<sup>2</sup> and Participatory Action Research methodology, this study adopts a postmodern approach to subjectivity,<sup>3</sup> which stems from concerns relating to various spatial theories.<sup>4</sup> Lived space could be perceived as felt space, and therefore this study offers a non-essentialist approach<sup>5</sup> to subjectivity that is primarily based in personal experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Social spatialisations are virtual but manifest materially in discourse and as frames through which problems are understood (Shields 2003:12).

<sup>2</sup> According to Smith and Woodruff, (2018: n.p.) phenomenology is the experience of phenomena from a "first person point of view". This approach is mentioned in this study as the very act of walking is phenomenological as it allows for personal narratives to come to the fore. However, an in-depth re-evaluation of the complexities surrounding the philosophical tradition falls outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Barker describes a postmodern approach to subjectivity as follows: "The decentered or postmodern self involves the subject in shifting, fragmented and multiple identities. Persons are composed not of one, but several, sometimes contradictory, identities" (2009:232). It is the aim of this study to investigate these multiplicities in the subjectivity of sex workers.

<sup>4</sup> Pile and Keynes contend that a "question remains on the specific ways that regimes of the body and the spaces of subjectivity intertwine" (1996:ix). In this thesis these regimes of the body are investigated by the act of walking with participants in specific spaces/places to investigate precisely the interaction of subjectivity in sites identified by sex workers.

<sup>5</sup>In Chapter Two and Three the historical narratives around sex workers in South Africa are discussed, as well the value of autobiographical narratives, as this is one method of destabilising stereotypes.

This approach has been realised through the collection of qualitative data by means of video recordings done by participating sex workers who uses Go-Pro technology<sup>6</sup>, to recount their experiences of places that they identify as sites of significance.

The participants to the study, Gavin<sup>7</sup>, Lee<sup>8</sup> and Guilam<sup>9</sup> are part of the feminist collective at SWEAT (Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Task Force). I got introduced to them through workshops that I did with the collective in relation to photographic representation and gender studies. At these workshops I proposed this study to the collective and they agreed to be part of it on a voluntary basis. There were a myriad of ethical considerations that had to be addressed through ethical clearance with both Stellenbosch University as well as SWEAT. Issues that were considered was the anonymity of participants, given that sex work is still criminalised in South Africa, but furthermore, consideration was given to the sensitivity surrounding individuals giving viewers access to very private memories and spaces. This study is in line with other important projects such as *MoVE* and the *Working the City Project* which also make use of Participatory Action Research in their projects with migrant sex workers.

This thesis reflects on the above process of working with sex workers in an attempt to offer an alternative to public discourses when speaking about sex worker subjectivity, one that is not centred in or around discourse(s) stemming from a normative

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<sup>6</sup> The official Go-Pro website (2018:n.p.) states that: “Go-Pro frees people to celebrate the moment, inspiring others to do the same. Everything we do is geared to help you capture life as you live it, share the experience and pass on the stoke. We believe that sharing our experiences makes them more meaningful and way more fun”. Initially Go-Pro technology was used to capture action sports and document these adrenalin filled adventure. Yet, this form of video recording aides the methodology of this thesis, as it allows for a phenomenological recording of environments that the participants identified, from a first person point of view.

<sup>7</sup> Gavin during the filming of the interview in 2016-2017 was 45 and 46 years old. He is a homosexual sex worker, has a background in theatre and stage and speaks 4 languages fluently. He has completed university education

<sup>8</sup> Lee is a pseudonym for one of the participants in the study, and at the time of the interviews she was between 26-28 years old and identified as cissexual. She is a dedicated mother of one, and is an avid lover of architecture.

<sup>9</sup> Guilam is a male to female transsexual individual. She also frequently goes by the name of the “Dutchess”. Guilam has been ‘living on the streets’ (sic) since she was 17 years old. She is considered the matriarch of a group of transsexual individuals living in Woodstock called the ‘Sistazhood’.

discussion or moralist framing of the body,<sup>10</sup> but rather in the way that place/space embodiment has a direct influence on how humans negotiate conceptions of themselves when engaging with sex as a form of labour and a source of income.

This qualitative research on street-based sex workers is interested in the relation between self-narration and space/place embodiment, and how this could contribute to discussions on alternative methods of researching sex workers.<sup>11</sup> The study makes use of the concept that Sarah Pink describes as "walking with video" as a research method which investigates and interrogates various elements of place-making and the sensorial aspects of human experience (Pink 2007:240-241). Participants to this study wore a Go-Pro camera as they walked their usual routes in Woodstock, whilst verbally recounting personal experiences and memories, and in doing so they provide an up-to-date unseen view of the urban landscape, whilst also recounting personal experiences of themselves.<sup>12</sup>

This recounting and videoing is done entirely from their perspective and space/place associations. This methodological approach stems from a historically well-recorded fact that the history of sex work in South Africa, both written and visual, is arguably biased against them, mediated by state authorities and forms of censorship, and this history largely denies or constrains the agency of sex-workers within the public sphere.

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<sup>10</sup> Chapter Two provides a detailed historical overview of sex work in South Africa, which highlights the state's subjugation of sex workers' bodies; these discourses arguably still prevail today as sex workers are still prone to stereotypes that affect discussion of their bodies and offer very little opportunity for alternative subjectivities to be explored.

<sup>11</sup> Chapters Three and Four present the methodology of 'walking with' (Pink 2007) and autobiographical narration by sex workers as a counter to the historical narratives that exist in South Africa around sex work.

<sup>12</sup> The initial recordings were over 10 hours long and has been edited down to approximately 1 hour and 20 min. During the editing process Gavin, Lee and Guilam had input into the portions they wanted included or excluded. I have myself decided to take out certain portions that were of a very personal nature and spoke about instances of violence or abuse by clients. The reasoning for this is that the study was a collaboration whose success depended on mutual trust that was established through working together for 3 years. As an ethical consideration I therefore decided to not include these interviews portions.

My contention is that this form of censorship has largely contributed to the current precarity that sex workers experience.

This study specifically speaks against such forms of oppression and censorship while allowing sex workers to decide how they wish to represent themselves in image and voice.

Yet in this study we never get to see the participants. We only hear the inflections in their voices, the agitation shown through body language, the excitement and tribulations in their narration.

This resonates with what John Kirtland Wright (1947:15) so poetically expresses: "The most fascinating *terrae incognitae* of all are those that lie within the hearts and mind of men".

This study thus aims to investigate autobiographical narratives that could potentially offer a counter-narrative to the still biased public discourse on sex work in South Africa.<sup>13</sup> By engaging with theories of self-narration (Ochs and Capps 1996), 'walking with video' (Pink 2007) and participatory action research (McDonald 2012), this study aims to comment on and critique the polemics arising when conventional art historical practices, such as the conventional genre of documentary photography, is disrupted and how a "more spatially inflected humanities" (Roberts 2015:25) might offer an alternative way of conducting research *with* (and not necessarily *on*) an Other.

I took my first portrait of a sex worker in December 2012. Her name was Monique and she was/is a sex worker on the Baden Powell Drive from Stellenbosch to Cape Town. Sex workers regularly sit next to the road to solicit clients on this road, although a large majority of them participate in what is known as 'trucking'.<sup>14</sup> I became fascinated by these women who seemed to exhibit such strength and defiance by sitting next to the road and openly flaunting their sexuality and also, arguably, their independence. It

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<sup>13</sup> Sex work in South Africa is still criminalised, further intensifying the stereotypical and marginalising view arguably held by the public.

<sup>14</sup> 'Trucking' is a colloquial term used by sex workers who 'hitch a ride' with truck drivers from the Western Cape area up to specifically Beaufort West. They provide services to the truck drivers and other clients on the road, and then generally continue the same journey back to Cape Town and the Winelands areas.

should be noted they had no pimp<sup>15</sup> and were a group of only women occupying and sexually advertising themselves in a place/space that is notorious for crime and lack of personal safety. My initial contact with Monique was a casual conversation which led me to ask if I could possibly take photographs of her in future. She agreed that I could come back the next week if I pay for her time.

I took many portraits of Monique over a period of a year that, because of predating this study, I chose not to include. What struck me throughout this process was that I could photograph her in any way, in any setting, but I was never allowed to show her face. This seemingly split duality fascinated me; it was the realisation that Monique not only embodied the persona of sex worker, but also that of an Other who monitored how much I can show of and also know about her.

This is when I started having conversations with sex workers and I had to question my own interest into their lived experiences; was it voyeuristic curiosity or was it an opportunity to conduct unconventional research?

This first encounter instigated 5 years of research into the history of sex work in South Africa and frames the historical narrative in Chapter Two. I realised that there existed an already biased discourse surrounding sex work in South Africa, apart from the very obvious<sup>16</sup> sanitation of the Afrikaner identity in terms of any involvement with sex workers, there is/was a conspicuous lack of visual accounts or records. This bias is, of course, not surprising. Jan-Ad Stemmet (2005) alludes to this sanitising phenomenon in his paper 'From Nipples and Nationalists to Full Frontal in the New South Africa: and Abridged History of Pornography and Censorship in the Old and New South Africa'. Stemmet (2005:201) argues that Afrikaner Calvinist identity politics

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<sup>15</sup> When I photographed Monique in 2012 the sex workers on the Baden Powell drive were an independent group of women that solicited their services on their own accord and by their own terms. When I drive the road now in 2018 it seems as there is always two men present which leads me to believe that they may be pimps.

<sup>16</sup> Chapter Two provides an in-depth account of the censorship and criminalisation of sex work in South Africa, both historically and currently.

were obsessed with the “policing of the sexual body” (something to be unpacked in more detail in Chapter Two).

The official structure and Calvinist ideology upheld by the Afrikaner-volk, as discussed by Stemmet, was enforced through the use of strict moral policing (from pedagogic control in schools, churches and legislation) to a general homogenous “laager mentality” that rejected any form of resistance (Stemmet 2005:200-201). Apartheid-era South Africa, having emerged from the suffocating Victorian tropes of sexuality that accompanied colonialism was, of course, not immune to the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. What set South Africa apart, and what suppressed sexuality and sexual expression in South Africa even further, were the series of draconian Immorality Acts, the first of which was implemented in 1901 in Cape Town (Oppenheimer 2014). The result of these Acts obviously did nothing to lessen the burden of individuals operating on the fringes of acceptable sexual morality, and served only to enforce the concept of 'othering', meaning that 'deviant' sexuality was not accepted in public discourse or public places

It is precisely this position of the Other<sup>17</sup> that this research is critically investigating, or more specifically, the 'practice' of viewing the Other. Within the scope of visual history and representation, discourses around the 'eye of colonialism', 'othering' and so forth are familiar to most people working in the field of Visual Studies. Yet the question should be addressed: Is there a way of looking, of visual storytelling, or visual anthropology, which does not objectify, or does not do so to the same degree as media like photography and film have largely done to date? Is there a 'way of looking' that is self-reflexive and aware of the at times unavoidable hierarchical position of viewing and being viewed? This problematic hierarchy is compounded when investigating the visual history, of sex work in South Africa, and these questions stand central to my own research project and are explored throughout this thesis.

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<sup>17</sup> In this study the position of sex workers as an Other is elaborated on, as the historical and current discourses surrounding them are very much still biased, given sex workers criminalised status in South Africa. However, as the research aims to employ approaches in research that work towards breaking down stereotypes the public discourse surrounding sex work is still one of stigmatisation and by default the position of an Other.

While there is a noticeable lack in visual representations of sex workers in South Africa, a few important images do exist. See, for example, Figure 15<sup>18</sup> by Paul Weinberg of a Black sex worker and the images taken by Billy Monk in the infamous Catacomb club as seen in Figures 5 and 6<sup>19</sup>.

Yet there is, and has always been, a dilemma with documentary photography as seen in the above examples, particularly environmental documentary photography that is used to represent and capture sex workers. The power relationship between the photographer and photographed subject is, in these cases, highly uneven, and this point will be elaborated on in detail in Chapter Four when I deal with the impact of such visualising media. It is not the aim of this study to offer a solution to the above dilemmas and power relations when it comes to photography as visualising medium; rather, the study is interested in collaborative creative attempts at conducting research with sex workers as a means to offer a possible alternative to the genre of documentary photography.

My research process can be explained as such: in conjunction with SWEAT,<sup>20</sup> I convened workshops with sex workers between 2015 and 2017, where we discussed the implications of photography and being photographed, while also discussing issues surrounding precarity, as well as Judith Butler's (2009) notion of the frames of recognition.<sup>21</sup> As sex workers occupy a very precarious place in society, both

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<sup>18</sup> The images are only shown within the specific chapter breakdowns where they are discussed in detail.

<sup>19</sup> There is no definitive proof that the women pictured in these images are indeed sex workers. However, Ashraf Jamal (2015: 64) quotes Henry Trotter when stating: "Of the 'escorts,' 'sugar girls,' or dock-side prostitutes who figure in some of Monk's photographs, Trotter (2008:229) notes: "While money was the global commodity, these women also had to 'traffic in many other types of cargo, such as language, DNA, diseases, drugs and romance. By the very nature of the job they perform, they must become traffickers in culture'".

<sup>20</sup> The Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Task Force (SWEAT) is a South African NGO primarily concerned with the decriminalisation of sex work, whilst also offering legal and medical assistance to sex workers.

<sup>21</sup> In 'Frames of War' (2009) Judith Butler draws a correlation between the governmental and legal frames of inclusion and exclusion that render certain people or societies as precarious. In the workshops that I did with the feminist collective we used their own position as sex workers in the legal framework of South Africa to explain Butler's (2009) theory of inclusion and exclusion. With sex work being

discursively and physically, these workshops helped to reflect on their own notions of subjectivity and as such opened up valuable conversations in terms of how they feel they are seen and how they see themselves.

During these workshops I took formal studio portraits of participants, and they were given disposable cameras with which to photograph their own lives for one week.<sup>22</sup> The visual stories that came to the fore were touching and revealed their context in striking ways.

Arising from these workshops and images came a recurring theme: these are important stories to be told and shared with a larger public audience, yet I did not feel that the black and white or colour photographs that we have created during the project could convey the experiences and complex human dimensions of the participating sex workers, an example of such an image is discussed in Chapter Four.

In contrast to personal photographs by sex workers, there are also a few images in the public domain that are also devoid of context such as Figure 15: *Untitled* (1979) by Paul Weinberg and the Billy Monk images, Figure 5: *The Catacombs 1* (1969) and Figure 6: *The Catacombs 2* (1969). They are arguably loaded with antecedent discourses and ideologies which are trapped in an imagination<sup>23</sup>, whether that imagination is personal or a collective.

And yet, it is not simply the visual representation that has to be contended with; there are, of course, the written accounts as well. Because every literary image is also a mental image, and because every mental image is a representation of an absent entity, imagination is a *poiesis*, a making up (Collins 1991:43). Readerly visualisation,

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criminalised under South African law, it helped to position Butler theory in a relatable way to which they responded very positively.

<sup>22</sup> This methodology was informed by photo voice projects as used by Plambech that offer alternatives to traditional forms of documentary photography (Plambech 2016); this will be elaborated on in Chapter Four.

<sup>23</sup> In 'On Photography' (1977:22) Sontag states: "A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence". Viewing images without an understanding of their context and history is problematic, for as Sontag states: "To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (1977:24).

the “production of mental images in the process of reading” (Esrock 2005:633), is made difficult in the absence of a stable, or comprehensive visual history of sex workers in South Africa and the consequent mental images that we produce (which is largely informed by normative ideologies) are especially stigmatising and problematic.

The preoccupation with subjectivity, and specifically the subjectivity of sex workers, is not new territory. However, this study addresses subjectivity 'indirectly', or rather it addresses the spaces where subjectivity is experienced, and is as such based on the lived experiences within the said places/spaces. By investigating spaces/places that hold meaning for sex workers, I am adopting a novel approach to addressing the topic of subjectivity without an emphasis on the body, or discourses stemming from discussions on the bodies of sex workers.

By doing so, I aim to bring to light an interconnectivity in Woodstock, the area that I decided to base my research on for both its rich historical significance to sex work, as well as the current socio-political climate which is addressed in detail in Chapter Two. Through a post-structural lens I begin to question concepts of belonging and how subjectivity is navigated in private and public spaces. Presently, street-based sex workers occupy a precarious sphere of urban memory and belonging, and their presence therefore fluctuate between visibility and invisibility (in as much as their occupation is illegal and marginalised) and the spaces that represent their lived experiences are multi-layered, particularly as these spaces are shared and often contested. This is particularly relevant to street-based sex workers, as the very nature of their work is transitory and not specific to one location. I contend that the space, Woodstock, that is frequented by the sex workers who participated in this study is worthy of investigation, as sex workers navigate their subjectivity in a public spaces and streets.<sup>24</sup>

My question is thus: How do we as image-makers and image-commentators use the technology available to us to explore more collaborative methods of research with research participants and, within the context of this study, specifically with sex workers.

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<sup>24</sup> In Chapter Two the historic and contemporary significance of Woodstock as the site for this study is elaborated on in detail.

In an attempt to answer this question, I make use of Go-Pro technology when filming takes place, participants wear a 'chestie'<sup>25</sup> and the Go-Pro is strapped onto the front of the participant's body, with the result that whatever the participants encounter or see, gets recorded. Furthermore, because of the placement of the Go-Pro, viewers of the video never get to see the participants, only their hands on occasion. Because of these technological choices, it could be argued that viewers of the video are afforded a more embodied experience when watching the film, as they 'actually walk with' the participants.

## 1.2 Outline of chapters and key texts

Following on the first chapter (my introduction), the main focus of the second chapter is to situate the historical position and public perception of sex workers in the deeply colonial narrative of Cape Town, South Africa. In the larger context of this study, this positioning is important as it firstly informs the methodological approach taken and secondly, this historical narrative of sex workers currently impacts their current precarious position. South Africa has a very contentious past when it comes to sexuality; this stems from imposed colonial value systems (Oppenheimer 2014) and also legislation such as the apartheid-era *Immorality Act* that followed on such systems (Gaum 2003). These contentious issues were perhaps no more intensely prevalent than in Cape Town during the height of the British colonial period, during which Victorian values were exported throughout the world. The Cape port was arguably one of the busiest in the world during this time, and sex workers were regularly confined to 'lock hospitals' for inspection and treatment (Thusi 2015).

The implementation of the *Contagious Diseases Act* in 1868 advanced these discourses of control, not only patriarchal control, but also the strict policing of sex workers' bodies (Thusi 2015:217). Historical accounts of surveillance are important, as sex work in South Africa is still criminalised, and as this study emphasises, sex workers' bodies are still policed, both judicially and publicly.

The chapter chronicles the history of sex work from the arrival of the Dutch East India Company (c 1652), during the period of British colonialism and the Morality Act of

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<sup>25</sup>A 'chestie' is a harness device used to strap the Go-Pro onto, it is usually used to capture action sports.

1902, and finally to Afrikaner nationalism and censorship. Throughout reference is made to the discursive and archival records that exist of sex workers, which defined them hegemonically as abject and precarious in society. These records that are kept in the National Archives of South Africa position sex workers as criminals who were subject to legal prosecution and position sex workers as a “social ill” (Gaum 2003:319). However, as Gaum posits, current legislation in South Africa still criminalises sex work and as such it still prevents sex workers from accessing legal protection and other benefits available to the hegemonic status quo (Gaum 2003:310).

This investigation into the history of sex work is what paved the way to framing the methodological approach this study wanted to employ, as what became abundantly clear was that there was a lack of consideration given to autobiographical narration approach/analysis towards sex workers, and how the policing of their bodies and the censorship of their being was – and in some instances still is today – being propagated through official channels.

As India Thusi (2015) alludes to historic and official stigmatisation of sex workers that went far beyond the realm of the medical; they were in fact used as pawns to heighten the contrast with the false sense of superiority and Victorian cleanliness. The “immoral act” of prostitution was initially overlooked by the British government during the colonial period, as the threat of homosexuality was seen as a far greater dilemma (Thusi 2015:211). The “unsavoury sexual desires” and appetites of the soldiers were to be serviced by sex workers, as no “respectable lady” could be called upon to be used as a precursor to homosexuality (Thusi 2015:213), as homosexuality was seen as a far greater threat to the British Empire than the immoral solicitation of sex workers

There is thus already a strong historical narrative to be found in South African archives on sex work, namely that of object versus subject. With a lack personal accounts and autobiographical accounts by sex workers, their subjectivity and identity is severely stigmatised.

As Thusi contends, a specific lexicon came to be associated with sex workers, or as they were referred to during this period, prostitutes. These included “maladjusted, an unbalanced personality and a menace to society” (Thusi, 2015:217). It is important to

draw attention to this verbal construction of an identity, because these ‘attributes’ are still associated with sex workers, as will be indicated in Chapter Three.

The Anglo-Boer War led eventually the unification of the two British colonies and the two independent Boer republics. Mining activity expanded and this resulted in White sex workers regularly having sexual relations with African miners (Thusi 2015:226). As explained in Chapter Two, the national archive has various accounts of White sex workers being imported to serve the White mine workers in South Africa, but following the racial transgressions that occurred, the *Morality Act* of 1902 was promptly drawn up (Thusi 2015:226). These historical accounts of racial transgressions made public opinion and discourse on sex workers all the more negative during the apartheid period. Indeed Gaum posits that the 1948 elections, which brought the National Party into power, led to a rise in apartheid legislation and also an imposition of a Calvinist morality that relegated both sex work and sex workers to the realm of immoral activity punishable by law (Gaum 2003:329).

This period also saw the appointment of Geoffrey Cronje, who led the now infamous *Cronje Commission*, which championed oppressive social regulations and the “pre-publication censorship board”, which would regulate local and imported books (McDonald 2006:23).

This historical overview provides valuable insights into, and understanding of, why current legislation in South Africa is arguably still so biased. The lack of historical autobiographical narratives and personal accounts by sex workers arguably impacts on the current legislation in South Africa that still prohibits and criminalises sex work under the apartheid-era *Sexual Offences Act 23* of 1957 (South African Law Reform Commission, 2009:14). Sex workers are afforded little to no public protection, as they are arguably still thought of as prostitutes who are trapped in a historical narrative and discourses that stigmatise, abject and fail to protect the rights of these individuals.

A portion of an interview with Lee, Figure 5: *A night out* (2018) highlights the dangers faced by sex workers;

*And then also my attitude and personality changes, I become a different person, cause you know I don't know what is ahead of me, I have to prepare myself mentally as well as physically. Ja by physically I mean, I*

*like to dress nice, but I also need to know that tonight I might have to run ... and always walk with something in my bag, like a nail file 'cause I can't always walk with a knife you see?*

(Personal Interview with Lee. 2016. 50:24 – 50:46)<sup>26</sup>

Lee works in Woodstock, Cape Town, and an area pivotal to this study as a site of geographical investigation. The site-specific focus on Woodstock, Cape Town was intentional, as this is where the Go-pro interviews were conducted with participants. Chapter Two explains in detail how this area is historically of particular significance because of its proximity to the harbour and the location of the Slave Lodge<sup>27</sup>In the light of this study, Woodstock is of interest today as a result of the intensified attempts at gentrification and consequently a rich multi-layered history is being obliterated. With regards to the methodology of this study, 'walking with video' (Pink 2007), the act of walking becomes political in that I as the researcher embark on a journey with the participants and walk their place and at their pace. And by doing so, I as researcher get exposed to an unseen, yet a familiar landscape. It is through the autobiographical accounts of the participants that a different Woodstock starts to emerge, one that is shrouded from public view, but is vitally important in shaping the geographical landscape of the city.

As Lefebvre states, space – specifically social space – is a shadowy cluster of “great diversity and knowledge” and it is here, in this contested space of Woodstock, positioned between increasing gentrification and ‘illegal’ sex work activities, that a rich social history and personal narratives needs to be investigated (Lefebvre, 1984:73).

Chapter Two argues that the current social, political and historical public discourse on sex workers is largely negative by giving a detailed history of sex work in Cape Town South Africa. These discourses have contributed to the current stigmatisation that sex

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<sup>26</sup> Throughout this thesis there are personal interviews with the three participants, Gavin, Lee and Guilam. These interviews are available for viewing in the link provided at the corresponding time indications.

<sup>27</sup> The Slave Lodge, built in the seventeenth century by the Dutch East India Company, was considered the oldest and most prolific brothel of the period in Cape Town (Gaum 2003:320). The distance from the centre of Woodstock, the Biscuit Mill and the Slave Lodge is according to Google Maps 3.7 km.

workers still face under South African legislation that criminalises sex work. Chapter Three looks at the importance of autobiographical narrative as an important method to counteract or destabilise the current public discourses on sex workers. The chapter begins by acknowledging Foucault's view that the subject is "historicised" and is in fact the product "of history"<sup>28</sup> (Foucault cited in Barker 2008:225). Furthermore, discourse not only enables us to become "speaking persons", but also places us in specific "subject positions" (Foucault cited in Barker 2008:225).

In the light of Foucault's emphasis on language and discourse, Chapter 3 investigates the importance of narrative and memory when giving an autobiographical account of one's life and experiences. Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996) indicate the importance of 'narrative agency' and write about the concerns of memory creation and the power of personal narrative from a psychological and anthropological perspective respectively. Indeed, they contend that "narrative and self are inseparable" (Ochs and Capps 1996:19) and this is illustrated in the chapter through the interviews with the participating sex workers. In reference to Heidegger, Ochs and Capps (1996:21) contend that "entities are given meaning through being experienced". The methodology of sex workers giving personal accounts thus opens up an opportunity for the listener, reader or viewer to 'experience' a different discursive construct of sex workers, a narrative spoken *by* them, not *about* them.

The chapter also investigates the above-mentioned narratives within a post-structuralist framework. Smith and Watson (2001:2) contend that with this approach one has to look at how one has become "who he or she is at a given moment and this is an ongoing process of reflection". It stands to reason that autobiographical accounts are invaluable when inquiring into a person's subjectivity because, arguably, who can know better than the subject who he or she is "at a given moment" (Smith and Watson 2001:2).

Smith and Watson state that the recollection of memories is dependent on the material body and that personal memories are indeed reconstructed "through symbolic exchanges" (2001:57). The act of walking with participants whilst they recount

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<sup>28</sup> This emphasis on the significance of history and subject formation is also the motivation for the in-depth historical account of sex work in South Africa in Chapter Two.

memories and experiences becomes part of these “symbolic exchanges” (2001:57) and adds to a shared corporeal experience in an attempt to develop a more collaborative approach to research. Smith and Watson refer to embedded memory (2001:58), where the materiality of the body is engaged with discourses that allow it to become visible or invisible. These discourses infiltrate the materiality of the body and have a direct influence on how these bodies act or appear in public.

Considering that discourse has a direct influence on the performance of identities, the chapter looks at Judith Butler’s *Excitable Speech* (1997). Butler maintains that persons can be subjected to forms of injurious speech. She posits that speech – language, in fact – situates us in the society we move in, determining our position. The distinctions between “illocutionary and perlocutionary” (Butler 1997:3) speech acts are incorporated into the argument for autobiographical narrative as a counter to current discourse on sex workers. Indeed, Butler states that certain modes of address could potentially function as “threats to one’s wellbeing” or to the way that the body is “sustained and threatened” (1997:5). This is substantiated as Chapter three with sex workers, who recount instances of being addressed in multiple ways. Chapter Three for instance incorporates portions of interviews from the Go-Pro video in order to establish the value of this methodological approach (autobiographical narrative) in recounting embedded memories. Smith and Watson (2001:57) contend that recollection of memories is dependent on the material body. This informed the decision to ‘walk with participants’ whilst recording their recollections, as suggested by Pink (2007).

The connection between narrative and memory is an important feature highlighted in the chapter, as Ochs and Capps (1996:19) contend that “[n]arrative and self are inseparable”. The study aimed to create a space where participants could autobiographically narrate their own experiences and in doing so give the reader or the viewer of the video access to unknown dimensions of the participants’ subjectivity and identity; this was done in the light of Barker’s contention that “ [t]he concept of identity refers to a regulated way of ‘speaking’ about persons” (2008:224). This regulated way of speaking becomes apparent in the interviews with participants, as when Guilam states:

*I act a certain way for clientele to be accepted, but that is the clientele that just come for a quickie, and maybe he doesn't know that I am trans, that I need to play my role around it for him not to discover me ... Because you never knew what could happen, there are a lot of spaces around where clients do their quickies, clients that come out of the bar, that can lead up to get killed.*  
(Personal Interview with Guilam. 2016. 6:14 – 7:17)

The methodological value of 'walking with' and experiencing *with* participants whilst recording their recounting of their memories is again highlighted in this excerpt, if one accepts Ochs and Capps's (1996:21) reasoning that "entities are given meaning through being experienced and that narrative is an essential resource in the struggle to bring experience to conscious awareness". The seriousness of Guilam's words becomes focused for me as researcher, and arguably for the viewer, through the genre of personal narration, as Guilam allows us access to her own "regulated way of speaking" (2008:224).

The chapter elaborates on the value of autobiographical narrative, but it is the methodology of 'walking with' that is the access point to these narrative accounts. Smith and Watson state that when we remember, or when we talk about personal experiences, these acts are not "passive acts of simply retrieving information" (2001:18). But rather the reflective act of 'walking with' can result in becoming what Pink (2008:48) refers to as "productive of place-as-event". Thus the collaborative act becomes both a retrieval of information and memories, but it also becomes a new memory of collaboration between researcher and participant. Thus, to conclude, the viewer, reader or listener experiences with the person recounting personal memories and participates in the event, rather than registering an event that happened to someone else somewhere else.

Whereas Chapter Three spoke about the importance of autobiographical agency for sex workers in public discourse, Chapter Four looks at how video, specifically GoPro technology, can challenge the stereotypical depictions of sex workers, whilst allowing for a mutually beneficial collaboration between researcher and participants.

Although the chapter alludes to some of the problems inherent with the genre of documentary photography, it also acknowledges contemporary artists who aim to

challenge and rethink the application of the medium of visual representation. Specific attention is devoted to Robert Hamblin's *interseXion - the art of advocacy* (2015) as well as documentary film work done by Sine Plambech (2016). John Tagg's seminal work in *The Burden of Representation* (1988) positions the use of photography as a "a new type of regime discovered in the eighteenth century, that is, a scientific-legal complex impregnated with a new technology of power" (1988:71).

The position of photography as a tool for surveillance, and ultimately a form of control, is further substantiated by Ashraf Jamal's (2015: 68) view that South Africa's legacy of documentary photography is "intrinsically negative, pathologically optical – which has informed, and continues to inform, the way in which South Africa's stories, and its image repertoire, has been recorded and received". Furthermore, Martha Rosler, in *In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)* (1992:302) poses the question of documentary photography as a voyeuristic scope regime;

Documentary is a little like horror movies, putting a face on fear and transforming threat into fantasy, into imagery. One can handle imagery by leaving it behind. (*It is them, not us*).

Documentary photography is thus positioned as manifesting unequal power relations between photographers and the subjects photographed. As Sontag contends: "photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed" (2003:41). Considering these theories on documentary photography in conjunction with the research done in both the narrative and visual archive of South Africa, Rosler argues that the genre of documentary photography, journalism and news reportage runs the risk to "provoke, to horrify or to mobilize sentiment against" an Other (Rosler 1992:209) instead of creating better understanding and compassion.

This realisation informed a new approach to research and the subsequent use of video technology that is rooted in a form of sousveillance versus surveillance as posited by Mann (2013). As Mann explains, "Sousveillance means 'watching from below', and its etymology derives from replacing 'sur' (over) with 'sous', which means 'under' or 'below' or 'from below' (as in terms like 'sous-chef')" (Mann 2009:19). So the use of Go-pro technology that records what the participants see allows them to now become

the surveyors of their environment and the people that they interact with in it, thereby challenging the public gaze that they are regularly scrutinized by.

Chapter 4 furthers positions my involvement as researcher in the study by acknowledging that it is a mutual collaboration, and as such employs the methodological approach of participatory action research (hence referred to as PAR). Pink (2009:178) states that this method of research serves to expose how PAR-practices are implicated in not only the “material and sensory realities”, but also a “phenomenological sense of place” (Pink 2009:178). The act of walking with participants in their chosen locations in Woodstock becomes a form of PAR, as the act of walking with participants become political. Greenhalgh and Taylor (1997:740) contend that the value of this methodology is that it becomes possible “to study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them”. McDonald (2012:34) claims that PAR is geared (or hopeful) towards an expression of the views and opinions of participants without “manipulation or control” from the researcher.

In the context of the research that I conducted with the participating sex workers, the actual filming of the videos and the interviews were ultimately in the control of the participants. As viewers we do not get to see the narrators, as the video is shot from their viewing proximity and the locations were also chosen by them. The Go-Pro’s were attached to their chests, so we see everything at eye level. This choice of technological application was influenced by the theories of Don Idhe (1993) and Rosenberg and Verbeek (2015) who write on post-phenomenology and the value of human synthesis with technology. The theorising of Go-Pro technology as a form of sousveillance combined with the methodological application of PAR is in line with what Rosenberg and Verbeek (2015:12) argues for, namely that the classical analyses of phenomenology and technology often position technology as an instrument that alienates “human beings from themselves and from the world they live in”. In contrast to this, post-phenomenology aims to synthesise science and technology to gain an understanding of humans in their world from their own perspective (Rosenberger & Verbeek 2015:12).

The chapter argues for the use of Go-Pro technology and walking with participants as an alternative method of research that allows for the finer nuances of narration, memories and experiences to be recorded. As Pink states: “filmic representations of other people’s experiences ... can invoke in us responses that can empathetically comprehend the embodied experiences of those represented” (2008:248). In interviews in Chapter 4 with the research participants, the value of this methodological approach is highlighted, as viewers of the video are allowed to experience situations and places where they would not normally be allowed, thereby aiding in destabilising public myths and narratives about sex workers, whilst aiding in creating a new space for contemporary discussions on subjectivity and research methodologies.

In Chapter Five, the conclusion, I reflect on the outcome of the study, and specifically on the application of PAR as a research methodology done in collaboration with Lee, Gavin and Guilam. Consideration is given to how this methodology could perhaps inform further research conducted with others. I recognise that my participation in this study as a participant must be acknowledged as I was not merely doing research, I was actively partaking in the process.

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## CHAPTER TWO: THE HISTORY OF SEX WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

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### 2.1 Introduction

This study looks primarily at the current situation that sex workers face in South Africa, however it would be impossible to form a more nuanced account of the current status of sex work in South Africa without looking at the past. As mentioned in the introduction, the accounts of sex workers in a historical perspective have been largely biased, as one can surmise from the research done by Oppenheimer (2014), van Niekerk (2005) and Gaum (2003), to name but a few. The legacy and normative scrutiny of prostitution in South Africa was largely gendered, and predominantly focussed on the female body hence the need to contextualise this sexual and gendered bias in this historical overview. Yet attention should be given to the fact that the participating sex workers, Lee, Gavin and Guilam do not conform to, or identify with strict binary codes of gender. This chapter provides an overview of the history of sex work in South Africa to provide a better understanding of why sex workers are currently facing such a precarious situation in South African society. Specific emphasis is placed on Woodstock, Cape Town, as it is a significant historic place in relation to sex work, both historically and currently.

### 2.2 From colonialism to censorship

Sex work in South Africa has an undeniably contentious history that can be dated back to 1652 with the arrival of European settlers, and the eventual colonisation of the former Cape Colony (Oppenheimer 2014:16). The profession was not only stifled with the usual stigmas associated with soliciting bodies for sex, but also as a result of the socio-political landscape that was an aspect of the European in arrival invasion of South Africa. Gardiol van Niekerk writes in *Criminal Justice at the Cape of Good Hope in the Seventeenth Century: Narratives of Infanticide and Suicide* (2005:152-153) that:

[i]n the early years of the Cape settlement, women, mostly of colour, were pawns in the economic enterprises of the Company. Their reproductive capacity was essential for the perpetuation of the system of slavery and for

the continued existence and development of the settlement. Their sexual exploitation manifested in prostitution, concubinage and rape. While the Company could exploit female slaves for their labour and their bodies, Khoi Khoi women could not be forced to work, but were nevertheless sexually exploited. Their exploitation was often by their own communities.

When discussing female sexuality in colonial narratives, it is important to note that female sexuality was (and arguably still is) viewed through the lens of “male privilege” (Oppenheimer 2014:16).

For the purpose of this thesis the position of a narrative ‘voice’ is important as the process of subjectivity and ‘becoming’ through the act of speaking and being spoken for is one of the key areas of inquiry to be discussed in Chapter Three. Bonnie G. Smith (2008:527) contends that a persistent component of prostitution is the “institution of male privilege, and its codification in a sexual double standard”. Male sexual indiscriminate was accepted, and at times even approved, while female promiscuity was “despised and denied” (Smith 2008:527). If one were to generalise about the phenomenon of prostitution, it could be argued that it thrived in male-dominated societies where discourses on female sexuality have been polarized against that of their male counterparts, whilst simultaneously being inhibited and institutionalised by the ideologies around family, marriage and morality. These double standards were most prevalent when women of different ‘classes’ were set apart for sexual use, and historians concur, with reference to various time periods, that “controlling prostitution and controlling women were two sides of the same coin” (Smith 2008:527). The question of agency and individuals providing narrative input when discussing the discursive constructs of subjectivity and ‘becoming’ thus becomes important when discussing sex workers’ identity.

This ‘male privilege’ automatically positioned women as submissive to men, and their existence was arguably confined to the sphere of domesticity (Oppenheimer 2014:16). This in turn dictated clearly demarcated social and gender roles, “which depicted what a respectable woman or an immoral woman looked like” (Oppenheimer 2014:16).

Women who opposed this position and chose to “operate in non-regulated space”<sup>29</sup> were classified as immoral and subsequently judged accordingly (Oppenheimer 2014:16). Furthermore, a woman was not allowed to “solicit herself to a man”, and was only allowed to offer her services should a “potential buyer approach her” (Oppenheimer 2014:16). In *Turning Tricks: A Brief History of the Regulation and Prohibition of Prostitution in South Africa*, Liezel Gaum (2003:321) states that legislation in the nineteenth century was essential in establishing society’s view of who the guilty party was when it came to prostitution, and “all the fingers pointed to the woman” (Oppenheimer 2014:16). India Thusi in *Policing Sex: The Colonial, Apartheid and New Democracy Policing of Sex Work in South Africa* (2015:208) makes reference to women (sex workers) who were cast as temptresses and were subsequently held accountable to laws that expressly buttressed this positioning, whilst further alienating them from the acceptable and demarcated spheres to which they were assigned. This, in turn, rendered them abject,<sup>30</sup> positioning them as Other.

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<sup>29</sup> Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift cite Haraway (1991) when explaining that the connection between spatiality and subjectivity that is most clearly elaborated by feminists is the constitutive link that it has to ‘the master subject’, “[t]hat is, white, heterosexual, middle-class masculinity – and the view of everywhere from nowhere which hopes to construct a transparent space in which the whole world is visible and knowable” (Pile & Thrift 1995:335). The female subject, and more so, female sexuality, during colonialism, was thus expected to be ‘acted out’ and exist in a space that is controlled and demarcated for them by men. As Pile and Thrift state, “[s]pace itself is bound into the power/knowledge relations addressed by a female subject of feminism. This means that space is also central to subjectivity” (Pile & Thrift 1995:335). Female sexual promiscuity, frowned upon in “transparent space” (Pile & Thrift 1995:335), would then have to occur in a space that was free from demarcated ideologies of accepted/expected gender roles.

<sup>30</sup> Abjection refers to a ‘state of being cast off’. It has strong connotations of degradation, meanness of spirit and baseness. It also refers, in post-structuralist terms, to that which could disturb conventional identity and cultural concepts (Childers & Hentzi 1995:56). In terms of this study, it can be stated that being abject in society has a direct bearing on an individual’s precarity, as recognisability of such a life as a life worth living starts to fall out of the frame (Butler 2009:13).

## 2.2.1 Legality

### 2.2.1.1 The Dutch East India Company

The historical social stigmatisation experienced by sex workers in South Africa was enforced by discriminatory laws that clearly positioned prostitution as “a social ill” (Gaum 2003:319). Yet these forms of prosecution, isolation and lack of legal protection for sex workers continue to be practised in current legislation<sup>31</sup> (Gaum 2003:319). The lack of rights and protection for sex workers seems to be a legal trend that can be traced back to “the *artyclebrief* of 1634” (Gaum 2003:320), which was still applicable in 1652<sup>32</sup> with the arrival of Europeans, specifically the Dutch East India Company at the former Cape Colony.<sup>33</sup> But this document made no reference to prostitution or brothel keeping as a crime, and there was no reference to prostitution in the *placaenten*.<sup>34</sup> Thus, legally speaking, the phenomenon was overlooked and ignored.

This did not mean, of course, that illegal sexual activities were not rife throughout the settlement. Elizabeth van Heyningen (1984:170) states that it is probable that prostitution was “endemic in Cape Town from the earliest days of white settlement” and adds that “first mention of a brothel was recorded in 1681”. Gaum (2003:320) makes reference to the fact that the Dutch East India Company’s slave lodge was seen to be the most established brothel of the period,<sup>35</sup> and slave sex workers had the motto “*Kammene Kas, Kammene Kunte*”, or “No cash, No Cunt” (Ross 1984:6). This

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<sup>31</sup> Liezel Gaum cites S.V. Jordan when stating that the South African Constitutional Court considers prostitution still to be a social ill that should be prosecuted and dealt with in terms of legislation (Gaum 2003:319).

<sup>32</sup> The *artyclebrief* was a document applicable to employees of the Dutch East India Company. It served to maintain order and discipline (Gaum 2003:20).

<sup>33</sup> It is important to state that the focus of this thesis is centred on prostitution from the perspective of Western discourse. By referring to the period of 1652 onwards when referring to “South Africa and its history of prostitution”, I do not mean to exclude any previous forms of sex work. Research on the period predating 1652 is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>34</sup> A *placaat* refers to a rule or proclamation that was issued during the Dutch East India Company’s rule at the Cape of Good Hope (Silva 1996:556).

<sup>35</sup> Robert Ross (2009:128) cites the Dutch East India Company employee Otto Mentzel’s description of the slave lodge: “Female slaves are always ready to offer their bodies for a trifle: and towards evening, one can see a string of soldiers and sailors entering the Lodge where they misspend their time until the clock strikes 9”.

makes it apparent that prostitution as a profitable employment opportunity had already been assimilated into this sphere of society.

Indeed, as Robert Ross states in *The Occupations of Slaves in Eighteenth Century Cape Town* (1984), in the period between 1652 and 1850 in South Africa the *placaeten* did not strictly prohibit prostitution, nor did they “[c]lassify illicit sexual activities as distinct crimes, but preferred to prosecute these activities under the umbrella of ‘immoral’ activities such as drinking and gambling and disorderly conduct” (1984:32).<sup>36</sup> Prostitution was thus not treated and prosecuted as a discrete offence, but it was instead seen to be an immoral albeit necessary act,<sup>37</sup> that threatened the moral fibre of Company men. Ross (1984:6) points out that this ‘corruption’ was addressed as early as 1685:

... [t]he visiting commissioner van Rhee de to Drakenstein was shocked by the amount of sexual immorality between the burghers and the Company's employees and its slaves. He ordered that any White man caught *in flagrante delicto* with a slave woman be sentenced to work for six months (or a year if a Company employee) as a slave.

Eventually the *placaenten* prohibited men from engaging in sexual conduct with non-Christian or slave women: the *Resolution of 21/22 January of 1692* even barred Company men from frequenting the slave quarters (Gaum 2003:321). By reflecting on legislation, or indeed the lack of it, regarding the act of prostitution during Dutch occupation, it arguably becomes clear that authorities were not so much concerned about the actual sexual promiscuity of Company men, as it was intent on prohibiting

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<sup>36</sup> According to Ross (1984:14), the *placaenten* or governing body “probably accepted that it [prostitution] was inevitable in a seaport town and provided a form of controlled release for the antisocial energies of unruly sailors”.

<sup>37</sup> India Thusi in *Policing Sex: The Colonial, Apartheid, and New Democracy Policing of Sex Work in South Africa*, (2015:209) notes several factors contributing to the bustling sex trade. There was a noticeable imbalance in the gender ratio in the colony which provided industrious women with an opportunity to capitalize on the situation, and for many women sex work “became a means to purchase their freedom”. Seafarers also spent months in an all-male environment, and for a long period, at least until the colony settled and began to prosper, sex workers were the only females to cater to the men's ‘needs’ (Thusi 2015:210).

sexual relations between races. This was to change dramatically with the transfer of control from Dutch governance to British imperialism where the legislation became a lot more conservative and exclusionary with an emphasis on strict racial segregation and the implementation of Victorian tropes of sexuality.

### **2.2.1.2 A New Era of British Colonialism**

Britain took control of the Cape Colony in 1795 under less than favourable circumstances. There was heightened tension between the Dutch authorities and settlers,<sup>38</sup> as settlers had started to migrate inland away from what the settlers considered to be general interference from the authorities (SAHO 2015). In order to acquire new territory, a steady workforce was needed and, under Dutch rule, there was a shortage of slaves. Dutch authorities did not want to incur high costs in importing slaves from Europe, and consequently slaves were imported from other parts of Africa and Asia. The slaves, however, remained the property of the Dutch authorities and this led to conflict with settlers who wished to prospect new land for grazing and farming (SAHO 2015). Considering the need for and dependence on the slave trade to ensure economic prosperity, the abolition of slavery under British rule in 1834 had far-reaching repercussions and, during this period, prostitution which were closely associated with slavery also came under scrutiny. Thusi (2015:210, citing van Heyningen 1984) states that under Dutch control "prostitution remained a casual profession. It had become an offence, but was relatively rarely prosecuted". British colonial rule, however, was strongly associated with the Victorian Era (c. 1837-1901), and this period was dominated by discourses on "sexual repression and sexual purification" (Thusi, 2015:211).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Thusi (2015:208) points out that what started off as a small refreshment station for vessels en route from the Netherlands to Batavia eventually became a sought-after settler colony. Employees of the Dutch East India Company were allowed to lease plots of land which they used for "labour-intensive farming". This resulted in the importation of slaves from "Madagascar, Mozambique and Asia" (Thusi 2015:209).

<sup>39</sup> Van Heyningen (1984:172) asserts that prostitution in the Cape Colony became institutionalised as one of the after-effects of the Crimean war and the concerns raised regarding the health of the British troops. Measures were thus instituted, such as the Contagious Diseases Act 1864, to combat the spread of venereal diseases. The Acts themselves embodied tropes of Victorian ideologies related to women and their role in society, sexuality and the notorious 'double standard' (1984:172). Foucault

Initially, the potentially transgressive act of prostitution was overlooked, as the imminent threat of homosexuality was of much greater concern to the British government (Thusi 2015:211).<sup>40</sup> It was during the Victorian age that a very clear discourse around the 'control of sexuality' and the inequality of genders came to the forefront. Not only was sex work 'used' as a safeguard against homosexuality, but the "unsavoury sexual desires of men" were expected and accepted to be satisfied by someone other than "a respectable lady" (Thusi, 2015:213). Sex workers were thus seen as a vehicle for the 'release' of desires that were not 'appropriate' within the holy sanctity of marriage, as well as a way to protect morally pure Victorian women from their husbands' "unsavoury desires" (Thusi, 2015:213). As such, sex workers became pawns in the crusade to protect what was deemed 'respectable' and 'proper' – consequently leading to prostitution becoming the marker of immorality.

### **2.2.1.3 The Woman Christian Temperance Union and the *Contagious Diseases Act of 1864***

As mentioned above, when discussing attitudes to female sexuality during colonialism, it is important to pay attention to the discourses that constructed and ultimately controlled them. The nineteenth century was marked by an interdependence of discourses focused on race, gender and patriarchy, generating a rhetoric and legislation that ultimately protected its producers: White European males. As

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(1978:3) in *The History of Sexuality* refers to Victorian attitudes towards sex as sanitised, reserved and designated to specific spaces. "But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple lay down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanour avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one's speech".

<sup>40</sup> During colonialism sex work (although feared) was encouraged, as the British authorities did not want men to engage in homosexual activities if they were not provided with alternative forms "of sexual release"(Thusi 2015:211). Linda Bryder (1998, cited in Thusi 2015:2011) states that "Sex work was thus considered necessary and was largely tolerated. Engaging sex workers ensured that men would not lose all their 'sensibilities' by delving into homosexual behaviours due to their prolonged absence from Europe".

previously noted, the 'oversight' by authorities of the morally dubious act of prostitution in order to protect the male populace from homosexuality and, in turn, their female counterparts from the "unsavoury sexual appetites of men" (Thusi, 2015:213) is a clear example of the patriarchy-driven discourses that dominated the nineteenth century. The *Contagious Diseases Act* of the 1864 is another example of discriminatory legislation that operated, through a power axis, to stigmatise sex workers, while protecting the clients who solicited their services. The 1860s in England were marked by significant outbreaks of venereal diseases, and British colonies (such as the Cape Colony) and authorities became fixated on the regulation of sex workers' bodies as they were seen as "the site of contagion", threatening not only the health of the men who engaged their services, but also the sanctity of the home (Thusi, 2015:216).<sup>41</sup> The control of sexuality and morality thus became a direct form of 'bio-power', as Foucault (1978:140) postulates:

During the classical period, there was a rapid development of various disciplines – universities, secondary schools, barracks, and workshops; there was also the emergence, in the field of political practices and economic observation, of the problems of birth-rate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration. Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'bio-power'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Gieseeking and Mangold (2014:183) contend that concepts around public and private are socially constructed that conceptualise various domains of everyday life. These range from "the interiority and privacy of our bodies and homes, to the publicness of city streets and public space" (2014:183). More importantly, however, they determine the limits of access granted to 'outsiders'. During the Victorian period sex workers' bodies were rebuffed from the private sphere/space, as the concepts that conceived these 'pure' spaces were conceptualised on the grounds of morality.

<sup>42</sup> Foucault (1978:140) asserts that the deployment of sexuality would be one of the "great technologies of power in the nineteenth century". In terms of the regulation of the nation states' subjects, bio-power became "one of the great instruments of the state, as institutions of power, ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomy- and bio-politics, created in the eighteenth century as techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions (the family and the army, schools and the police, individual medicine and the administration of collective bodies), operated in the sphere of economic processes, their development, and the forces working to sustain them" (1978:141) The armed forces of Britain were thus an economic tool, or 'bio-power' over

These forms of control Foucault alludes to manifested in all the British colonies and women who were suspected of – or openly engaged in – sex work were banished to lock hospitals.<sup>43</sup> Here they had to undergo (mostly involuntarily) treatment for venereal diseases and associated examinations (Thusi, 2015:216). For example, Figure 1: *Lock Hospital (1899)*, shows an official letter of the colonial secretaries office discussing the case of Marian Lee and Sennie Carlson, two young girls suspected of prostitution in Cape Town.

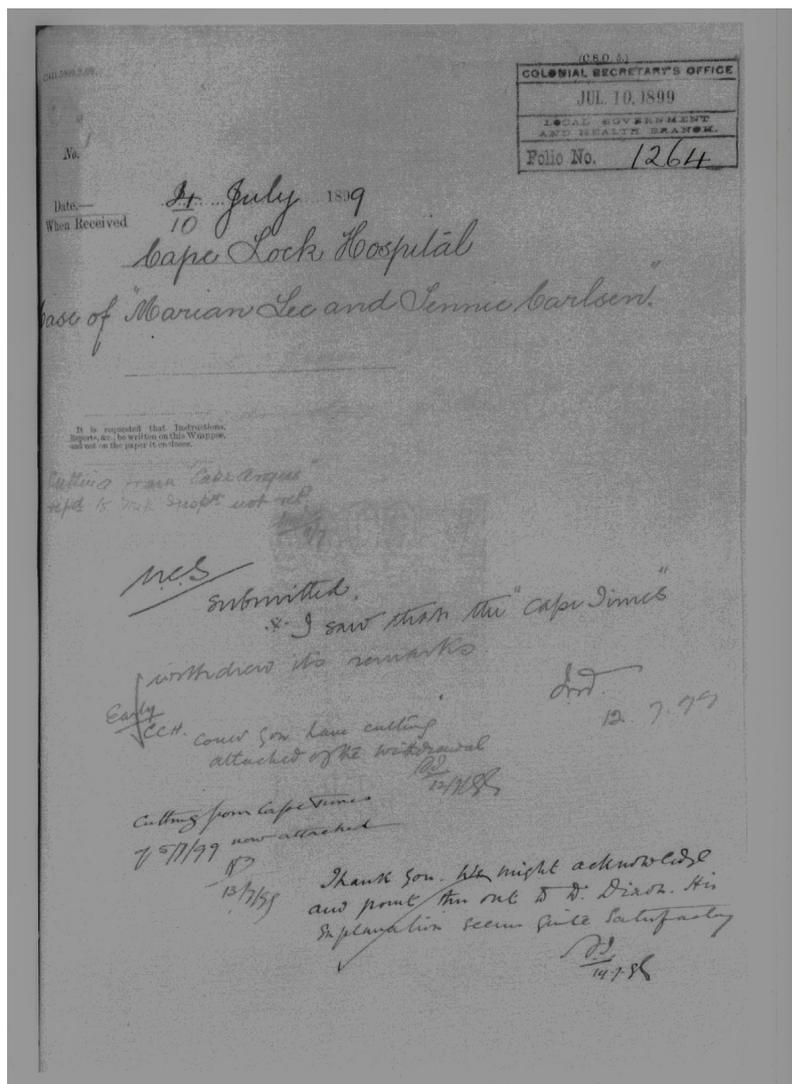


Figure 1: Lock Hospital (1899). Colonial Secretary's Office.

which the government exercised control, and threats to this 'commodity', such as venereal diseases, had to be controlled.

<sup>43</sup> Lock hospitals were closely linked with British military operations from the 18th to the 20th century. They specialised in treating sexually transmitted diseases that were rampant among British military troops, who were advancing Britain's colonial ambitions.

Lee and Carlson were examined at one of the lock hospitals, and this letter (Figure 1) is one of a few official documents in the National Archives of South Africa in Cape Town that discuss sex work (then prostitution) in Cape Town during British occupation. These lock hospitals were imposed by the naval and armed forces of the British government in an attempt to preserve the troops' health, which was of the utmost importance for the colonial effort at a time when British imperialism was at its height. The *Contagious Diseases Act* (implemented in South Africa in 1868) is thus not only an example of patriarchal control of the female body as a dominant discourse during the Victorian period, but more importantly it heralded an era of the strict 'policing' of sex workers' bodies and sexuality in general (Thusi, 2015:217).

With the implementation of the above act, sex work went from being a 'necessary evil' to being regarded as a threat not only to one's health but to the moral fibre of the 'pure' Victorian. The act required the "registration and regulation of sex workers" (Thusi, 2015:217), and sex work became institutionalised and subjected to strict control, scrutiny and judgement. Sex workers themselves became notorious as the "hosts of disease" and common terms associated with them were "maladjusted, an unbalanced personality and a menace to society" (Thusi, 2015:217). The act thus discriminated against sex workers, while their male patrons' actions were condoned or tolerated, as the laws implemented actually protected them to a large degree. They were, for instance, not subjected to the same forms of bodily 'policing' and mandatory and involuntarily examinations as women who were known to be sex workers.<sup>44</sup>

These fiercely unequal gender regulations did not sit well with British feminists, such as Josephine Butler,<sup>45,46</sup> and English women's groups in Britain started to rally for the

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<sup>44</sup> These involuntary examinations further degraded sex workers and exemplified the humiliation imposed on them through the Contagious Diseases Act. Van Heyningen (1984:184) states that sex workers complained most about internal examinations and the general rough-handedness of lock hospital doctors. This resulted in a notorious riot in 1893 against specifically Dr J.F. Dixon, who was known to be especially unpopular with the women.

<sup>45</sup> According to Helen Mathers (2014:10) Josephine Butler was; "the leader of a national women's political campaign in Victorian England, at a time when women did not have the vote. She campaigned on the behalf of prostitutes and trafficked women from 1869 until her death in 1906".

<sup>46</sup> Patricia Hollis (2013) cites Josephine Butler's opposition to the Act: "I never myself viewed this question as fundamentally any more a woman's question than it is a man's The Legislation we opposed

repeal of the Act (Thusi, 2015:217). In South Africa, however, sex workers were being positioned by groups such as the Cape Women's Christian Temperance Union (hereafter referred to as WCTU) as victims of male sexual immorality and depravity (Thusi, 2015:213). Rather than advocating for their rights to equality,<sup>47</sup> the WCTU was more concerned with 'saving' sex workers from what they saw as a morally impure life (Thusi, 2015:214). This in fact did little to protect the sex workers, as the WCTU's focus was on men's moral transgressions, as well as calling for the abolition of sex work. Under immense pressure in England, the Act was finally repealed in 1886; however, the repeal of the Act was not as swift in the Cape Colony, and it was repealed only in 1919 (Thusi, 2015:219).

#### **2.2.1.4 White Sex Workers, Black Mine Workers and Afrikaner Nationalism**

Following the unification of the four colonies of South Africa and the Anglo-Boer War in 1902, there was a panic around Black (male) sexuality and what implications it could have for White masculinity (Thusi, 2015:226).

As a result of the expansion of mining activities in the country, there was an influx of European mine workers, as well as White sex workers,<sup>48</sup> who readily had sexual

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secured the enslavement of women and the increased immorality of men; and history and experience alike teach us that these two results are never separated" (2013: 23).

<sup>47</sup> The WCTU was the frontrunner of what would become the "post-1910 anxiety over South Africa's urban and social landscape" and was primarily concerned with racial purity, combating prostitution and prohibiting liquor consumption (Thusi 2015:214). Such organisations arguably did little to help the plight of sex workers, who were positioned as helpless victims and stripped of any agency.

<sup>48</sup> Charles van Onselen's (1982) *New Babylon New Nineveh - Everyday life on the Witwatersrand 1886-1914* chronicles the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand and the socio-economic plight of immigrant workers during this period. He made specific reference to sex workers who were "imported" from Europe to satisfy the high demand for their services amongst mine workers. In his research Van Onselen came across a survey on brothels conducted by the then Sanitary Superintendent, A.H. Bleksey (1982:119). The report estimated that in 1895, in central Johannesburg alone, there were approximately 97 brothels; however, only two of these brothels included people of non-White ethnicity. The rest were French, German, Russian, Austrian and English, to name but a few (Van Onselen 1982:120). As Cape Town boasted the busiest port of this period, one could assume that the arrival of these sex workers would have had an impact on Cape Town's social demographic before migrating up north to the mining areas.



2015:226). Despite its name, the act did not explicitly emphasise immorality, but rather focused on the prevention of “illicit carnal intercourse between Europeans and natives and other acts in relation thereto” (Gaum, 2003:328). Neither did the Immorality Act of 1927 deal expressly with prostitution,<sup>50</sup> and prostitution-related offences were only addressed in the Immorality Act of 1957, which eventually changed to the Sexual Offences Act implemented in 1988 (Gaum, 2003:328). The restriction of (interracial) sexual relations was, of course, to be upheld by the apartheid government long after the British relinquished control of the country. The 1948 elections in South Africa heralded in a period of Nationalist Party politics which, coupled with draconian apartheid legislation, saw the rise of a religious brand of Calvinist morality that would severely influence the legislation affecting, as well as public perception of, sex work and sex workers (Gaum, 2003:329).

Jan-Ad Stemmet cites D.F.M. Strauss (1989), who contended that Afrikaners subscribed to a very specific branch of morality, one that saw them identify as the “‘uitverkore volk’ (chosen people); that it had a divine calling; a God-given task to fulfil in South Africa” (2005:200). The Afrikaner *volk* (people) strove for a unity that was measured by an extreme exclusivity focused on race, and this exclusivity infiltrated discourses of Afrikaner morals and politics (Stemmet, 2005:200).

This belief in a ‘higher calling’ was grounded in stringent moral convictions and a rejection of anything, and anyone that threatened the status quo. As Stemmet (2005:200-1) states:

Morally, the Afrikaner group was always on the lookout for the ‘volksvreemde’ and liberal rationales which could so easily lead to the dangers of decadence and sexual promiscuity which, of course, could disrupt the group’s moral purity

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<sup>50</sup> This act prohibited sex between White and non-White individuals. This period signifies the beginning of Afrikaner nationalism, and the establishment of ideologies that would eventually culminate in apartheid legislation (SAHO Afrikaner Nationalism 2015). Interestingly, “Despite the influx of women into urban spaces, sex workers were only prosecuted ... when loitering or being in any street or public place for the purpose of prostitution or solicitation *to the annoyance* of the inhabitants or passengers” (Thusi, author’s emphasis 2015:231) This point, to be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, emphasises on how important the specificity of space/place is in terms of subjectivity, as sex workers are only afforded visibility and recognition in certain previously agreed upon territories.

and therefore its superiority; split its single-mindedness, its culture and therefore its unity, its strength and by implication its very survival ... The fear of anything from outside or that did not fit into the official structure was instantly demonised.

The “official structure” alluded to by Stemmet was enforced by a strict policing of morals, from pedagogic control in schools, churches and legislation, to a general homogenous “laager mentality” that repudiated any form of resistance (Stemmet, 2005:200-1). Arguably the most influential form of pedagogic control was to be found in the rigid, partisan Nationalist control of the print media.

### 2.2.2 Censorship

In *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences*, Peter D. McDonald (2009:9) contends that South Africa's history with censorship can be traced back to 1824 when then British governor, Lord Charles Somerset, banned the Thomas Pringle and John Fairbairn article concerning the failure of the British immigration scheme in the East Cape.<sup>51</sup> Somerset's banning of the article should come as no surprise for in 1824 and – for what would become a pattern in the media landscape of apartheid South Africa – government control and censorship were draconian in terms of protecting the nation state, ‘*die volk*’ and Afrikaners (McDonald, 2009:10).

The success of the apartheid government, and the exacting regulations that accompanied this, were dependent on the ‘group’ (Afrikaner Volk's) functioning as a dynamic whole. Afrikaners experienced censorship with regards to “freedom of thought, speech and expression”, and the group did not accept any deviations from these measures, nor did they humour “internal troublemakers” (Stemmet, 2005:201). Considering the Afrikaners’ belief in their divinely ordained position as “the chosen

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<sup>51</sup> Pringle and Fairbairn launched the *South African Journal*, hoping that it would be the first South African literary journal. Their utopian ambition was to nurture a more autonomous media culture that would be devoid of, or at least challenge, the divisions of the past, enforced by Dutch East India Company rule and British imperialism. After publishing numerous articles on the “value of literary and scientific societies” in one of the first editions of the journal, they, in collaboration with “other prominent gentleman” of the Cape, established the “South African Literary Society in July 1824” (McDonald 2006:10).

people”, the issue of sexual morality was not taken lightly (Strauss in Stemmet, 2005:200). It was thoroughly verbalised and lived, manifesting in legislative control and entrenched in pedagogic institutions (Stemmet, 2005:202). Furthermore, with the *Immorality Act of 1957*, and the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949*, it was also determined who an individual could marry or sleep with (Shaun, 1989:32). What was ‘allowed’ as sexually arousing was determined by the politically dominant group and it had to conform to a strict Calvinist moral ideology.

Being immoral or conducting immoral activities was taboo, and complete ostracism was guaranteed for anyone who did not conform to nationalist standards (Stemmet, 2005:203). Afrikaner nationalism, blessed with a perceived moral exclusivity and sense of superiority sanctioned by Afrikaner Calvinist belief, produced “the legislative marrow of Apartheid” whereby the body politic became the barometer for accepted behaviour (Stemmet, 2005:202). The ideologies of the government were spread and enforced through aggressive propaganda, and the media became the main tool for the dispersion of rhetoric. Strict censorship controlled the media landscape of apartheid South Africa. However, the interdependence of government legislation and the lack of freedom of choice was a factor prior to the rise of the Afrikaner nationalists (McDonald, 2006:21). The Union of South Africa, founded in 1910, was “a racially segregated dominion of the British empire” which adopted the Entertainments (Censorship) Act of 1931. Initially the censorship board focused primarily on the new medium of film, theatrical performances and pictorial representations, but power was extended in 1934, when control was exercised over imported books and periodicals (McDonald, 2006:21).

According to McDonald (2006:21), in the 1940s and 1950s further amendments were made that listed nineteen contraventions addressing “sedition and public decency”, which included topics related to:

‘[W]hite slave traffic to passionate love scenes’, from ‘drunkenness and brawling’ to the ‘rough handling of women and children’ ... others covered ‘reference to controversial or international politics’, ‘the religious convictions or feelings of any section of the public’ and ‘the intermingling of Europeans and non-Europeans’.

The blueprint for what would become the “apartheid censorship system” was initiated in 1954 under D.F. Malan and the newly-elected National Party government, when the Commission of Inquiry launched an investigation into what was termed “Undesirable Publications” (McDonald, 2006:22). The inquiry, instigated by a moral panic related to an article on prostitution that was published in two Afrikaans magazines<sup>52</sup>, appeased the church groups that had been vocal about concerns relating to pornography and other undesirable topics. Malan, a former “Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) cleric” was very sympathetic to the public concern and imminent threat to ‘volk’ morality (McDonald, 2006:22). National Party leaders were acutely aware of the value the Afrikaner electorate placed on the NGK and other Calvinist-based religious groups, and knew that censorship control was a political tool that could be exploited. Furthermore, it allowed the government to expand its power and “seize state control of the public sphere” (McDonald 2006:22).

Aiding Malan in expanding the government’s political ambitions was Geoffrey Cronje's appointment to the chair of the Publications Commission. He led a press inquiry, referred to as the Cronje Commission, which gathered information from around “400 groups and individuals”,<sup>53</sup> and published its findings in 1957. The Commission advocated for oppressive regulations such as “pre-publication censorship” and the implementation of a “national enforcement agency” that regulated both local and imported books (McDonald, 2006:23). Furthermore, the Publications Control Board exercised control over the formal licensing of all printers, publishing houses and sellers, thereby strengthening the government’s iron grip on the public sphere (McDonald, 2006:23).

The laws that regulated ‘volk’ morality and protected the “morally pure” (Stemmet, 2005:202) from corruptible material unavoidably gravitated towards the realm of sexuality. Prostitutes, having already been classified and judged as morally corrupt and as a threat to the purity and chastity of the volk, were not to be spared the penetrating eye of the Cronje Commission. Figure 3: *Review board (1963)*, is a copy of the review board’s recommendations regarding the book by J.G. Mancini,

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<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately in McDonald (2009:22) there is not a direct reference to the two articles mentioned.

<sup>53</sup> These 400 individuals included publishers, writers and journalists (McDonald 2006:23).

*Prostitutes and Their Parasites* (1963), and exemplifies the control exercised through the Publications Board.

61-5.000  
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74/63

RAAD VAN BEHEER OOR PUBLIKASIES, D.L. 100.  
PUBLICATIONS BOARD.  
ROOM 101, FEDERAL BUILDINGS,  
TULLAGH CENTRE,  
CAPE TOWN.

22.11.1963

Kindly furnish below your report and views on the undermentioned publication which has been submitted for censorship:-

**PROSTITUTES AND THEIR PARASITES - J. G. MARCINI**

J.S.A.A. Secretary.

REPORT OF READER:

(a) Synopsis of publication dealt with:-

*Wetenskaplike studie van prostitusie en probleme wat daarmee saamhang. Onstelligend, maar nie prikkelend nie. Trek ook te velde teen mededepligtigheid en laksheid van amptelike instansies.*

(b) References to pages on which appear passages considered to be indecent, obscene, or objectionable:-

(i) Crime \_\_\_\_\_ Violence \_\_\_\_\_  
Description of murder \_\_\_\_\_ Sadism \_\_\_\_\_  
Ill-treatment to women \_\_\_\_\_

(ii) Intimate description of women's bodies \_\_\_\_\_  
Passionate love-making \_\_\_\_\_  
Sexual relations \_\_\_\_\_  
Loose morals \_\_\_\_\_

(iii) Traffic in drugs \_\_\_\_\_ White slave traffic \_\_\_\_\_  
The drug habit \_\_\_\_\_ Other vices \_\_\_\_\_

(iv) Offensive intermingling between Europeans and Non-Europeans \_\_\_\_\_  
Blasphemy \_\_\_\_\_ Objectionable language \_\_\_\_\_  
Other objectionable features (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

(v) Subversive propaganda \_\_\_\_\_

(c) Cover \_\_\_\_\_

(d) General remarks and opinion:

*Meeste studies wat ernstig moet gelees word.*

Date: 2/12/63

*[Signature]*  
Signature of Reader.

Figure 3: *Prostitutes and their parasites* (1963). Board of Publications South Africa.

The following remarks appear in the section titled 'Synopsis':

*Wetenskaplike studie aangaande prostitusie en probleme wat daarmee saamhang. Onstelligend, maar nie prikkelend nie. Trek ook te velde teen mededepligtigheid en laksheid van amptelike instansies.*

[Scientific study of prostitution and related issues. Disturbing, but not stimulating. Very critical of the complicity and leniency of official institutions.]

The topic of prostitution was obviously taboo and not to be discussed, nor would any suggestion of the government's failure to address the 'problem' be tolerated. The

central idea behind the strict censorship laws was arguably to mask the “degeneration of the European” and to continually cement the ideology of Whites as “the lighthouse or beacon of culture” (McDonald, 2009:24). The stereotypical Victorian rhetoric of the “undesirable book” as a “spiritual poison” (McDonald, 2009:25) was deeply ingrained in the “official structure” (Stemmet, 2005:200-1) and National Party politicians “subjected literature and writing”, without any concession made for art, to the same stringent laws that governed “all indecent behaviour in public” (McDonald, 2009:27). Under these regulations, writing and the consumption of literature became a “public act like any other” (McDonald, 2009:27).

The media landscape became biased and sanitised, united in the common goal of promoting and preserving Afrikaner nationalism. With strict censorship laws and a government intent on preserving and advocating the ‘morally pure’, sex workers were largely obliterated from the public view.

### **2.2.2.1 Current legislation**

Sex workers in South Africa are precariously vulnerable as they are exposed to many hardships such as the threat of violence and sexually transmitted diseases, while also living and practising their trade outside of a legal framework that offers any support or protection. This leaves sex workers subjected to precarity of both a physical, psychological and political nature.<sup>54</sup> With prostitution having migrated from slave lodges during the Dutch occupation, to the status of sex work in South Africa through the years, one might be forgiven for assuming that under democracy, and with ostensible protection under the Bill of Rights (Department of Justice 2018:5), the living and working conditions for sex workers would have improved.<sup>55</sup> Although open

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54 Precarity, as theorised by Judith Butler in *Frames of War* (2009), states that conditions that render life insecure, and situations that affect one's material and psychological health leaves one vulnerable and defenceless. (2009:3-7)

55 Section Nine of the Constitution of South Africa addresses the equality right, stated as the first right in the Bill of Rights. Under the heading ‘Equality’, the section states:

“ (1) Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.  
 (2) Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.

discussions are underway to decriminalise the profession, largely spearheaded by NGOs such as SWEAT and RHRU,<sup>56</sup> legally, sex workers are still marginalised and prone to stigmatisation.

*The South African Law Reform Commission Discussion Paper 0001/2009 Project 107 Sexual offences – Adult Prostitution* (2009:9) defines prostitution as follows:

The term ‘prostitution’ comes from the Latin word prostitute which is derived from the words pro + stature which means ‘to cause to stand’, ‘to set in place’, which refers to the practice of standing in public to solicit clients. The word prostitute means to expose publicly or to offer for sale. It usually refers to the offer of sexual activity in return for payment but it can also mean the sacrifice of a person's self-respect for the sake of personal or financial gain. The conventional understanding of the term prostitution, however, usually encompasses ‘the exchange of sexual acts for money or goods’.

The Commission draws attention to the fact that prostitution in South Africa is hard to define because of our particularly unique socio-economic situation. This study makes reference to the fact that it has to acknowledge that it is a generally accepted fact that “sexual services are frequently rendered for rewards other than financial gain” such as accommodation, food and clothes (South African Law Reform Commission, 2009:9). The commission furthermore found that most people involved in the exchange of sexual favours for gifts from older men – or as it is more commonly known, the “sugar daddy phenomenon” – do not identify themselves as prostitutes, nor is this looked upon as an illicit activity<sup>57</sup> (South African Law Reform Commission, 2009:9).

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(3) The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.” (Department of Justice 2018:5).

<sup>56</sup> SWEAT is the acronym for the 'Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Task force'. It is a non-profit organisation that aims to empower South African sex workers (Gould 2008:3). RHRU is associated with University of the Witwatersrand of South Africa and stands for the Reproductive Health and Research Unit. refers to the Reproductive Health and Research Unit of the Witwatersrand University in South Africa.

<sup>57</sup> “Yet others might see the harm related to prostitution as largely deriving from the state or society's response to it, either through stigmatization and marginalization, or the double moral standards applied to women and men, or abusive police conduct, or lack of access to necessary services – such as health-

The issue of morality, and associated discursive ideologies, which forms part of this thesis's inquiry in terms of narration, is addressed both presently and historically. Attention is drawn to the fact that discussion of law and morality will inescapably give rise to "a jurisprudential debate" (South African Law Reform Commission, 2009:9). These debates centre on a pertinent question: is it appropriate to enforce legal and legislative control that is derived from a particular moral viewpoint? Or should one conform to the position expressed in a 1957 British report, the 'Report of the Wolfenden Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution', which states:

Unless a deliberate attempt is to be made by society, acting through the agency of the law, to equate the sphere of crime with that of sin, there must remain a realm of private morality and immorality, which is, in brief and crude terms, not the law's business (Wolfenden cited in the South African Law Reform Commission, 2009:9).

Those who argue for the criminalisation of sex work largely do so on the basis "that prostitution is immoral" (South African Law Reform Commission, 2009:9). The reality is that current legislation is arguably inherited from groups, for instance, those who represented the "Afrikaner laager mentality" (Stemmet 2005:200-1) or the "Victorian tropes of morality" (Thusi 2015:217), that conceptualised morality in diverse ways, and, as discussed, these moral viewpoints are usually linked to other ideologies, such as those related to religion, and social and gender expectations.

What becomes abundantly clear, at least in terms of this thesis, is the lack of consideration given to a participatory approach/analysis of sex workers, and how the policing of their bodies and censorship of their being were – and in some instances still are today – being propagated through state-sanctioned publications and laws. Furthermore, this ideological positioning of not only the discursive 'body of the sex worker', but also of the places s/he inhabits and frequents, become subjected to invisible borders that further hinders attempts at personal autonomy.<sup>58</sup> Reflecting upon

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care" (South African Law Reform Commission 2009:9). The double standard set in terms of the "sugar-daddy phenomenon" could be construed as similar to the 'Victorian double standard'.

<sup>58</sup> Joel Migdal (2004:6) posits that boundaries consist of two elements: checkpoints and mental maps. "Boundaries are constructed through the practical monitoring devices that groups use ... checkpoints refer to the sites and practices that groups use to differentiate members from others and to enforce

the censorship laws and legislation discussed, it could be argued that the subjectivity of sex workers is contested at every point in the public sphere, and opportunities to narrate their experiences are rendered mute. In *Torture and the Ethics of Photography*, Judith Butler posits that how we respond to the suffering of others, how we negotiate moral criticisms and how this informs our political analysis, is all depended on an existing field of reality (2007:951). The field of reality associated with sex workers, discursively constructed through legislation and censorship, was clearly lacking any form of phenomenological narrative,<sup>59</sup> or agency, from the perspective of sex workers, and this trend arguably continues today. Sex workers are/were positioned – spatially and by law – in very clearly demarcated allocations of abjection.

South Africa's current legislation enforces the total prohibition and criminalisation of prostitution. This is set out in the *Sexual Offences Act 23 of 1957* and the *Sexual Offences Amendment Act of 2007*. Section 20(1)(aA) states that "any person who has unlawful carnal intercourse, or commits an act of indecency, with any other person for reward commits an offence" (South African Law Reform Commission, 2009:14). As with legislation during colonialism and the earlier Dutch occupation, very little regard is given to the experience of sex workers, and the pattern of treating prostitution as "a social ill" (Gaum 2003:319) is still being repeated.

### **2.3 The Geographical and Social Landscape of Woodstock, Cape Town**

The suburb of Woodstock in Cape Town has, from the beginning<sup>60</sup>, facilitated an environment where communities from various cultural backgrounds – be it in terms of

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separation" (Migdal 2004:7). The invisible borders propagated through censorship and the sanitisation of the apartheid media landscape could be equated to what Migdal refers to as "mental maps" (2004:7). "Mental maps incorporate elements of meaning people attach to spatial configurations, the loyalties they hold. The emotions and passions that groupings evoke, and their cognitive ideas about how the world is constructed" (Migdal 2007:7).

<sup>59</sup> Ochs and Capps in *Narrating the Self* (1996:19) contend that narrative and ideas surrounding the 'self' or human subject) are intrinsically linked and that "narrative is both born out of experience, and gives shape to experience". Furthermore; "Narrative also interfaces self and society, constituting a crucial resource for socializing emotions, attitudes and identities, developing interpersonal relationships and constituting membership in a community" (1996:19).

<sup>60</sup> Woodstock, originally the Village of Papendorp in 1881 was incorporated into the villages of Salt River under the new name of Woodstock. Legend has it that a group of fishermen outvoted the rest of the

race or religion – have managed to live amicably side by side. In contrast to the neighbouring District Six, which was also a multiracial suburb, Woodstock was spared the forced removals under the apartheid government (Joseph 2014:1). These removals served to advance the apartheid government's racial ideologies and economic growth.

Henri Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space* (1984), contends that one of the key aspects of capitalism that is commonly overlooked, but is of the utmost importance, is hegemony. Hegemony refers to more than “coercion”; it is influence exerted in society through culture and knowledge, “generally via human mediation: policies, political leaders, parties, as also over a good many intellectuals and experts” (Lefebvre, 1984:10). Hegemony is thus exercised through ideas and mediated through institutions. According to Lefebvre (1984:10), “[t]he ruling class seeks to maintain its hegemony by all available means, and knowledge is one such means” as for instance censorship as alluded to previously

Legislation and censorship promote hegemonic ideas on morality and sexuality, but it is important to note that physical space can also become encoded with meaning. However, space – social space to be exact – in terms of this study is a nebulous site of “great diversity and knowledge” (Lefebvre, 1984:73) and hegemony, in its essence, along with subjectivity, become contested in social space. These ideas resurface in the coming sections where I look at the historical legacy and physical make-up of Woodstock.

### **2.3.1 The Physical Site of Woodstock – Geography, Gentrification, Mapping**

In *Making a Place for the Rich? Urban Poor Evictions and Gentrification in Woodstock, South Africa* Andrew Flemming contends that “[r]eshaping South Africa's historically divided and splintered urban areas into inclusive and integrated landscapes remains one of the country's largest and most imperative contemporary development challenges” (2011:2). South Africa is currently facing increasingly challenging dilemmas following the increase in migration, and even more so, spatial integration

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meeting and wanted to rename the neighborhoods in honors of their favorite watering hole (SAHO 2018)

(Flemming, 2011:3).<sup>61</sup> *The Housing Act of 1997* indicated a need for more interspersed “urban planning” as a means for advancing “sustainable and integrated development” (Flemming 2011:3). However, as is often the case with planning on governmental levels, the finer nuances and challenges that are unique to each urban settlement can be overlooked (Parnell & Pieterse in Flemming, 2011:3).

Cape Town, with its reputation as the “liberal heartland”, exemplifies a unique spatiality where inhabitants of various ethnicities, religions, sexual orientation and economic standing live together in various urban environments, resulting in an eclectic mix of diverse communities (Flemming, 2011:4). However, the historic influence of the British and Dutch presence is still manifest in “problematic spatial legacies”,<sup>62</sup> as is made evident in discrepancies regarding house prices and funding for urban planning and infrastructure (Flemming 2011:4). There is evidently an obstacle in achieving Cape Town's ambitions for racial and social integration, and addressing the reality of spatially disparate communities. The suburb of Woodstock lies at the heart of this tension: a mere 3 kilometres from the city bowl, and adjacent to the city's harbour, Woodstock was originally referred to as Papendorp, and it was home to a diverse populace that, not dissimilar to its neighbour, District Six, included “[a] Jewish congregation, artisans, tradesman, domestic servants and labourers to prostitutes” (Jeppie & Soudien, 1990:32). It developed as a strong cosmopolitan and unique working-class neighbourhood that boasted bustling port-side activity, and proximity to the city and “low-cost, tenure-flexible housing” (Jeppie & Soudien, 1990:32). As Coralie Bickford-Smith (1995:74) contends:

A number of factors which determined the limits of social segregation in Cape Town, helped to define the parameters of this place's ‘uniqueness’. The most important of these were probably cost, the ‘notorious permeability of the

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<sup>61</sup> Spatial integration can be seen as a process whereby urban borders are eliminated through the creation of common market and trade areas.

<sup>62</sup> Joel Migdal (2004:8) posits that “All people from multiple social groupings, including the state, in their daily lives that offer differing divisions of space, that is, differing mental maps of how their world is constructed and laid out and different monitoring devices marking the boundaries of that world”. The physical site/place of Cape Town is steeped in a problematic history; the ghosts of colonialism and apartheid still haunt the memory of people creating mental maps and borders that remain problematic to unite.

colour line', incomplete correlation of ethnicity and divisions of labour, the nature of economic activity in the city, coloured political mobilisation and the fact that not all whites adhered to the ideology of social separation. All these factors were intimately interrelated.

In an interview with Gavin<sup>63</sup>, Figure 4: *Woodstock history* (2018) the uniqueness of Woodstock for this study is elaborated on as he sheds light on sex worker activities in the area;



Figure 4: *Woodstock history* (2018). Screen shot by author.

*'Ja' well Woodstock, people, as much as it is like an old style of community, people don't really mind and they mind their own business, as much as they are into each faces as well. If you just go straight down this road here, this is where the old market used to be, and there you have people living in the old market which used to be stables, and so everybody knows what the neighbours are doing, but they also don't care. And I also think being close to the harbour here, sex workers have always been a big thing around here, especially with the high unemployment rates around here, we just hop over to the docks. Even*

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<sup>63</sup> Gavin is one of the participants in the study. During the filming of the interviews he was 45 years old, identifies as cissexual.

*meter taxis as well, before we got the little, those Zola Budds<sup>64</sup> mini bus taxis, it was from around here, people would be driving, in those days it was predominantly girls, that were working on the ships that were coming in here. The ships were from the Japanese and the Chinese, so you will find a lot of kids running around here where you can obviously see that the father is a fisherman.*  
(Personal Interview with Gavin. 2016. 22:04 – 23:20)

Securing economic stability in Woodstock was challenging at times, but there were opportunities for informal employment because of its adjacent location to the city centre, this afforded a flexible and economically viable urban space, especially for women (Crais & Scully in Flemming, 2005:11). This seeming tolerance of miscegenation in Woodstock should not deflect attention from the fact that it was a working-class neighbourhood and with the clearly demarcated social borders, stemming largely from the Victorian discourses on morality and social acceptability, it was also ‘plagued’ by what the government termed ‘unsavoury activities’. As discussed in the previous chapter, prostitution was clearly relegated to a specific social space that was far removed from the ‘pure’ and ‘chaste’ and, although not widely accepted, it was more commonly (albeit not exclusively) found in the working-class areas. Immorality apart, nothing was more frowned upon than the miscegenation of White, Coloured and Black citizens in a common suburb, as this vehemently defied the National Party’s apartheid legislation and threatened the morality of the ‘volk’.

District Six, perhaps Cape Town's most famous mixed-race area, was demolished by 1970 in terms of the *Group Areas Act, Number 44* of 1950 and *Number 77* of 1957. Racially diverse groups of people were segregated and ordered into “proper racial groups” (Sauls 2004:28). Whilst institutionalised racial segregation became interlinked with South Africa's urban planning and landscape, Woodstock, in opposition to District Six, fell outside the parameters of the government’s *Group Areas Act*, and developed into one of the few ‘grey areas’ in the country. These areas managed to avoid the government’s urban planning system, and were able to continue its “multi-racial and culturally diverse” cohabitation (Flemming, 2011:5; Garside, 1993:27). In the 1960s

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<sup>64</sup> The Zola Budds that Gavin is referring to is a colloquial term for the mini bus taxis that mainly transport communities that live on the periphery of the city into the CBD for work.

and 1970s the suburbs adjacent to Woodstock, such as Mowbray and District Six, saw the mass evacuation of non-whites. Woodstock, with its relatively low-income population, became the epitome of the idea that Cape Town “had one of the more liberal populations” of South Africa (Flemming, 2011:5; Garside, 1993:28). From the 1980s onwards Woodstock has been subject to wide-scale neighbourhood gentrification that once again radically restructured the dynamics of inclusion and neighbourhood cooperation (Garside, 1993:28). Gentrification has thus left the government's “developmental policy objectives of spatial integration impotent” (Mammon in Fleming, 2011:4) as Woodstock's low-income residents are pushed to outskirts. Low-income evictions are currently taking place behind the facades of chic restaurants, trendy boutique stores and expensive apartments. The visual and structural changes in Woodstock's public spaces are excluding the low-income residents from their very own neighbourhood, and exemplifying the stereotypical concepts of “a commercially-desired neighbourhood” (Flemming, 2011:5). Low-income rental evictions are currently perpetuating “South Africa's colonial legacies of spatial inequalities” (Fleming 2011:5), and are effectively rendering residents spatially marginalised.

### **2.3.2 Politics and Socio-Economics**

The historical socio-political landscapes of Cape Town and Woodstock in particular cannot be discussed without specific mention of the influence of the Anglo-Boer War and the discovery of mineral wealth in the Transvaal. With regards to this study, these events had a tremendous impact not only on the economic viability of sex work, but also on legislation and public attitudes towards the trade.

As previously referred to, the Afrikaner settlement in the Cape Colony had rebelled against the British government and the troubled legacy of the Dutch occupation. The Great Trek of the 1830s was the consequence and settlers even started to prospect for land beyond the Vaal River. As a result of the consolidation of the Afrikaner republics, British attempts at regaining sovereignty were met with resolute resistance. However, with the discovery of diamonds on the De Beers farm, British imperialism was mobilised to regain control of the region and fill its coffers. This effort was further fuelled with the discovery of gold on a farm called Langlaagte, on the present-day Witwatersrand, situated deep in the interior. British companies and investors spent

fortunes in securing mining rights, and the influx of British and other miners was so intense that within three years the largest city in the country had been established – Johannesburg (van Onselen 2001:67). This of course meant an enormous influx of labourers and, as Henry Trotter (2008:679), points out:

[t]he Mineral Revolution ignited a global migration to the Transvaal gold fields. Diggers, pimps and prostitutes passed through the coastal ports, some never going any further. To cater to this boom, European Jewish pimps trafficked thousands of ‘Continental women’ (poor European Jews) to southern Africa.

The Boer government, already deeply entrenched in its Calvinist ideologies, tightened regulation surrounding prostitution and “many retreated to the coast” (Trotter 2008:679). During this period from about 1898 Johannesburg was producing a quarter of the world's gold, and was far too strategic an area not to have control over (van Onselen 2001:89), which ultimately led to the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899.<sup>65</sup> Cape Town, having one of the most evolved ports in the country at the time became a hub of social upheaval. Estimates are that by March 1900 South Africa had received 200 000 British troops, and that within the next two years approximately 450 000 troops had landed (Cape Town Heritage, 2015). Cape Town was also bursting at the seams with refugees, and an estimated 25 000 people fled from Johannesburg to the south (Cape Town Heritage, 2015). This resulted in an increase in demand for sex workers and, as Trotter (2008:679) states, as early as 1896 there was a steady influx of “continental women”, which assisted in the “professionalisation” of the trade, leaving many of the local sex workers isolated. This influx led in turn to an explosion of brothels in the Cape. At the height of the Anglo-Boer War Cape Town's port became crowded with “upcountry refugees, pimps and prostitutes along with thousands of transiting soldiers” (Trotter 2008:679). If vice was your field of expertise, times could not have been more profitable. A pattern thus started to emerge: once again, to the benefit of a select few and the country, prostitution was seen, accepted and engaged in as a “necessary act” (Thusi, 2015:209) As discussed in the previous chapter, similarly to

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<sup>65</sup> The South African mining society was male-dominated that expanded rapidly in the Witwatersrand during the 1880s and 1890s. This contributed to a fully-fledged prostitute community. Van Onselen's view was that “prostitution in Johannesburg was a structural consequence of South Africa's most explosive capitalist development” (cited in Trotter 2008:681).

when prostitution was seen as necessary in the colony under the Dutch East India Company to avoid “homosexual tendencies” (Thusi, 2015:209), the Anglo-Boer War was no different. Women were burdened with the old “Victorian double standard” (Trotter, 2008:679) and prostitution was rampant and profitable, and men engaged in social activities that can be understood as “back region activity” (Goffman in Barker, 2000:2918).<sup>66</sup>

### 2.3.3 Post-war Dockside Activities

The conclusion of the War on 31 May 1902 meant that White prostitutes began leaving the Cape, and prostitution started to disappear from the visible social scene, returning to the more invisible and obscure position it had before (Trotter 2008:680). Control of the profession returned to the local women, and information about sex work during this period is vague to say the least. Trotter posits that it could be this lack of international involvement in the sex trade that has led to so few scholars writing about it, or indeed undertaking any research on prostitution during the first half of the twentieth century (2008:680). The accounts which do exist stem from “temperance movements”, dominated almost exclusively by White women during World War One, with the exception of Anna Tempo,<sup>67</sup> but as was the case with the WCTU, this stemmed from

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<sup>66</sup> Giddens (1987) comments on Goffman’s (1969) concept of ‘front’ and ‘back’ regions to posit a fundamental departure in social spatial activity. “Front space is constituted by those places in which we put a public ‘on-stage’ performance acting out stylised, formal and socially acceptable activities. Back regions are those spaces where we are ‘behind the scenes’, preparing for public performance or where we can relax into less formal modes of behaviour and speech” (Barker 2000:291).

<sup>67</sup> Anna Tempo (23 Sept 1867 - 30 May 1946) was born to Mozambican slaves in Worcester. She worked for Henrietta Schreiner, a well-known temperance worker. Anna was influenced by Henrietta’s social work, and started visiting hospitals and prisons with her. Anna was particularly interested in helping ‘girls who had gone astray’ (read pregnant and/or soliciting for sex). She acquired a small Napier Street house close to the docks (now De Waterkant) and encouraged girls to take refuge there and reconsider their lifestyle. She was also known to try and influence the men who “went off with the ladies of the night” (Verwey 1995:65). There was, however, public pressure for her to vacate her house in 1922 due to the type of work she was doing, and the ‘class’ of people it attracted, and in 1924, with assistance from the Dutch Reformed Church, she located to a house in Castle Street. With further assistance from the church she opened “Nannie House” in 1928 and fulfilled a lifelong dream to redeem the girls and women who had gone astray. She received the King George Coronation Medal in 1937 for “her years of work among the prostitutes of Cape Town” (Verwey 1995:68).

a desire to 'save' sex workers from their 'dreadful' circumstances and immoral life choices. The 1950s, with its draconian *Immorality Act* and strict censorship regarding printing and distribution of offensive materials, presents historians with the near impossible task of accounting for apartheid-era prostitution. Prostitution was rife, however, especially in the District Six and Woodstock areas, as the anthropologist Sheila Patterson describes how "visiting ships' crews were said to frequent night clubs and dives in the more unsavoury streets of the Coloured 'District Six' in the centre of Cape Town" (Patterson in Trotter, 2008:680).

Patterson (in Trotter, 2008:680) notes that authorities even went as far as posting notices for visiting sailors warning that the:

[p]remises, particularly in the Coloured and Indian quarters of this city, to which contact men, pimps or taxi-drivers, hansom-cabs and rickshaws may take you for liquor or women are to be avoided; you are liable to be drugged, assaulted and robbed in these places. SEXUAL INTERCOURSE between white and non-whites is a serious criminal offence in South Africa. MARRIAGE between whites and non-whites is prohibited by law.

This kind of propaganda arguably fuelled the relationship between sailors and prostitutes rather than deterring them. As Bickford-Smith and van Heyningen contend, nightclubs in close proximity to the docks became the meeting grounds for 'Johns' and 'ladies of the night' (Bickford-Smith, van Heyningen & Worden 1995:140). The 1960s saw prostitutes and clients meet in "rough and tumble-down nightclubs", and even though they were, at times, potentially violent places with drugs and sex freely available, they offered a space where "Cape Town ignored apartheid legislation" (Trotter 2008:680).

Although shrouded in uncertainty about what precisely is being depicted, Figures 5 and 6 show Billy Monk's iconic images of the Catacomb nightclub in Cape Town.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> "Billy Monk worked as a bouncer in the notorious Catacombs club in the dock area of Cape Town during the 1960s. He originally began taking pictures in the club with the intention of selling the photographs to the customers - the people he was photographing. His aim was not to make a social statement, but his money-making scheme quickly turned into something else as he increasingly



Figure 5: *The Catacombs 1* (1969). Photograph by Billy Monk, Stevenson.



Figure 6: *The Catacombs 2* (1969). Photograph by Billy Monk, Stevenson.

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captured the raw energy of the club, its decadence and tragedy, its humanity and joy" (Goldblatt, de Villiers & Sampson 2011:iv)

Trotter asserts that although clubs like the Catacombs were frequently raided by police, they were not closed down (Trotter 2008:681). They were, for the most part, left “to their own devices” and interaction between races was allowed there to an extent that was the “antithesis of apartheid’s law and order racial segregation” (Trotter 2008:681). It would seem, then, that although the *Immorality Act* had the majority of South Africa tightly in its grip, the illicit activities at the docks were flying in the face of the National Party government’s legislation. The sex trade in both District Six and Woodstock was flourishing, with the brothels, aptly named ‘suikerhuisies’,<sup>69</sup> plying their trade as “taxi drivers ferried prostitutes or their clients to and from their ships” (Trotter 2008:680).<sup>70</sup> Prostitution in the “dockside communities” of District Six, District One and neighbouring Woodstock, were a familiar occurrence of everyday life (Trotter 2008:680). This seemingly heterotopic space of social ‘intermingling’ came to an abrupt end with the forced removals of Coloured communities in the 1970s.

## 2.4 Conclusion

From this historical overview it becomes clear that sex work has contributed greatly to the social and economic landscape of developing South Africa, yet there is very limited information on personal experiences, and almost no narrative accounts. However, sex workers are very clearly positioned by society in terms of what Louis Althusser refers to as “ideological state apparatuses” (Weedon 2004:6). It is problematic that narration and personal experience become lost when identities are assigned through social, cultural and institutionalised practices, as this not only leads to precarious circumstances for individuals, but also detracts from compiling a rich and textured history, as well as from reflecting on a future understanding of society.

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<sup>69</sup> ‘Suikerhuisies’ refers to the brothels that were located in the Coloured areas in Cape Town, sea farers and sailors used to frequent them.

<sup>70</sup> The ‘working’ relationship between taxi drivers and prostitutes was not unfamiliar; van Heyningen (1984:181) draws attention to the fact that already in 1894, it was noted that “cab drivers played a prominent role, in that a considerable portion of the cabs in Cape Town were owned by brothel keepers. During the Anglo-Boer war they would issue the clients with metal tokens, giving them the address of the brothels”.

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## CHAPTER THREE: THE TROUBLE WITH NARRATION, MEMORY AND LACK OF AGENCY FOR A 'PROBLEMATISED' BODY

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*We come to know ourselves as we use narrative to apprehend experiences and navigate relationships with others (Ochs & Capps 1996:20).*

### 3.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter the focus was on the existing historic and literary accounts of sex workers in South Africa, especially as it relates to the area of Woodstock. This is in essence a historical perspective, because, as emphasised before, there is a considerable lack of personal narratives or autobiographies on the subject of sex work. As such, the public domain of knowledge around the history of sex work is arguably written from positions of power and stigmatization, rendering this history as stigmatized and stereotyped. This chapter will offer a rationale and motivation for the methodology of "walking with video" (Pink 2007), as the value of personal story telling is essential in highlighting the overall aim of the study.<sup>71</sup>

The question of agency<sup>72</sup> is highlighted throughout the study, and therefore it is imperative that this term is clearly defined, as it can become ambiguous. When the research methodology of 'walking with video and participants' as postulated by (Pink 2007) is positioned as a political act, the use of agency is also linked to legal and sociological terms. In *Narrative and Identity* (2001), Brokmeier and Carbough refer to the conference organised by the International Research Center for Cultural Studies (IFK) in Vienna in December of 1995 (2001:1). At the conference representatives from

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<sup>71</sup> I would like to make the following distinctions between 'space' and 'place' to emphasise the importance of physicality while narrating; Anthony Giddens (1991) positions space and place within the parameters of absence and presence. Place is defined by face-to-face encounters whereas space is defined by the relations between absent entities. Space thus relates to an abstract idea, a space devoid of interaction very much like the spaces one would imagine sex workers occupy.

<sup>72</sup> With respect to this study, agency is postulated as Giddens (1991) cited in Barker (2008:231) states; "Giddens argues that the multiple narratives of the self are not the outcome of the shifting meanings of language *alone*. They are also the consequence of the proliferation and diversification of social relationships, contexts and sites of interaction".

a wide array of disciplines, including philosophy, social sciences, communication, film theory and psychology, attended to discuss the “importance of narrative as an expressive embodiment of our experience” (2001:1) and how, as a form of communication, it influences personal understandings about the world we live in and, ultimately, ourselves (2001:1). Brokmeier draws attention to the fact that we need to question how we are constructed, and also what type of construction creates what kind of self (2001:1). What the conference ultimately investigates, and draws attention to, is that our construction of our own self draws on a specific use of language: narration (2001:1).

Throughout the course of this study and in subsequent interviews, the value of narration raised by Brokmeier (2001) is echoed in my interviews with participants, as is illustrated in this interview with Gavin Figure 7: *The rubicon* (2018).



Figure 7: *The rubicon* (2018). Screen shot by author.

*Gavin: I think as time goes on people's mind sets will change and as kids grow up in the new South Africa people's attitudes towards sex change as well, cause coming from the old days people never used to talk about sex openly. 'Oh, where did you come from? No, the monkeys brought you from the mountain'. And now it's changed completely, so I think in time things will change.*

*Me: What is the value of talking to me about your experience? Must these memories be preserved?*

*\*Gavin: Uhm, I find it's one way of.... well you understand me better now, and I think that you will also understand other sex workers, cause it's like you said, there were things that you never knew that we opened your eyes to. So as long as I made a change in one person's life and way of thinking then I think my job is done here. I think we kind of have to archive things so that in years to come...let's say ... no we will get decrim,<sup>73</sup> and then we can go back into the archives and see how it all came about, so that we have a story to tell, and our stories are preserved. But I think because of criminalisation no one was going to come forward. That's how times have changed, that is where we are at, where we are now. We are basically at the Rubicon.*

(Personal interview with Gavin. 2016. 40:08-41:17).

It becomes clear that Gavin refers to a very specific form of narration and agency, one that makes it necessary to draw on Foucault and his concept of the subject, and Butler's subsequent critique of him. As Chris Barker (2008:225) states, it is indeed Foucault opinion that "[t]he subject is radically historicized; that is, the subject is held to be wholly and only the product of history". Barker emphasises that for Foucault, it is discourse that not only enables "speaking persons to come into existence", but furthermore classifies us into specific "subject positions" (Barker 2008:225). As was illustrated in Chapter Two, the discourse on sex workers in South Africa is biased and entrenched in politically loaded ideologies and as such the subject position that sex workers occupy in terms of public and legal discourse is one of precarity. As discourses surrounding sex work has only recently started to change in South Africa as a result of the higher visibility of sex workers and the drive for decriminalisation, it is still important to remember that, as Barker (2008:224) points out, "[t]he concept of identity refers to a regulated way of 'speaking' about persons", and for this reason autobiographical narration is important to this thesis.

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<sup>73</sup> 'Decrim' is a colloquial term used by sex workers and activists who are fighting to have sex work in South Africa decriminalised.

However, during the course of this study it became clear that “words generate meaning not by referencing some special or essential characteristic of an object or quality. Rather, meaning is produced through the network of relationships of a language-game in use” (Barker 2008:225). Butler states in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) that it is indeed the responsibility, or the response, that is instigated when hailed by another that evokes reflexivity. When asked by another to “give an account of oneself” (Butler 2005:5) the response comes through a responsibility that is rooted in acts of disclosure. It is indeed through being addressed by an Other that one gives a narrative account of oneself and becomes a reflexive being before the Other (Ong-Van-Cung 2011:2). When asked by another to account for oneself there are very often power relations involved in, as Foucault states:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault cited in Rabinow 1991:22).

Thus, to give an account of oneself does not automatically afford you the right to be heard, nor is your account guaranteed to be accepted. Barker (2008:232) states that according to Foucault (1987) “subjects are understood as discursive constructions and the products of power”. It thus stands to argue that discourse can determine who can count as a subject and under what conditions, as Barker states: “knowledge is a form of power implicated in the production of subjectivity” (2008:232).

In view of this, it is the aim of this study to address, through self-narration and ‘walking with video’ (Pink 2007), the polemics of biography, narration and narrative as they arise in the context of sex work. While I do not propose that self-narration or ‘walking with video’ provide clear-cut answers to the issue of agency that pervades most

representational media, I do believe that this issue can perhaps be critically rethought.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.2 Narrative and Memory

Why is it that having one's story told, one's tale preserved, evokes such emotions of nostalgia, deep thought and reflection? The value to oneself of being able to give “an account of oneself” (Butler 2005:5) can be regarded as a given and common right by arguably most sections of society. Yet far too often there are those sub-cultures in society whose stories are overlooked or disregarded, and arguably in the worst-case scenario, as discussed in Chapter Two, stories are made up *for* and *about* them. One could contend that this strips them – sex workers specifically in this thesis – of discursive agency in their own life narrative. Considering this, the concept of ‘narrative agency’ as postulated by Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996) is of key importance as they write from a combination of anthropological and psychological perspectives of how memories are created and about the power of personal narrative. This is, of course, not implying that the participants of the study, or sex workers in general, do not possess the opportunity of personal narrative. One has to be aware that historically, as explained in Chapter One, sex workers have been silenced in the public domain and therefore public accounts of personal narratives have been absent or suppressed. Seeing that historically sex workers have occupied the space of the abjected and the Other, it is the aim of this study to bring to light some of these personal narratives.

Ochs and Capps (1996:19) contend that “[n]arrative and self are inseparable”, to the point where narrative is both created out of experience whilst simultaneously, giving shape to experience. The act of narration furthermore grants ‘tellers’ the opportunity to “impose a sense of order” on events that would otherwise be disconnected and inchoate, thereby making sense of and creating continuity “between past, present and imaginary worlds” (Ochs and Capps 1996:19). This seems to be an intricately vital

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<sup>74</sup> Chapter Four will focus on how the methodology of this study has attempted to allow for a more collaborative approach to research with an Other. There is a lot of emphasis on phenomenology, but Chapter Four incorporates theories of post-phenomenology (Idhe 2009) in a further attempt to incorporate technology as a departure from conventional documentary photography to allow for autobiographical narrative.

component for constituting a 'whole subject' or self. When considering the importance placed on personal narrative in this study, it could be argued that the possibility of having their personal narratives heard in the public domain still seems rather unachievable. This is largely due to the stigmatising discourses surrounding them as a community. However, their identities as sex workers are, as I will show in Chapter Four, performative identities<sup>75</sup> and this is highlighted through the interviews that I conducted.

Ochs and Capps, (1996:21), with reference to Heidegger, state that "the inseparability of narrative and self is grounded in the phenomenological assumption that entities are given meaning through being experienced and the notion that narrative is an essential resource in the struggle to bring experiences to conscious awareness". Although some experiences of sex workers in South Africa have been recorded by historians such as Van Heyningen (1984), referenced in Chapter Two, these experiences assume the position of a historical reference rather than autobiographical narrative. Following Heidegger's line of reasoning, the "meaning given to those entities" (cited in Ochs and Capps, 1996:21) is construed from their *being* experienced, rather than a reflection of their own experiences. Kathleen Kirby (1996:13) draws attention to the fact that bodies are recognised and discursively constructed on the surface and that "the surface of our bodies interact with the divisions between groups drawn up by ideology". These bodies created through ideology come to occupy a specific "space" where subjectivity can be located, and as Kirby posits, this becomes the "abstract but mappable space of discursive terrains" (1996:13). Claudine Herrmann states that it is when the exterior of our bodies engages with the discursive terrains of ideology that in some cases violence may occur (Herrmann 1981:163).<sup>76</sup>

This is exemplified in the interview Figure 8, *Die Baan* (2018) with Guilam, a transsexual sex worker. Guilam identifies as female, although biologically she would be classified as male.

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<sup>75</sup> According to Butler, the identities and genders that one performs are indeed re-articulations of acts that have been ongoing before we are interpolated as subjects. As such, we are spoken for, before we speak, and we are acted for, before we act (1999).

<sup>76</sup> In Chapter Four, this is elaborated on by referencing interviews with participants that directly speaks about instances of fear and violence.



Figure 8: *Die Baan* (2018). Screen shot by author.

*This space on this side and outside of this space, we call it ‘the baan’, it fits with my identity cause why, I need to portray, play a role. Act a certain way for clientele to be accepted, but that is the clientele that just come for a quickie, and maybe he doesn’t know that I am trans, that I need to play my role around it for him not to discover me. Because you never knew what could happen, there are a lot of spaces around where clients do their quickies, clients that come out of the bar ... that can lead up to get killed. But there in the corner is where I work my way up, to my clients that take me by right to certain spots where I can make him feel safe or he can make me feel safe. If it’s a regular, but if it’s a non-regular I still need to portray a person or act in a certain way for him to think that I am that woman that he is picking up, and I am going to deliver that service that he wants.*

(Personal interview with Guilam. 2016. 6:14 – 7:17).

As Guilam explains, her identity as a transsexual sex worker places her in danger at times because of the ideology of binary gender performances. As she notes, it could even lead up to her being killed, or clients ‘taking’ her without her consent. Discursive

constructs around subjectivity, abstract as they may be, have the potential to place or in some cases displace individuals in society (Kirby, 1996:13). However, these “patterns of belonging and excluding” (Kirby, 1996:13) eventually become embodied and manifest in physical spaces where they end up giving us “individual and social form” (1996:13). The space that Guilam refers to as ‘the baan’ becomes such an embodied physical space, a space that is claimed and where she can perform her identity, and where she can make her clients feel safe, whilst feeling safe with them (Personal interview with Guilam. 2016. 6:14 – 7:17). As discussed in Chapter Two, an already existing ideology, informed by biased discourses on sex workers, has emerged in South African society, and that self-narrative contributes to the destabilising of hegemonic assumptions and challenges the spaces in which sex workers are not included. It is thus important that the public’s narrative memory of sex workers is disrupted. As Ochs and Capps (1996:21) note, “the inseparability of narrative and self is grounded in the phenomenological assumption that entities are given meaning through being experienced”. This poses a problem for sex workers and, as this study aims to show, the persona of sex worker is only part of the subject, yet the stigmatisation associated with them hinders almost any other form of interpretation of them as individuals – they are in fact mothers, sisters, daughters and sons as well. The historical narrative on sex workers in South Africa are riddled in discourses centred on abuse, objectification and helplessness. In *Empowering, invasive or a little bit of both? A reflection on the use of visual and narrative methods in research with migrant sex workers in South Africa*, Oliviera (2016:261) states that:

Growing bodies of researchers, including myself, believe that one way to counter these incomplete representations of sex work is to support the production of information and material generated by those who are experiencing the abuse and exploitation under discussion.

The following section will make a case for why using personal narratives to account for experience and agency is of such vital importance.

### **3.2.1 Biography, Narrative and Autobiography as Embodied Memory.**

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001:1), quoting Phillippe Lejeune, contend that autobiography is usually associated with a retrospective narrative “or prose that

someone makes of his own existence: when an individual centres himself in his account of his life, especially “upon the story of his own personality”. However, in a post-structuralist narrative account, “life is expanded to include how one has become who he or she is at a given moment and it is an ongoing process of reflection”, and as such an autobiographical account requires a more in-depth analysis (Smith & Watson 2001:2).

Gill Jagger draws attention to the fact that in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) Butler refers to speech act theory when stating that bodies are “materialised as sexed” (Jagger 2008:4). Jagger states that this incorporation of “materialisation” is an important inclusion as “it allows her to link the materialisation of the body to the performativity of gender, and in so doing, rethink the materiality of the sex/gendered body in non-essential terms” (Jagger 2008:4).

Speech act theory is essential in Butler’s account of “giving an account of oneself” (Butler 2005:5). Butler refers to the concrete construction of the inherent ‘self’ and the exterior subjectivity of the constructed ‘I’. There are already existent discourses on sex workers in the public domain, and as such the “giving an account of oneself” (Butler 2005:5) is arguably reliant on socio-political and economic factors, and thereby ‘performativity’, as postulated by Butler, is reliant on language. In the light of this, the emphasis on self-narration in this study is pivotal, as the matter of ‘materialisation’ is essential. Considering this statement, and the fact that this materialisation occurs through language, this would indicate the need for re-thinking the nature of social constructions of identity and subjectivity to counteract essentialism (Jagger 2008:4). As will be explained in Chapter Four, it is the aim of this study’s methodology to offer an alternative to essentialism located in discourse and visual representation.

Personal narrative and biography are both modes that are used for narrating lives, but they are in fact not interchangeable. Most notable is the distinction that, although both narrate a life, biography is written by a “scholar of other people’s lives” and such lives are interpreted from a point of view that is not narrated by the subject (Smith & Watson 2001:6). However, the problem is not with biographical narrative per se, but rather the focus is on the lack of autobiography, or rather, the focus is on who is presenting, and who is narrating these autobiographies. In this study, it was found that autobiographical narratives, presented by the narrators themselves, when people talk

and write from mostly a phenomenological perspective, allow them to tend to do so from both "externalised and internalised points of view" (Smith & Watson 2001:6). It is important to note that a life narrator indeed confronts two lives, and not only one life. Smith and Watson cite the renowned British poet and critic Stephen Spender who states that the one life is constituted by "the self that others see"; this self is made up of achievements, personal relationships and social appearances (Smith & Watson 2001:6). However, there is also the self that is hidden from the outside, a self that is only experienced by the person him/herself. This "inside" self has a history, perhaps not in the sense of a conventional and objective "history in time", but rather a history of "self-observation", and this history is constituted by personal memories (Smith & Watson 2001:6). Although this thesis aims to be a challenge to conventional visual representations, there are, of course, also problematic aspects that one should be aware of. Although the basic intention of the research is collaboration, there will inevitably be questions around authorship and the researcher-subject position. My position as researcher may be clarified as follows:

The participant-centred approach facilitated a process whereby researchers and participants worked together in knowledge and meaning-making. By using a series of participatory approaches, the researchers shifted the focus to the experts of their own lives. (Thompson 2008 cited in Oliviera 2016)

As has been discussed in Chapter Two, much has been written *on* sex workers in South Africa, yet very little has been written or narrated *by* sex workers. This is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, writing on someone relies on various forms of information: historical documents, autobiographical accounts, documents and archives or family history that should be validated. The history surrounding sex work in South Africa is prone to censorship or bias, and sex workers had very little to no agency with regards to the representation of their own history in their profession as sex workers. This is in part due to the fact that, as sex workers, their profession is not adequately represented in official and/or unbiased discourse. This does not result in their having no agency, and nor should this be the point of contention, but if they have the opportunity to talk about and narrate their own lives, a multi-layered and more complex account of self potentially comes to the fore where they can reclaim and represent their own voices. Their ability to narrate their own lives versus having their

lives narrated by others, including archival sources such as "letters, journals, photographs, conversations and their knowledge of a historical moment" (Smith & Watson 2001:6), contributes to the destabilising of "social constructions in a move to counteract essentialism" (Jagger 2009:4).



Figure 9: *Gavin's history*. 2018. Screen shot by author.

Gavin points out in the interview:

*Ok, I am 45 years old, I come from a family of four, I come from an average family, both my parents were working when I was young. I finished high school, and then I went to theatre school, cause I didn't know what I was going to do and ended up going to study. And during that time, obviously I didn't have money ... I had to make ends meet and then obviously I also didn't know that I was gay when I was at school, it was only when I left school that I realised ok after going clubbing that I am gay and it was just an easy way of making money, it was an alternative. Didn't have money to go and study, got a scholarships, but it wasn't enough and then obviously I started getting flirted by older guys and then obviously, money started coming in, people were buying me drinks and eventually people were paying me to sleep with them.*

(Personal interview with Gavin. 2016. 18:06 – 19:05).

As Gavin shows in recounting aspects of his life and how he got involved with sex work, it can be argued that these resources, “conversations and their knowledge of a historical moment” (Smith & Watson 2001:6), are invaluable when narrating a life, as they offer support and supplement personal and idiosyncratic acts of recalling memories (Smith & Watson 2001:7). Gavin recounting memories or details of his youth, his family structure and his schooling in effect “counteracts essentialism” (Jagger 2009:4). We are allowed as viewers of the film to encounter Gavin as he sees himself.

Indeed, Smith and Watson contend that in terms of narration and autobiography, there are five essential processes that must be addressed: memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency. It is, however, memories (Smith & Watson 2001:7) that are recalled that serve as both the source of narration and act as authenticator of subjectivity and experience, and therefore the focus in this study falls on this aspect of narration. Smith and Watson (2001:18) contend that remembering is not a passive act of simply retrieving information, but rather that remembering involves a “reinterpretation of the past into the present”. Individuals thus participate in actively creating the meaning of the past through the act of remembering; as such, narrated memory is an interpretation of the past that can never be recalled in its entirety.

However, when recalling these experiences, there is value in this study when considering what Jason Throop refers to as “definitional ranges” (2003:227). He refers to the value of phenomenological models of experience that aim to integrate “the immediacy of temporal flux and the mediacy of reflective assessment” (Throop 2003:233).

Throop thus suggests that researchers should keep in mind that experiences should not be confined to rigid interpretations and definitions; instead he urges one to consider the “entire definitional range of the intermediate, the fluid, the incoherent, the internal, the fragmentary ... and the unitary” (2003:227). When Throop refers to “temporal flux and the mediacy of reflective assessment” (2003:233) he postulates that some methods which include, for instance, interviewing and questionnaires, give a very specific form and coherence to experience (Pink 2006: 24). However, for this study, the act of walking with participants and the Go-Pro video produced during this act by them (which will be elaborated on later) adds another layer of experience. As

Throop states: "Videotaping and/or systematic observation of everyday interaction can capture the often pre-reflective, real-time unfolding of social action" (Throop cited in Pink 2006:43). The act of 'walking with' (Pink 2007) becomes a form of PAR and as such, a phenomenological methodology, as it is both reflective and temporal, but the finer nuances of talking and walking are captured and, in turn, this allows for a less rigid approach to narrative and experience.

Daniel L. Schacter postulates that "memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves" (1996:22) we thus construct our life narrative from remembered portions of experience that are bound to change over time. Schacter further stipulates that we organise or construct fragments of memory into recognisable and layered constructions that become the narration of our lives (Schacter 1996:000). Schacter's account of memory is of particular importance to this study; the act of walking and talking and remembering in fact become "events themselves" (Schacter 1996:000), but more so, these events allows agency to sex workers as the story tellers of their own life experiences.

Susan Engel (1999:20) describes how certain acts of remembering take place at particular "sites" and in specific situations (Engel 1999, cited in Smith & Watson 2001:18). What Engel refers to in relation to recollection and memory is essential for this thesis, as it is argued that the act of walking with participants to specific 'sites' assists in an unconventional way in the recalling of memories and experiences, thereby providing a self-narrated account of subjectivity and of personal history. According to Smith and Watson, relationships are remembered typically according to, for instance; "sexual intimacy" or significant anniversaries, and also celebrating accumulative history as citizens (Smith & Watson 2001:18). In terms of "autobiographical narrative" Smith and Watson (2001:19) contend that narrative is specific to "the time of writing and the contents of telling".

As noted in Chapter Two, the South African historical accounts of sex workers are positioned as a generalised 'truth'; hence a collective account of memory and remembering is ascribed to the historical construct of sex workers, with any possibility of agency diminished, as narratives are written on or about them, but not by them.

Consequently, memory and remembering can also become political acts, especially if the remembering is not solely for the benefit of the individual or recounted by the individual. Smith and Watson (2001:21) contend that when memory becomes a collective act, it extends beyond "the acknowledgement of social sites of memory, historical documents, and oral traditions".

One should indeed question motives for remembering and, as Smith and Watson (2001:18) remind us, memory and the act of remembering are indeed implicated in how we as readers and listeners understand the past and "make claims about their versions of the past". Memory is, arguably, a clearly "intersubjective act", and should not be recounted out of context, or situated as an abstract visitation of past experiences (Smith & Watson 2001:21). W.J.T. Mitchell posits that "memory is an intersubjective phenomenon, a practice not only of recollection of a past *by* a subject, but of recollection *for* another subject" (1994:193). Within the scope of this research, the intersubjective act of walking with participants is akin to "participatory visual and narrative approaches" (Oliviera 2016:261) that, as Mitchell (1994:193) points out, entails the recollection of memories and experiences "for another subject" – in this instance for me, the researcher, and, by implication, for the reader of this thesis as secondary audience. It is thus implicit to recognise my own agency in this project; however, the aim is to collaborate with participants in the process and together create the space and opportunity to "challenge and contest" (Oliviera 2016:261) the historical discourse that persists around sex workers in South Africa.

Acts of remembering or memories, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four, are thus modes of sharing a personal or social past that has become shrouded. Yet it has the potential to activate or "reshape a future of, and for, other subjects" (Smith and Watson 2001:21). Although memory is arguably so "immaterial, personal and elusive", we should remember that it is always "implicated in materiality" (Smith and Watson 2001:21). Memories are permeated and littered with sounds, clothes or the very materiality of our bodies. Smells, tastes, touch can evoke memories, whilst simultaneously memories can be encoded in "objects or events with particular meaning for the narrator" (Smith and Watson 2001:21). Memories and experience are thus intrinsically entwined, and even more so for an autobiographical subject and life narration. Smith and Watson state that, whilst the experience alluded to in an

"autobiographical narrative" may seem one-dimensional and personal, it is indeed anything but. The complexity of narrated experiences can be ascribed to the fact that these experiences are "mediated through memory and language" (Smith and Watson 2001:25). Kirby contends that "words give us social form" (1996:14), but more than that – they can contain parts of identity and, depending on the social form they assign, they can influence our subjectivity. We don't determine the places we are in; they in fact determine us (Kirby 1996:21) and as "words give us social form" certain places will be permeated with specific memories that are only available to the narrator giving an autobiographical account. Considering this, experience then becomes an interpretation of our "past and of our place" and situates us in a very specific cultural and historical present (Smith and Watson 2001:25). This historical specificity is very evident in the interviews with the sex workers, as the discursive constructs and ideologies that accompany the discourse of sex work are elaborated on.

Since experience and narration as complex and intertwined with materiality, one has to recognise that experience is also partly discursive. Perez-Villanueva (2014:55) expands on Smith and Watson's (2001) hypothesis by stating:

Language is related to experience because in a life narrative, as Smith and Watson claim, "subjects know themselves in language" ... Smith and Watson understand narrators as interpreters of their own stories because "in autobiographical acts, narrators become readers of their experiential histories, bringing discursive schema that are culturally available to them to bear on what has happened". As narrators of their own lives, they have the "authority of experience".

Experience can then be the procedure that moulds or shapes individuality, or rather how a person becomes a certain kind of subject based on their standing or navigation through the social realm, and cultural and socio-economic strata (Smith & Watson 2001:25). Butler and Scott (1992:27) contend that "experience, whether conceived as internal or external, subjective or objective" is responsible for the "prior existence of individuals". Internally it signifies an individual being's "consciousness", whilst when external, it "manifests the material upon which consciousness then acts" (Butler & Scott 1992:27). Experience seen in this context can lead to taking the existence of the individual for granted. It runs this risk because it operates in an "ideological framework"

to positively make individuals the origin, or starting point of knowledge, but simultaneously it also normalises categories, whether of sex or race, by treating them as essentialist characteristics (Butler & Scott 1992:27). These categorisations are very apparent in the public discourse on sex workers. This public and historical discourse on South African sex workers is, of course, not objective, yet it does to a large extent constitute "the prior existence of individuals" (Butler & Scott 1992:27). This is arguably due to the exclusion of personal narratives in the public domain, although this is in fact changing with projects such as MoVE<sup>77</sup> and the *Working the City* project<sup>78</sup> that allow for a new discourse and narratives, ultimately subjectivities, to filter into the public domain.

Scott reminds us that "[i]t is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (Butler & Scott 1992:27). Subjects that give autobiographical accounts thus do not predate experience, but rather they "know themselves as subjects of particular kinds of experiences" which are directly linked to their "social statuses or identities" (Butler & Scott 1992:27). Individuals thus become certain subjects, because categories linked to their experience have become naturalised and are assumed to reflect the characteristics of the individual (Butler & Scott 1992:27).

This thesis is premised on the notion that experience as a discursive construct is vital, as this directly ties into the emphasis given to narrative and autobiography. Similarly, as this thesis is centred on a post-structuralist construction of identity, experience must be looked at as, amongst other things, "discursive, embedded in language of everyday life and the knowledges produced at everyday sites" (Smith and Watson 2001:26).

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<sup>77</sup> Oliviera states that "Recognising the need to involve people and communities within research processes, and an associated commitment to developing ways of co-producing and sharing knowledge through public engagement, has resulted in the establishment of the MoVE (method:visual:explore) project at the ACMS, a project that explores ways of doing research differently"(2016:261).

<sup>78</sup> According to Oliviera the "Working the city Project" that took place in 2010 in Hillbrow – Johannesburg, made use of photo voice and participatory research to investigate and report on the lives of 11 "cross-border and internal adult migrant women who lived and sold sex in Hillbrow". Participants were lent digital cameras and attended photography workshops in basic photography skills (Oliveira 2016:264).





material, we mediate them as experience discursively, both as narrative and experience. We thus mediate our own experience and, through storytelling, we convey this to others (Smith and Watson 2001:26). Discursive patterns thus "guide or compel us to tell stories about ourselves in particular ways" (Smith and Watson 2001:26).

These ways of telling that are grounded directly in the embodiment and materiality of the subject. This is largely deducible from the hypothesis that "the body is a site of autobiographical knowledge because memory itself is embodied" (Smith and Watson 2001:57); as embodied subjects, it would then stand to reason that life narrative becomes embodied knowledge, and due to this embodiment, phenomenological perspectives in recounting this knowledge become fundamental in uncovering identities that are not reflected in the public domain and become a way of allowing challenges to historical discourses.

Indeed, Vanni and Waskul (2012:23) contend that "the body is always more than a tangible, physical, corporeal object; the body is also an enormous vessel of meaning, of utmost significance to both personhood and society". As such, subjectivity is closely related to our bodies, and we are indeed shaped by it; as P.J. Eakin (1999:xi) notes: "our lives and our bodies profoundly shape our sense of identity". It is because of this materiality of the body that the act of walking with participants is so important, as this act 'places' the body so that the intuitive remembering becomes an experience, a phenomenological act.

### **3.2.2 Embedded Memory**

The recollection of memories is dependent on the material body, for the body is responsible for the interpretation of the experiences of the external world. Personal memories are indeed reconstructed, whilst the individual participates in the physical world with "symbolic exchanges" (Smith and Watson 2001:57). It has been my experience through my research that these embodied moments of recollection can become a shared corporeal experience, as the act of narration and the physical proximity and shared activity between researcher and participant provide a more collaborative approach to sex workers narrating their experiences.

Even though remembering is an internalised act, it is still largely influenced and mediated by cultural discourses that "determine which aspects of bodies become

meaningful - what parts of the body are 'there' for people to see" (Smith & Watson 2001:58). These discourses determine when – or if at all – a body becomes visible, what intelligibility it is afforded and what agency this visibility constitutes. If one considers Figures 7 and 8, which shows public words of address towards sex workers, and the words they use to address themselves it is arguably preferable to be associated in the public sphere with words such as "mother, sea goddess, carer and mediator" (2018). However, it is important to note, as these two figures show, that the body of sex workers is 'problematized' in the public domain and arguably these forms of address it could be also takes place in private, such as with clients or family. However, sex workers who took part in this project have a very specific approach to their subjectivity and materiality one that stands on contrast to public discourse surrounding them.

In the following section the act of walking and talking is addressed, as the aim of this study is to indeed to approach, or rather incorporate, 'unconventional ways' to give space for autobiographical narratives to be brought into the public domain.

### **3.3 Walking and Talking**

When recalling memories and experiences while walking, the act of remembering is not a "passive act of simply retrieving information" (Smith & Watson 2001:18). The walking with sex workers has indeed resulted in what Pink (2008:248) refers to as being "productive of place-as-event" by placing an emphasis on the experiences of sex workers in their environments. In this study I walk with participants as they record their environments and recall memories. As their bodies move through spaces, as they engage with other bodies and things, the viewer never gets to see the sex workers, but instead can hopefully "serve as a catalyst for communicating about other people's sensory embodied experiences" (Pink 2009:250).

Mikhail Bakhtin draws attention to the fact that language should be not seen as a neutral medium, or at least one should be aware that it does not move freely "into the private property of the speaker's intentions" (Bakhtin cited in Holquist 1992:294). Language is in fact "populated" or – in a postmodern, post-structuralist context – "overpopulated with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin cited in Holquist 1992:294). To take ownership of the 'I', or to force it to submit to one's "own intentions and accents",

does indeed become a process that is difficult to navigate (Bakhtin cited in Holquist 1992:294). Bakhtin posits that we are "socio-ideological beings" and as such diverse opinions, interpretations and the very 'heteroglossia'<sup>79</sup> of linguistic expression means that an individual's consciousness lies "on the borderline between oneself and the other" (Bakhtin cited in Holquist 1992:294). As such, the words of address and answer are always located within the domain of and reliant on an Other. These words becomes "one's own only when the speaker populates [them] with his own intentions, his own accent ... adapting [them] to his own semantic and expressive intention" (Bakhtin cited in Holquist 1992:294).

Take, for instance, the way Guilam describes the way she entices clients Figure 12: *Guilam dancing* (2018):

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<sup>79</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin has written extensively on the study of text and its potential for performance, whilst still acknowledging the "social, cultural and political nature of all texts" and indeed the importance of context when interpreting text (Parker-Fuller 1986:1). According to Bakhtin, all speech 'acts' or utterances are heteroglossic "and polyphonic" –in that they partake of different languages" and indeed "resonate with many-voices" (Parker-Fuller 1986:1). Parker-Fuller states that "heteroglossia (other-languagedness) and polyphony (many-voicedness)" should be considered as the base conditions that govern the association of meaning in utterances (Parker-Fuller 1986:1). Heteroglossia refers more broadly to certain ideologies that are imbedded in various languages to which we, as social beings, "lay claim, and by which we constituted as individuals" (Parker-Fuller 1986:1). Such ideologies can be imbedded in our professions (as is the thesis for sex workers), our demography, social class, family etc. (Parker-Fuller 1986:1).



Figure 12: *Guilam dancing* (2018). Screen shot by author.

*As trans we want to be that beautiful woman, that real woman that got the boobs, the vagina and everything. And we want to deliver a permanent service for a client to come back ... we want to look beautiful, with a little make-up thingies and thingies and see that we are dressed because when clientele pulls up, we need to give them that million-dollar smile and chip-chop that he falls for you. Because why, you have to dance for your client, he wants to see that figure, he wants to see that booty move, you know, he wants to see that figure loose. Because why, what he picks up is something that he saw, and he is going to pay for it. Understand?*

(Personal Interview with Guilam. 2016. 08:26 – 09:20)

In this interview portion with Guilam, it becomes clear that there are very specific complexities in linguistic exchanges that are related with an Other. She speaks about her vagina and breasts and the ritual she goes through to solicit clients, these actions and rituals she performs is directed to an Other, yet she interpolates these words by bringing her own expressive nuances to it. As Bakhtin states, one must note that, prior to this moment of allocation, language and words do not exist in a neutral vacuum (Bakhtin cited in Holquist 1992:294).

They "exist in other people's mouths, contexts" where they can in fact serve other people's intentions, Bakhtin suggests that it is from this point that one should "take the word, and make it one's own" (Bakhtin cited in Holquist 1992:294).

The written historical accounts of sex workers in South Africa have been subjected to various forms of injurious speech – to use Butler's term in *Excitable Speech* (1997). In our daily lives language is inseparable from our existence, whether to convey messages, or express opinions and thoughts; it situates us in the society we move in, and determines our position in a myriad of social networks. Butler draws from Austin's speech act theory where he distinguishes between "illocutionary" and "perlocutionary" speech acts (Butler 1997:3). According to Austin, illocutionary acts refer to acts that "in saying, do what they say, and do it in the moment of saying" (Austin cited in Butler 1997:3).

Perlocutionary refers to speech acts that produce "certain effects as their consequences; by saying something, a certain effect follows" (Butler 1997:3). This form of linguistic violence and discursive censorship committed on precarious individuals becomes interpolated through performativity of the speech acts and, as Austin postulates, they become "ritual or ceremonial" (Butler 1997:4). Butler further contends that as utterances, these speech acts work since they are ritualised, meaning they are repeated in "time" and as such they "maintain a sphere of operation that is not restricted to the moment of the utterance itself" (Austin cited in Butler 1997:3). The moment of the utterance as ritual is thus "condensed historicity", it can "exceed" itself in both "past and future" directions and can thus invoke an effect of "prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of utterance" (Butler 1997:3). The discursive construct and ideologically loaded word, 'sex worker', prostitute, has been subjected to these forms of injurious speech throughout history.

In South Africa the word prostitution became synonymous with women of ill repute, and a ritualistic response was adopted by the apartheid government in terms of invoking moral purity and the ideal Afrikaner women as a bastion of moral superiority in stark contrast to those with 'loose sexual morals'. Words such as 'dirty', 'immoral',

'sinful'<sup>80</sup> became perlocutionary speech acts associated with sexual transgressions and this also resulted in the strict censorship laws in terms of what literature and visual material was made available to the public. This meant that abjected individuals who operated and lived on the fringes of acceptable sexual morality became excluded from public awareness and memory.<sup>81</sup> Butler contends that words, or rather certain forms of address, not only function "as threats to one's well-being", there is also a strong sense "in which the body is alternately sustained and threatened through modes of address" (Butler 1997:5). Language thus sustains "the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way, but instead it is being interpolated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes available" (Butler 1997:5). In an interview with Lee, Figure 13: *Language in Woodstock* (2018), it became clear that these forms of marginalised interpellation are still very much prevalent in sex workers' everyday experiences.

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<sup>80</sup> The success of the apartheid government, and the exacting regulations that accompanied it, was dependant on the 'group' functioning as a dynamic whole. Afrikaners experienced censorship with regards to "freedom of thought, speech and expression", and the group did not accept any deviations from these measures, nor did they humour "internal troublemakers" (Stemmet, 2005:201). Considering the Afrikaners' belief in their ordained position as "the chosen", the issue of sexual morality was not taken lightly (Strauss in Stemmet, 2005:200).

<sup>81</sup> India Thusi in *Policing Sex: The Colonial, Apartheid and New Democracy Policing of Sex Work in South Africa* (2015:208) makes reference to women (sex workers) who were cast as temptresses and were subsequently held accountable to laws that expressly aided this positioning, whilst further alienating them from the acceptable and demarcated spheres to which they were assigned. This, in turn, rendered them abject, positioning them as Other.



Figure 13: *Language in Woodstock* (2018). Screen shot by author.

*It is a hub of potential, and as you can see it is getting more and more, there are a lot of foreigners which makes us very happy, cause there is more work, and ... you see the people, also, I can't... they are not as harsh as they would be in other suburbs, or in other, other areas. Where for instance if they see a sex workers they are going to stone them or call the police. They are diligent but they are accepting cause they see us walking on the bridge and they know us, but they not gonna ... they won't uhm, you are going to get some idiot who are going to shout something out of the car or whatever, but the majority of the people they, they give us our freedom to do whatever we do as long as we do it in a respectful way.*

(Personal Interview with Lee. 2016. 57:49 – 58:27)

Lee's social existence thus comes through a certain discursive association with her body as sex worker. These moments of verbal interactions with the public have a radical impact on subjectivity, yet they are not the only associations that affect Lee as a subject. These interviews with sex workers aims to show a better understanding of the multifariousness of associations and experiences that are evident in the lives and identities of sex workers.

The social construct of Lee as sex worker has been framed linguistically by injurious speech acts (Butler 1997:3) that have acquired a ritualistic quality through a historicised reiteration of associations. One may be forgiven for asking the seemingly obvious question: Why, if it is a deliberate choice to operate in this stratum of society, does the terminology associated with sex work generate such anxiety and fear in sex workers? If it is a "purely linguistic address" (Butler 1997:5), why does it produce a sense of fear? Especially for a participant such as Lee, who makes a very clear distinction between her work persona and her personal self, as the interview Figure 14: *Lee working conditions* (2018) indicates:



Figure 14: *Lee working conditions* (2018). Screen shot by author.

*I have to just always be cautious. And preparing myself emotionally is ok, not like, too like change my persona, but I know, I tell myself, this is what I am going to go and do, this is .... cause sometimes you know you feel down cause you don't have money and your child needs a nappy you and you need to get it, and you pray 'Oh I need to get back in an hour before he wakes up cause I want to feed him'. So then I always just try to become positive as well, and I give myself a little pep talk, and I try to because ... my face, I have a very serious face, people will tell me sometimes that it chases people away, especially when I am*

*thinking or concentrating on something, I don't look very friendly, so it is difficult for people to approach me.*

(Personal Interview with Lee. 2016. 49:15 – 51:09)

Lee, by her own account, is conscious of and actively inhabiting the identity of sex worker, and while she recounts her experience of being a mother, she is also open about her identity as a sex worker. I would venture to add that, although it is a performative act, the persona of Lee as a sex worker is still an integral part of her being, and yet she has no control over the public perception of that persona, as the linguistic construct is already ideologically loaded, as shown in Figure 8. It is also important to note that even if it is a performative identity, Butler (1997:5), reminds us that language also has physical repercussions, therefore to call someone something, is to call a reality into being.

As Laura Hengehold (2007:5) contends, "the human body exists as much in the imagination as in the flesh" and is not detachable from the visuals and people that it resembles in significant ways. For subjectivity to manifest as a non-fragmented and cohesive construct individuals must aim and struggle to attain as much autonomy as is possible, and furthermore "derive as much benefit as possible from the powers associated with his or her body" (Hengehold 2007:6). These powers are constructed through associations with "family members, political parties, or a public to observe and draw meaning from the resulting actions" (Hengehold 2007:7).

Individuals who exemplify bodies that fit into "a valorised style of individuality" (Hengehold 2007:7) do not experience individuality as an obstacle. However, members of ethnic minorities and people of "so-called deviant sexuality" (Hengehold 2007:7) or for that matter precarious individuals in general, are forced to navigate the discordant character of their own "embodiment" and are generally confronted with "excessive" situations that require from them "more self-surveillance and interpretation" than 'conforming' bodies do. This is particularly true in the case of sex workers, where the performative body is already being held accountable to strict moral policing and negative imaginative constructs. Sex work is illegal, it is criminalised, and this in turn will keep the 'body' of a sex worker in the sphere of the villainous. It is exactly these imaginative constructs that the 'performative persona' of sex workers

must re-negotiate and navigate to constitute a non-fragmented subjectivity. Yet the embodiment and materiality<sup>82</sup> of the 'sex worker body' is largely subject to linguistic and discursive constructs, which have a profound material effect, and is as such marginalised and bound to the narratives written about them.

### **3.4 Walking and Film**

It is through the process of walking with sex workers that this study investigates alternatives to narratives about sex workers, to “make experience meaningful” (Pink 2009:248) and to create awareness of the different environments and social practices that constitute their subjectivity. As MacDougall (1998) contends, film can communicate across cultural boundaries, as it “reveals not only the intersubjective field of consciousness linking Self and Other, but also the gradual modulations and commonalities of experience between different cultural groups” (MacDougall cited in Pink 2009:247).

One of the aims of this thesis is to highlight the “corporeal intersubjectivity” (Pink 2008:248) when the act of filming and walking with sex workers takes place. As Pink (2008:248) rightly point out, these “filmic representations” can lead the viewer to have a response that allows for a more empathetic comprehension of those who are being represented.

When recalling memories and experiences while walking, it becomes evident that the act of remembering is not a “passive act of simply retrieving information” (Smith & Watson 2001:18). The walking with sex workers has indeed resulted in what Pink (2008:248) refers to being “productive of place-as-event” by positioning the bodies of the sex workers as they sensorially experience, instead of them being experienced. As their bodies move through spaces, as they engage other bodies and things, the

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<sup>82</sup> Gill Jagger comments that Butler (2008:4) “argues that this view of the body, as a matter of materialisation involves rethinking the meaning beyond social constructionism”. Important to note in relation to this extract is that Butler never contends for a fully determining subject. This non-determining allows for the “possibility of resistance and rearticulating of categories. These categories are themselves linguistically constituted, rather than naturally given, the way of approaching change and transformation is through language and signification – through the signifactory practices that constitute and control particular identities” (Jagger 2008:4).

viewer never gets to see the sex workers, but can instead hopefully “serve as a catalyst for communicating about other people’s sensory embodied experiences” (Pink 2009:250).

The act of 'walking with' participants thus aims to approach narration in exactly this unconventional way. It becomes a political act that aims to destabilise the more conventional ways of observing another, whether it is academic or anthropological in its intent. The body thus becomes a "narrative point of departure" (Smith & Watson 2001:58), and the act of walking the city streets becomes, as Michel De Certeau (1984:98) contends, a "[p]ractice of everyday life" that constitutes people entering into contracts with one another through movements. It is through these contracts entered upon between researcher and participant, specifically between myself and participants, that the internal world of embodied memories can begin to resurface into an external world. This act of walking and filming is elaborate on in Chapter Four, where the use of Go-Pro technology is described as a departure from conventional phenomenological methodologies to an adoption of post-phenomenology.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Chapter Three has investigated the importance of personal narrative, autobiographical narrative more precisely, as a counter-narrative to the very biased historical and public discourses on sex work and sex workers in South Africa that currently prevail. This study makes the argument that the inclusion of these personal accounts and life experiences may contribute to a better understanding, or at least a recognition, that sex work, like all work, does not dictate who you are as a subject. The attributes associated with sex work are discursive and the language that precedes the person engaging in this work is bound in historical narratives of abjection and stigmatisation. Chapter Four will expand on the use of these autobiographical narrations with the technology of Go-Pro as a further attempt to offer a more collaborative methodology when doing research with an Other.

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## CHAPTER FOUR: VIDEO AS CHALLENGE TO DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

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### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the point was made that in terms of narrative archives, there is a noticeable lack of representation for sex workers in South Africa. This chapter will point out, however, that the state-supported archives reflect not only a visual and written inequality, but also a social and political inequality. Yet it is also important to acknowledge those archives that attempt to destabilise the state-supported archives, since contemporary archives such as GALA<sup>83</sup> (2014) attempt to offer a heightened visibility for sex workers. Recent exhibitions such as *interseXion - the art of advocacy* (2015) by Robert Hamblin and group exhibition *Sex* by curator Lerato Bereng (2016) that featured work by Steven Cohen, FAKA and Nicholas Hlobo, to name but a few, also contribute to new conversations around the visibility and subjectivity of marginalised communities.

While such forms of visual engagement provide an important platform for representing sex workers, one of the most prominent forms of visualisation, namely documentary photography is still embedded with problematic legacies such as surveillance and agency. This study proposes that Go-Pro video technology could be employed to offer alternative methods of visualisation and recording of marginalised communities. This methodological proposal is a departure from the genre of traditional documentary photography, to include moving images which allow for more collaborative research practices, as proposed by Pink (2007). This is not to dismiss the valuable work that documentary photography has done to give marginalised communities visibility, nor is

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<sup>83</sup> Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA) “is a centre for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQ) culture and education in southern Africa. Our mission is, first and foremost, to act as a catalyst for the production, preservation and dissemination of knowledge on the history, culture and contemporary experiences of LGBTIQ people. The impulse behind our creation in 1997 is reflected in our original name ‘The Gay and Lesbian Archives’” (2018). The organisation aims to question/address the erasure of “experiences and stories” of LBGTIQ people from the “official archives” in South Africa (2018).

it proposing that the camera is ontologically superior; it is, however, to address a legacy of surveillance associated with the medium. Ingrid Richardson (2010) contends that the relation between humans and technology should also be recognised as a “body-tool relation”; thus when we merge with technology, this stipulates “certain kinds of being in the world” and also “particular ways of knowing and making that world”. It is thus not the camera itself that is inherently problematic, but rather the semiotic associations with power and observation of an Other that has to be interrogated. As Richardson (2010:12) states:

Medium specificity describes the fact that specific media have specific spatial, temporal and socio-cultural effects, determining particular conditions of possibility for the way meaning is made.

This is especially true when photographing precarious communities, such as sex workers; van der Wal (2017:3) contends that photography is often “employed to reinforce the dichotomous structure of public and private” but also to solidify their distinction between “normalised” identities and their supposedly aberrant opposites.

In order to start to interrogate the validity, and inherent problematics of photography, one has to first recognize the prevalence of photography as a form of surveillance. I draw attention to this from the perspective that sex workers work on the periphery of visibility and invisibility – visible in order to solicit clients, and invisible in order to avoid prosecution.

As John Tagg states in *The Burden of Representation*:

Our starting point must be power itself and the attempts to theorise its functioning. This, margin of performativity ... the analysis of power will take us far beyond the boundaries of conventional art into the institutional aspects of the modern state (1988:77).

The problematics Tagg (1988) alludes to is indeed prevalent in the South African history of documentary photography. Jamal (2015:55) contends that South African photography:

Infrequently veers away from the Real as an objective and ideational category. By conceiving the site and sighted as a document and order of things *subject* to photographic record, South African photography rarely penetrates the object hood of things subject to photographic record. Such is the haste to explain or account for the thing seen, to infer its content.

When looking at the South African state-sanctioned archives, sex workers and the influential role they played in South African society was discursively framed as a reprehensible social problem, while it was given very little visual exposure (as explained in Chapter Two). Yet, in order to better explain the choice of methodology for this study, the legacy of photography needs to be positioned, as a form of surveillance and a state apparatus of control. The Chapter starts by investigating the genre of documentary photography and then moves to a more nuanced explanation of my own research with video that provides a potentially more rounded perspective on sex workers than those produced up to date. This methodology aims to bring together a range of exposures and or representative tools (moving image, talking, walking, showing, walking) that have not been used to date in this manner when dealing with sex workers in South Africa.

## **4.2 Photography as a legacy of surveillance**

### **4.2.1 The documentary genre**

Tagg likens the use of photography in the eighteenth century to “a new type of regime discovered in the eighteenth century, that is, a scientific-legal complex impregnated with a new technology of power” (1988:71). According to Tagg (1988:66), in the 1880s and 1890s photography was going through a double “technical revolution” (1988:66). This was the period when the market was flooded with hand-held Kodak cameras, whilst simultaneously there was the mass production of cheap printings blocks and, overall, there was more affordable photographic equipment (Tagg 1988:66). These advancements in the field led to the use of photography spreading to various other areas, such as the “scientific, technical, medical and legal” fields (Tagg 1988:66). These new applications functioned as a means to keep record, but also “as a source

of evidence” (Tagg 1988:66). These new ‘attributes’ associated with photography are what led to the medium, especially the documentary genre, to become entangled with concepts of power and control. It is due to these new functions that photography became seen as a “kind of proof” and the use of the medium shifted towards becoming a state apparatus of control and surveillance (Tagg 1988:67) that was imbedded in spreading dominant discourses. South Africa was not immune to these advances and the legacy of photography in South Africa is also to a degree tainted.<sup>84</sup> Jamal (2015: 68) draws attention to the legacy of South African photography:

What I wish to draw the reader’s attention to is the perceptual register – intrinsically negative, pathologically optical – which has informed, and continues to inform, the way in which South Africa’s stories, and its image repertoire, has been recorded and received. A perversely mutinous denial of love – a fascination with lovelessness – has informed the making and consumption of South Africa’s photographic archive. Therefore, to state that South African photography remains overdetermined by the legacies of colonialism and apartheid is, frankly, an understatement.

He further contends that South African photography serves as a repository, and archive, for that which has fed it, and that these “interlinked systems” of power and oppression have had a disciplinary hold over the South African imaginary that has never really truly “embraced a world that exists outside of this toxic framework” (2015:68)

As, *inter alia*, a state apparatus of control and surveillance, it can be argued that photography is deeply imbedded in ideology. Tagg draws attention to the “complicity of photography in this spreading network of power” when he refers to the correlation

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<sup>84</sup>In the *Body and the Archive*, Alan Sekula (1986:10) states that “Notwithstanding the standard liberal accounts of the history of photography, the new medium did not simply inherit and “democratize” the honorific functions of bourgeois portraiture. Nor did police photography simply function repressively, although it is foolish to argue that the immediate function of police photographs was somehow more ideological or positively instrumental than negatively instrumental. But in a more general, dispersed fashion, in serving to introduce the panoptic principle into daily life, photography welded the honorific and repressive functions together. Every portrait implicitly took its place within a social and moral hierarchy”.

between the evolution of photography and the reliance police departments started to place on the medium for the “purposes of identification” (Tagg 1988:74). However, this form of record keeping differed greatly from previous administrative “writings”<sup>85</sup>; what emerged now was a register and a “permanent account of individuals’ behaviour” (Tagg 1988:74). These permanent registers exerted power because it is through the “control of the ideological state apparatuses” that one can “enforce the ruling ideology” (Tagg 1988:69). As explained in Chapters Two and Three, the dominant ideology in historical accounts of sex workers in South Africa entailed sanitising state media and the press to exclude sex workers. This was done to both visual and written accounts, and as such a precarious sphere of society was subjected to erasure by those with power. Tagg points out that photography is intertwined in very complex relations of both power and ideology, and it is when we grasp that “power is the name given to a complex strategic situation in a given society, then we can also grasp the possibilities of resistance” (Tagg 1988:72). Contemporary artists, however, are questioning the medium of photography and its inherently problematic legacy, while aiming for a more sensitive approach that could, as Tagg states, “grasp the possibilities of resistance” (1988:72).<sup>86</sup>

For instance, Van der Wal (2017:1) investigates the work of transsexual artist Robert Hamblin and how his work with still and moving images as modes of “visual representation can be used in the service of trans subjects” as a way for them to express and interrogate the precariousness they face as sex workers in South Africa. Hamblin’s 2015 work *interseXion - the art of advocacy*<sup>87</sup> is a combination of still and moving images and, as van der Wal contends, Hamblin’s work offer a departure from conventional filmic traditions by allowing them trans sex workers to “move beyond the typecast victim role and show their own lives as more nuanced” (2017: 7). Hamblin’s

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<sup>85</sup> Examples of such administrative writings were shown in Chapter two in Figure **Error! Main Document Only.**: *Lock Hospital* (1899) and Figure 3: *Wakool 1* (1906).

<sup>86</sup> Yet in the questioning of this legacy, photography’s referential value has been questioned for some time by academics and critics alike, please see Elkins (2007) *Photography Theory*, Enzewor (2008) *Archive Fever* and Butler (2009) *Frames of War*.

<sup>87</sup> The solo exhibition by Hamblin is a combination of video, voice and photographic installations that investigate sex work in South Africa, particularly transgender women, it was shown at Iziko South African National Gallery, until 26 August 2018.

work, according to van de Wal (2017:7), also creates an environment where Hamblin, as photographer, and the sex workers who participated in his project, as artists and activists, are engaged in a collaborative “process of creation”. This approach in methodology applied by Hamblin is similar to the approach adopted I adopted in this study, insofar as my own interaction with sex workers, by means of walking and filming, is also a collaborative process and a deliberately political act.

Another artist who engages with the photographic genre to question hegemonic ideas around gender is visual activist Zanele Muholi. In particular, her 2006-2014 photo series “Faces and Phases” produced an “archive of South Africa’s lesbian community that works to reclaim each subject’s humanity and autonomy” (Keller 2017). Muholi’s subjects are confrontational in their gaze to the camera, and she produced striking black and white images that are a tribute to the strength and resistance of these subjects in the face of the patriarchal discrimination, the “hatred and violence” (Keller 2017) they face as individuals and as a community. While it is imperative to acknowledge the work of contemporary photographers who use the medium of film and photography to address social and political inequalities, the medium as a form of surveillance needs more elaboration. This elaboration is addressed in the following section where the use of video as *sousveillance*<sup>88</sup> versus surveillance is contrasted to further highlight the methodological approach used in this study.

### **4.3 The implications of Documentary Photography**

The ‘trouble’ with photography has been well documented; it is inherent in documentary, social anthropology and phenomenological attempts at inclusion and recording. The relationship between photographer and subject is never equal, as Sontag states: “through the production of meaning we also produce knowledge, and knowledge, within a particular discourse, is connected to power” (Sontag 1977:22).

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<sup>88</sup> According to Steve Mann and Joseph Ferenbok; “Sousveillance means ‘watching from below’, and its etymology derives from replacing ‘sur’ (over) with ‘sous’, which means ‘under’ or ‘below’ or ‘from below’ (as in words like ‘sous-chef’)” (2013:19).

Martha Rosler, in *In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)* (1992:303), poses the question of how we deal with documentary photography today in the contemporary moment. Rosler (1992:303) argues that documentary photography has to a large extent come to represent the “social conscience of liberal sensibility presented in visual imagery”.

With reference to South Africa’s visual past, consider for instance Figure 15: *Untitled* (1979), by Paul Weinberg.



Figure 15: *Untitled* (1979). Photograph by Paul Weinberg.

This is one of the few existing images of a sex worker taken during the apartheid regime, and therefore the value of this image as a historical record of sorts is beyond doubt. Yet, I would argue, there are certain problems with this image. Most significant

of all is the question regarding agency, essentialism and the ‘production of knowledge’, given Sontag’s point that “discourse is connected to power” (Sontag 1977, cited in Hall 1997:6). The image depicts a Black sex worker in her underwear, striking a provocative pose in what can be assumed to be her house. There are a number of problems with this image, firstly, the image is untitled, the woman has no identity<sup>89</sup> and it is arguably quite reminiscent of ethnographic depictions of an Other. The image is shot quite voyeuristically; the frame of the door is visible suggesting that one is ‘peering in’ on a private space or moment. What further needs to be noted is that Weinberg as photographer leaves this situation, but the sex worker is forever captured in this moment, thereby this image being devoid of context, allows for the viewers of the image to make up their own narratives, and this making up of narratives “produces knowledge, that is connected to power” (Sontag 1977:22).

These kinds of depictions might seem archaic, yet as Rosler notes, this type of documentary still exists and it has a social function in society. The type of ‘liberalism’ expressed in this genre – where the photographer seemingly enters the underbelly of society and brings it to the fore, for the viewer’s benefit, the otherwise unseen – has now been rerouted to the realm of the glossy magazines and books, and has become commodified as it enters the art gallery and museums (Rosler 1992:307). But this is problematic, as Rosler points out:

Documentary is a little like horror movies, putting a face on fear and transforming threat into fantasy, into imagery. One can handle imagery by leaving it behind. (*It is them, not us*). One may even, as a private person, support causes. (1992:307)

And indeed, as was shown in Chapter Two, South Africa’s state visual and archival past was so severely sanitised that the accounts that do exist of sex workers are incredibly biased. Hence, one could argue that images such as Figure 10 do little to dispel the stereotypes that (arguably) still exist in South African. It is thus important to remember and recognise that the genre of documentary photography as we have

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<sup>89</sup> Although the occlusion of identity was possibly done for the sake of protecting the subject, a pseudonym could still have been used to compensate to some extent for the loss of agency.

come to know it usually “carries (old) information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful” (Rosler 1992:307). Indeed, as Susan Sontag posits: “To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power” (1973:22).

This historic relationship between photographer and photographed is naturally positioned within a hierarchy of power. Paraphrasing Foucault, John Tagg states that “Power in the West ... is what displays itself most and hides itself best” (1988:67). It is also important to take into account the intention as well as the complicity of the photographer for, as Rosler states:

The boringly sociological becomes the excitingly mythological/psychological. On this territory a more or less overt sexualisation of the photographic image is accomplished (1992:308).

It is thus perhaps the role of photographer that becomes important, becomes interesting, after all, it is he/she who has the bravery “or (dare we name it) the manipulateness, the savvy [to enter] a situation of physical danger, social restrictedness, human decay or combinations of these, to save us the trouble” (Rosler 1992:309).

Documentary photography is arguably thus voyeuristic and yet in certain cases there is the common argument which posits that the genre “humanizes the so-called Other, and promotes identification between the viewer and people so regarded” (Rosler 2004:208). But Sontag insists: “Photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed” (2003:41).

Thus, the argument could/should be made that this ‘humanization’ is in fact a form of surveillance. The identification or recognition as Other relegates and leads to a visual surveillance. In photography this creates a complication, as this perceived ‘proximity’, the humanization, between viewer and subject, reinforces stereotypes of people with such “highly marked appearances and ascribed identities” (Rosler 2004:208) rather than allow for an experiencing of Other identities. It is because the divide is so easily

overcome, and yet so voyeuristically positioned, that “the people pictured lessen the distance between them and the other viewers” (Rosler 2004:208). However, this “lessening of distance” (Rosler 2004:208) is devoid of context and is still intrinsically linked to power. The argument then moves towards asking what would happen if one were to add quotations to the images? Would this then serve to reduce the distance between the people pictured and the other viewers? (Rosler 2004:208). Arguably the inclusion of quotations changes the dynamic of the image between the viewer and subject; the subject can now ‘speak’, whereas previously a caption spoke for the picture (Rosler 2004:209). Even so, one is still confronted with very specific and unavoidable “framing elements” (Rosler 2004:209). Such framing includes the pre-existing “attitude of viewers rooted in dominant discourses”. As discussed in Chapter Three, when analysing narrative versus autobiographical narrative, it becomes more important than ever to have more inclusionary archives or representation of sex workers, so that, just like the written accounts of sex workers, now being narrated by sex workers, we also work towards a visual archive that is created by sex workers, or at least, in collaboration with sex workers.

It is the pitfalls of documentary photography that led to the methodology for this study. It came to the fore, with research done in both print media and the National Archives of South Africa in Cape Town that the genre of documentary photography, journalism and news photography, rather than aiming to “promote understanding”, could have actually been used to “provoke, to horrify or to mobilize sentiment against” an Other (Rosler 2004:209).<sup>90</sup>

When embarking on this study I, as researcher and film maker, was acutely aware of the responsibility that all forms of representation involve, but also the pitfalls of (ostensible) “descriptive accuracy” that photography presents. The apparent “truth value of photography and film” (Rosler 2004:209) has indeed made these mediums very powerful vehicles for social and political commentary, but of all “photographic practices”, social documentary has become the scapegoat, the medium where the

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<sup>90</sup> It should be noted that the archives at GALA do house some material on sex workers, yet this study argue for the production of knowledge by sex workers themselves.

“self-professed truth teller ... is the one in which the underlying issues of social power are accessible to contestation” (Rosler 2004:209).

This contestation becomes ever more prolific in a digital world with new technological advances available to us as researchers. The question of who is “speaking and from where” is becoming more compelling when conducting research; the status of photography as an episteme of truth, simply because of its “sheer visuality”, is no longer satisfactory in a postmodern approach to representation and subjectivity (Rosler 2004:209), as will be discussed in the next section. Yet, despite the questioning of agency in the medium, or rather a question of who is doing the narration and the representation regarding the documentation of people or events, the genre still has a tremendous impact on the readers of newspapers and, of course, online reporting. By and large, “the public still trusts images it sees in the daily newspaper and on the evening news” (Rosler 2004:224), even if these images are akin to voyeuristic surveillance of an Other. As Gerhard Richter states:

The photograph is the only picture that can truly convey information, even if it is technically faulty and the object can barely be identified. A painting of a murder is of no interest whatever; but a photograph of a murder fascinates everyone (quoted in Obrist, 1995:57).

It is thus important to state that the study takes this voyeuristic surveillance as its point of departure. The focus is on video work with participants, not on participants, which aims to highlight the complexity of not only the medium, but also the lives of the participants. Video work then allows for more intimate nuances of everyday life to be revealed.

There is the argument that images which take as their subject matter “social relationships” or social issues can succeed (Rosler 1992:325); however, the “cultural legitimacy” that documentary photography has been afforded should not be seen as a valid response to this argument (Rosler 1992:325). The arguments that documentary photography proposes to address become visual generalizations about “the condition of man” (Rosler 1992:325). This is problematic, as not all subjects of society write history; it is the few in power, the dominant class, that “selects and interprets events”

and people according to their “own successes”, and that see “history’s goal, its *telos*, as the triumph of that class” (Rosler 1992:327).

This is perhaps no more evident than in the erasure of sex workers from the South African archives, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three, both visually and narratively, respectively.

With an epistemological approach to photography, this is indeed the case; however, this study, which adopts phenomenology as one of the main methodologies, shows that it is indeed these power relations that are inherent and unseen, and which the study hopes to uncover and challenge, specifically with a challenge to ‘conventional’ filmic or photographic representations.

Contemporary discussions on narrative and representation demand a new approach to “truth and accuracy in representation” (Rosler 2004:209), an approach that is more inclusive of phenomenology and self-narration/authorship.

#### **4.3.1. Video as Sousveillance**

If documentary photography has a legacy connected to surveillance and control, it would be naïve to posit that video work can offer a radical alternative. Video work also has a very complex history as a vehicle of surveillance. Arguably, much of our current understanding of “institutional practices of surveillance” has been informed by “CCTV (closed-circuit television) surveillance” (Mann 2013:20). According to Mann, surveillance systems are often discussed in relation to the panopticon<sup>91</sup> described by Foucault (1995), which functions as system whereby self-observation instigates self-discipline (Mann 2013:19). The panopticon becomes a metaphor for how power,

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<sup>91</sup> “In Foucault’s panopticon, the watcher sees the body of the prisoner, but is not him or herself seen (Elmer 2003; Foucault 1995). A panoptic system is based on asymmetric gazing between guards and prisoners agents of the institution generally write, maintain, store and interpret the record or identity, and the subject of the gaze, from whom the system is generally kept opaque. So, the guards (metaphorical authoritarians) use their ability to ‘see-but-not-be-seen’ to observe and discipline people. This model suggests that we as citizens generally observe the rules of the authority in power because we fear repercussions: the punishment” (Mann 2013:20).

institutional power in particular, is applied and distributed “through the fear of being watched” (2013:19). Within the scope of this study, this again highlights the precarious periphery of visibility that sex workers have to negotiate.

They need to escape the gaze of and/or observation by the law, yet attract the notice of their clients. Such official observation is done through CCTV cameras in the city of Cape Town, or the physical interactions of and surveillance by and with Metro police, specifically the SSU.<sup>92</sup> Yet the state-sanctioned observation of sex workers goes beyond the everyday interactions they face. As a form of video or moving image, commercial and documentary film also plays a large role in how sex workers are portrayed. In ‘The Art of the possible: Making films on sex work migration and human trafficking’ (2016:182) Sine Plambech contends that fiction films and documentaries “increasingly bring sex work migration” to larger audiences.

She emphasizes that a growing margin of films is focusing on undocumented female sex workers, but she is quick to point out that:

These films often focus on women who have experienced a range of abusive conditions within the sex industry, experiences which are typically all labelled “trafficking” and narrated through the capture of innocents and their rescue. Other films claim that they provide never-before-seen insights into the criminal underworld as narrated by (the often crying) women themselves performing testimonial truths (Plambech 2016:182).

The genre of these films, according to Plambech, is usually a “generalized and sensationalized” production that highlights stereotypes of sex workers and reiterates “the women as victims” (2016:182).

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<sup>92</sup> “Strategic Surveillance Unit (SSU). The SSU monitors 560 cameras throughout Cape Town, 24 hours a day, and 7 days a week. The CCTV unit works closely with the Camera Response Unit and alerts its members when crime, traffic and by-law infractions, and fires are observed as well as supplying SAPS investigators with requested footage via a structured process” (Western Cape Government 2018).

Svati Shah (2016:182) states that there are five features in which sex workers are cast in these films:

- 1) The films refuse to consider sex work as a livelihood option;
- 2) They maintain an exclusive focus on women and children;
- 3) They have a narrative arc that begins by articulation of sex work as violence and end with scenes of rescue;
- 4) They conflate sex work with violence and/or trafficking;
- 5) They overlook any organizing efforts among sex workers

The correlation in terms of imbedded ideologies of stereotypes between documentary photography and video or filmic representations of sex workers is thus clear to see. Yet Plambech contends that we have to remember that documentaries on sex workers are not “documents of objective truths”, but they are rather performances of narration and communication processes (2016:183). She further states that not only should we be aware and critical of how sex work is represented on film, but also be cognisant of how these films are produced (2016:183). This study and the methodology it employs could possibly offer a more rounded representation of sex workers and their experiences.

Steve Mann suggests that changes in the way we look or observe (veillance) are strongly connected to changes in systems of power (Mann 2013:23), and it is by recognizing these changes in the way we observe (as viewers), or in the way we produce (as film makers), that we can, as Tagg points out, “also grasp the possibilities of resistance” (Tagg 1988:72).

It would thus be naïve and irresponsible to claim that all forms of veillance<sup>93</sup> are negative, as not all forms, as Mann contends are “institutionalized and overtly regulated” (2013:33). It can be argued that the technology, similar to the camera, is

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<sup>93</sup> Steve Mann states that; “Veillance is a broad concept that includes both surveillance (oversight) and sousveillance (undersight), as well as dataveillance, uberveillance, etc.. It follows that: (1) sousveillance (undersight) is necessary to a healthy, fair, and balanced society whenever surveillance (oversight) is already being used; and (2) sousveillance has numerous moral, ethical, socioeconomic, humanistic/humanitarian, and practical justifications that will guarantee its widespread adoption, despite opposing sociopolitical forces (2009:1).

not ontologically hierarchal, but the power it yields comes in its application. Thus, as in the case of documentary photography, the question has to be asked here as well: Who is doing the talking, and who is narrating? Mann, referencing Haggerty and Ericson (2000), states that hegemonic discourse in contemporary culture “tends to prioritize one form of veillance (surveillance in particular) over .... sousveillance – which tends to be more rhizomatic<sup>94</sup>” (2013:33).

The methodological approach adopted in this study, i.e. walking with participants and the use of Go-Pro cameras, is an attempt at video work as a form of sousveillance. The act of looking thus moves away from the “eye in the sky” approach to rather employing a method where observation is brought down to a human level. As Mann explains: “Sousveillance means ‘watching from below’, and its etymology derives from replacing ‘sur’ (over) with ‘sous’, which means ‘under’ or ‘below’ or ‘from below’ (as in words like ‘sous-chef’)” (Mann 2013:19). The study thus aims to renegotiate how we use existing technologies that are already imbedded in existing visual tropes, whilst also being critical of how we use them. This criticism allows for the exploration of political power inherent in sousveillance, and in the approach to research in this study the focus is on agency, with the emphasis on the recording “by a participant in the activity” (Mann 2013:19).

Returning to Foucault’s concept of the panopticon, the wearable technology of a Go-Pro camera and the resulting video effect as seen in Figure 16: *Guilam’s view* (2018) allows the wearer of the technology (Guilam) to, in effect, return the gaze of the viewer.

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<sup>94</sup>Jesse Bazull & Shakhonoza Kayumova states that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri’s concept of the rhizome, refers to “non-hierarchical forms of organization that makes connections horizontally rather than linear” (2016:293)



Figure 16: *Guilam's view* (2018). Screen shot by author.

As can be seen, throughout the video, the people that come across Guilam's way as we were walking were being recorded, and this is a particularly powerful form of political commentary for sex workers. This specific image (Figure 16) is when Guilam is talking about some of the dangers sex workers face in their daily lives, this is also the area called 'die baan' where she does most of her work. Sex workers livelihood is dependent on constant surveillance from potential clients, but this visibility also leaves them open to surveillance from police and consequently the law. However, as Mann states "We are entering an age where people can and will not only look back, but in doing so potentially drive social and political change" (2013:24). There is a fundamental difference between surveillance and sousveillance in that the power dynamic between the gaze of the observer and the subject of observation is destabilised. As can be seen in the video piece produced (Figure 11) Guilam is in fact now the gazer – her surroundings and the people that interact in her everyday space, become the surveyed. The use of Go-pro technology allowed for this 'return of the gaze' to happen in a natural and unobtrusive way. The only indication that any filming was happening was the 'chesties' the participants wore, thus they could go about their day and walk their usual routes without drawing unnecessary attention to them.

This “looking back” (Mann 2013:24) is linked to using the available technology (video) in innovative ways, which can possibly be of use to sex workers in destabilising prevailing stereotypes and myths about their everyday lives – and in doing that, allow for a space to have new conversations about the precarity they face on a daily basis.

#### **4.4 Participatory Action Research (PAR) as Challenge to traditional collaborative research methodologies.**

The value of PAR as a research methodology for this study is particular importance, since the study was a collaboration between myself as researcher and sex workers as participants. Furthermore, the technicality of the use of Go-Pro technology spoke to, and necessitated, a form of PAR; the act of walking with participants in their everyday environments whilst they recount experiences and memories becomes a shared corporeal experience. One should also consider the medium of the Go-Pro camera and the walking with participants as a broader attempt to challenge conventional filmic traditions. As this study is a phenomenological inquiry, an emphasis must be placed upon PAR. Furthermore, Greenhalgh and Taylor (1997:740) contend that researchers who employ qualitative research seek “to study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them”.

In *An urban tour: The sensory sociality of ethnographic place-making* (2009), Sarah Pink suggests that through photographing, audio- and video-recording, a shared walking, drinking and shared imagining with participants, the researcher starts to share an embodied experience with those being researched. Doing so allows for the researcher to better “comprehend the places she or he seeks to analyse” (Pink 2009:175). This approach to research is not new, but it is gaining popularity as researchers are seeking more inclusive ways to analyse the “human practice of everyday life, performance and imagination” as this method serves to expose how these practices are implicated in not only the “material and sensory realities” but also a “phenomenological sense of place” (Pink 2009:178).

As will be shown in the following sections, by engaging in forms of PAR with participants I as researcher and arguably the viewer of the resulting video are allowed

a view of the city and of places that gain new meaning because of the experiences and narrative accounts of the sex workers.

#### 4.4.1 Participatory Action Research

Cathy McDonald contends that PAR is considered a “qualitative research methodology” that is distinctly different from other qualitative methods (2012:34). The main difference is that PAR aims to focus on the qualitative “features of an individual’s feelings, views, and patterns” (McDonald 2012:34). It is hoped that, through using PAR, the views of participants are revealed without “manipulation or control” from the researcher (McDonald 2012:34).

Throughout this study the participants had full control over what was being shown to the viewer; the fact that we never get to see the participants but only see the surrounding landscape and streets from their perspective is a feature of this (PAR) methodology. As can be seen in Figure 17: *Woodstock harbour view* (2018), the participants wore Go-Pro cameras on the front of their chests; as such they had a large degree of control about what the viewer will eventually see.



Figure 17: *Woodstock Harbour view*. (2018). Image by author.

Hence, they are actively engaging in and performing a kind of sousveillance, insofar as they are doing the gazing on their surroundings and the people that are in it. Thus, the participants are “active in making informed decisions throughout all aspects of the research process” (McDonald 2012:34).

This form of research method places the focus on human experience, but also focuses on the meaning individuals ascribe to the experience. This once again highlights the value of autobiography for, as Wuest argues, “there is no single, objective reality, there are multiple realities based on subjective experience and circumstance” (1995:30). To highlight these realities is indeed a form of co-production in research approaches; these happen between academic and non-academic partners, as was the case in this study. These co-productions endeavour to “produce both practical and academic knowledge” (Darby 2016:230).

As researcher I gained valuable academic information into how PAR can be effectively used as collaborative research method, but practically I also encountered new revelations about Woodstock, the city and the everyday experiences that sex workers negotiate. As Darby (2016:230) posits, collaboration should not be mistaken for a technique; it is an approach that “frames knowledge production as a process” where the emphasis is on the mutual interest shared by researcher and participant in that which is being studied. In this sense, PAR is a challenge to traditional power hierarchies; it favours a phenomenological approach rather than (detached) academic knowledge. The time spent with the sex workers participating in this study facilitated a process whereby qualitative data became a discourse of knowledge around previously unknown associations with spaces and places, and life experiences.

#### **4.4.2 PAR, Visuality and Video Work**

At the start of this study in 2015 my initial interest was in interrogating the spaces and places that sex workers frequented to uncover a rhizomatic interconnectedness in Woodstock between the general public and sex workers. Yet in the process of developing the study, my interest shifted to the lived experiences of the participants within these spaces. As such, my theoretical approach shifted to a phenomenological

study of sex workers' subjectivity, autobiographical narration and the use of video technology to offer counter-narratives in public discourses permeated with stereotypes and biased information.

Initially participants were given disposable cameras to document their lives for two weeks, with the motivation that they should photograph aspects of their lives that the public do not encounter. This resulted in a photo-voice project that started the initial process of participatory research.

Plambech alludes to the fact that in her own research for her film *Becky's journey* (2015)<sup>95</sup> she also used this method;

I distributed disposable cameras to the women that I could not visit. Furthermore, I realised some of the benefits of this type of "in-house ethnography". Over time I came to spend many hours with the women as they "hung out" at my place, instead of me "hanging out" at their places. In my apartment there were no family members to listen to our conversations or daily chores to take care of (2016:184).

This is indeed not a new approach to research, yet it did pave the way for the establishing of trust between myself and the participants. Very intimate details were shown in the images, for instance Figure 18: *Frida's room* (2016). The image depicts Frida's bedroom in her house that she shares with her son and her daughter. Upon the resulting 'show and tell' sessions that followed, she elaborated on the fact that she wished to show the public that she is a responsible mother who created a safe environment for herself and her two children, an environment that she can afford and maintain through sex work. Frida's reasoning for taking such a private image led me to ponder if there is not a more effective way to show the everyday lives of these

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<sup>95</sup> "Shot in Benin City, Nigeria, *Becky's Journey* is about Becky, a 26-year-old Nigerian woman, who feels stuck in Nigeria after two failed attempts to go to Europe. The film is based on a series of interviews conducted in an apartment in the centre of Benin City and intercut partly with sequences of everyday life where viewers sense the feelings of limbo and immobility that permeate Becky's life" (Plambech 2016:184).

individuals, for as I have highlighted, a photograph is limited in its ability to narrate or convey an experience.



Figure 18: *Frida's room* (2016). Photograph by Frida.

Considering this, the use of Go-pro technology offered a departure from traditional photo-voice projects. Indisputable as the value of the method (photo-voice) photography is, Sontag contends that “images that do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire” (Sontag 1977:4).

The incorporation of Go-Pro cameras to record the environments and interviews with participants on our walks, paved the way for the inclusion of a new theoretical dimension, post-phenomenology. Rosenberg and Verbeek (2015:12) contend that the classical analysis of phenomenology and technology position technology as an instrument that alienates “human beings from themselves and from the world they live in”. In contrast to this, post-phenomenology aims to synthesise science and

technology to enhance an understanding of humans in their world (Rosenberger & Verbeek 2015:12). In contrast to classic phenomenology, post-phenomenology does not aim to “describe the world”, but rather seeks a deeper understanding of the “relations between human beings and their world” (Rosenberger & Verbeek 2015:12). As Rosenberger and Verbeek (2015:9) contend:

All of these post phenomenological studies have at least two things in common. First of all, they study technology in terms of the relations between human beings and technological artefacts, focusing on the various ways in which technologies help to shape relations between human beings and the world. They do not approach technologies as merely functional and instrumental objects, but as mediators of human experiences and practices. And second, they combine philosophical analysis with empirical investigation. Rather than ‘applying’ philosophical theories to technologies, the post-phenomenological approach takes actual technologies and technological developments as a starting point for philosophical analysis.

Considering the use of Go-Pro technology as a form of sousveillance and the emphasis that post-phenomenology places on “human experiences and practices” (Rosenberger & Verbeek 2015:9), it is important to make reference to post-phenomenology as a theoretical framework. If gaining empirical knowledge on sex workers were the main impetus behind this study, more conventional video applications could arguably have been quite successful. However, the use of Go-Pro technology and the synthesis it created between participants and the process of observation and narration allowed for a much more intimate experience to unfold when viewing the video. Arguably, participants are more relaxed as there is not a camera focused on them, whilst the viewers get the chance to experience a more embodied gaze, as they are privy to the point of view of the participants. The viewer gets the experience of walking with the participants, as the viewer asserts a gaze from the position of the body of the participants. The finer nuances of participants’ personalities are experienced through inclination in voice, hand gestures and the rhythm and pace of walking. Guilam for instance uses elegant slow hand movements and talk in calm controlled voice, whereas Lee is a lot more energetic, shaking matches or smoking and talks at a fast rapid pace. The fact that we spent a lot of time walking together

allowed for mutual trust to be built up, and participants became a lot more relaxed as the process continued.

#### 4.4.3 PAR and the Research Process of this Study

Plambech, when discussing her film *Becky's Journey* (2015), contends that anthropological research is aimed at structural “levels of analysis” that are conducted through observation or interviews, whereas films generally leave “less room for explicit historical and cultural analysis” when trying to convey human experience in order to “construct forms of knowledge” (Plambech 2016:183). However, in this study I wanted to incorporate precisely and highlight the finer nuances of each participant’s experiences, thereby drawing attention to the specific “cultural and historical analysis” of their (Plambech 2016:183) experiences and subjectivity.

The value of this method is illustrated in the following extract from the interview with Lee as depicted below in Figure 19: *Lee at the bridge* (2018):



Figure 19: *Lee at the bridge* (2018). Screen shot by author.

*Lee: As you can see the bridge was closed up hey? (hums to herself). See there's a hole and there's a hole.*

*Me: So what happens here? What kind of activity?*

*Lee: I just come to do business there, well I used to stay there, that's like two years ago. So my family, they were out of town and they rented the house out, I was going through a rough patch and I stayed here for about 4 months until I got arrested for trespassing and then when I came out I left and didn't come back.* <sup>96</sup>

(Personal Interview with Lee. 2016. 1:01:06 – 1:01:43)

When one reads this part of the interview, or when one looks at Figure 13, two things are likely to occur. Firstly, one has a response to the written portion of the interview, when one reads and responds to Lee's words transcribed by me as researcher. Secondly, when one looks at Figure 19: *Lee at the bridge* (2018) one perhaps imagines what she sounds like, imagines what the environment sounds like and so forth. However, when one looks at the video, when one sees from her perspective, hears her voice, walks with her through a particular landscape at her pace, a very different story starts to emerge.

For the first time in the video (Figure 19) Lee is quiet and starts to talk more softly as we approach the bridge;<sup>97</sup> she actually starts to hum to herself, almost like a lullaby. From the interview and video it becomes clear that this place that Lee has brought us to has deep significance, perhaps representing trauma, to her. It is because of the utilisation of PAR as a research method combined with Go-Pro technology as a form of sousveillance that these finer nuances of expression and emotion are revealed. PAR as a method of "qualitative research reflects the values of subjectivity, individualism, holism, relativism, and interpretation" (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995 cited in McDonald 2012:40), and as such, Lee's embodiment of the experience of revisiting this place is highlighted and made manifest.

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<sup>96</sup> The two holes Lee is referring to are under the bridge connecting Woodstock and Salt River. The bridge is hollow on the inside and homeless people have broken through parts in the wall to access the inside cavity. It is still regularly frequented by the homeless and sex workers.

<sup>97</sup> The bridge is the bridge connection Salt River and Woodstock in Cape Town.

This form of research is akin to photo-voice projects,<sup>98</sup> where researchers gain access to the world and viewpoint of participants who have probably not had control over the imaging of their personal worlds for public viewing. Yet the definite break with photo-voice is important, not only in relaying a different point of view, shown by the agency acquired through the use of the Go-Pro technology, but also for me as researcher and mutual participant in the study.

It was only by walking with Lee and seeing her reactions, her change in body language, that I could truly grasp the importance the place held for Lee. It was only by walking with her that, “as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place” (Feld & Basso 1996:91).

However, this approach also has value for the viewer of the film/video. As Pink notes: “Filmic representations of other people’s experiences ... can invoke in us responses that can empathetically comprehend the embodied experiences of those represented” (2008:248). Although it would be naïve to think or assume that viewing the film can substitute for the actual fact of being there, using Go-Pro technology and the phenomenological research method of ‘walking with’ can possibly “bring us closer to understanding how other people perceive their multisensory environments, constitute place through everyday practice and ‘live in their bodies’” (Pink 2008:246). Furthermore, the use of this technology also allows for a new form of anthropological understanding of everyday lives. In Figure 20: *Guilam’s mirrors* (2018) the viewer can see Guilam’s reflection in a shop window.

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<sup>98</sup> According to Wang (1999:185), “Photo voice is an innovative participatory action research (PAR) method based on ... non-traditional approaches to documentary photography”. Participants are given cameras to document aspects of their lives and use photography to ‘speak’ and narrate their lives.



Figure 20: *Guilam's mirrors* (2018). Screen shot by author.

In the video Guilam states:

*These are our mirrors, this is our mirrors ... we want to look beautiful, with a little bit of make-up and thingies and thingies.*

(Personal Interview with Guilam. 2016. 08:35 – 08:45).

Guilam is telling the viewer about how she interacts in a public place, essentially performing private rituals such as putting on make-up and observing herself as one would do in the privacy of one's own home before going out; this also destabilises the actual public space that is the city. In this regard, this form of research (PAR) also becomes another way in which a shared corporeal experience between researcher and subject is established. As researcher, I am allowed into a space where Guilam is giving a narrative account of her personal experiences in front of a shop window that – for me as researcher, and arguably for the viewer of the video – will now hold multiple meanings, such as Canterbury street, which Guilam calls 'die baan', the Bisquit Mill, Woodstock train station and the bridge between Salt River and Woodstock to name a few.

The use of this methodology also extends to allowing viewers to experience situations and places where they would not normally venture, thereby aiding in destabilising myths and narratives surrounding sex workers everyday lives. For example, in Figure 21: *Guilam's Quickie* (2018), Guilam shows one of the spaces that she frequents with her clients



Figure 21: *Guilam's Quickie* (2018). Screen shot by author.

This place is in fact just behind CPUT (Cape Peninsula University of Technology). As she explains:

*Guilam: And this is a place where most sex workers, even our trans sex workers come, because why, it's a place where we can go just for a quickie, cause some clients don't have cars, some stay in our community and they have a wife and a husband, the wives don't know so they do not want to be caught seen and this is a hide out where we actually take them.*

*You see this is where we do sometimes quickies...*

*HALLO! (Guilam is startled)*

*Unknown person: Hi.*

*I'm good; oh, you just gave me a fright...*

(Personal Interview with Guilam. 2016. 11:45-12:19)

What transpires in this moment is that Guilam takes me into a very private space where she regularly engages in ‘quickies’ with her clients; later on in the video (Figure 21) she states that:

*There is also a lot of safety around these places, like security is 24/7. So, if a client try to abuse you, or client tries to take his money back or rob you, it's not easy for him cause all you have to do is scream. Because why the security will run and at the end of the day you build a relationship with them.*

(Personal Interview with Guilam. 2016. 12:21 – 12:42).

The value of PAR and Go-Pro technology is emphasised in this part of the video. Guilam speaks of safety and security, yet when viewing her body language, another narrative is shown. When she is startled by the unexpected person in the bushes, you can see her stop completely and get a fright. From there on Guilam, like Lee in Figure 19, talks more softly and is more constrained. If these nuances were to be only written accounts, the actual emotions experienced would not have been conveyed as they are with the use of Go-Pro and the post-phenomenological use of technology.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The synthesis of technology and human experience, or the recording and archiving of experiences alluded to by Rosenberger and Verbeek (2015:9), is apparent in these excerpts from the video interviews conducted with participants. Van der Wal contends that a moving image can complicate and depart from the very idea of ‘fixity’ and destabilise ideas of subjectivity as permanent and stable (2017:13). Instead he posits that moving images can rather “create a space for escape and withdrawal, a place where the body does not need to stay put” (2017:13)

It must be admitted that the aim of this study was adjusted through the process of interaction (PAR) with participants. By applying the methodology of ‘walking with’ (Pink 2007) and the use of Go-Pro technology as a form of sousveillance, I would venture to state that, firstly, when watching the interviews, a space is created for viewers to realise that sex workers are not fixed entities embroiled in abject historical and contemporary discourses of bias and stereotypes. They are much more than media

images of an Other; in fact, they are mothers, brothers, sisters, daughters and sons whose identities extend far beyond that of a sex worker. Secondly, for me as researcher, a space is potentially created to affectively experience the embodied memories and emotions of the participants, while actively participating in creating new and shared memories.

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## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

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In the initial stages of conceptualizing this study, the main emphasis was, as mentioned earlier, to interrogate the spaces and places that sex workers frequented, and that held meaning for them. However, upon reflection, it was in the initial stages of the photo-voice project mentioned in Chapter Four that the study took a different trajectory and the main emphasis turned to narration and agency.

In “Indifferent Boundaries” (1996:13), Kathleen Kirby contends:

Speaking of the social effect of different kinds of bodies leads us to another “space” in which the subject could be located: the abstract but mappable space of discursive terrains. Words, which exist only as intangible, one-dimensional temporal strings, manage, in our culture, to divide up and constitute conceptual and social space.

Chapter Two provided an in-depth historical overview of the history and documentation of sex work in South Africa. Attention was specifically given to the exclusion in the state archives, as well as to a visual history of documentation. The investigation of these historical accounts of sex workers is invaluable to this study as the current precarious position of sex workers in terms of legislation and judicial protection is arguably informed by historic discourses.

Kirby points out that “We are determined by the place we’re in, not vice versa. Subjectivity is framed in opposition to a political move on the part of the hegemonic system” (1996:21). In terms of this study, much research has gone into the role that sex workers have played in society by Oppenheimer (2014), van Niekerk (2005) and Gaum (2003), to name but a few. However, in the light of Kirby’s statement, the state archival records paint a very biased and stereotyped image of sex workers, as is shown in Figure 1: *Lock Hospital* (1899) and Figure 2: *Wakool 1* (1906).

Considering this, the site of Woodstock accordingly became of particular interest, as it is rich in counter-narratives and alternative voices, as alluded to in section 2.2.

However, Woodstock is also a place frequented by sex workers both presently and historically, as Gavin explains in Figure 4: *Woodstock history* (2018).

I wanted to explore this area because I was familiar with Woodstock, as my subjectivity as a White female is never really contested in these spaces; yet the subjectivity of sex workers is contested at arguably every point in the public sphere, especially in Woodstock, as it is a known hub of activity for sex workers, but it is also a politically charged location, as there are continuous efforts to gentrify the area.<sup>99</sup> As such, the area is in a state of flux resulting in a tension regarding public and private spaces. The area of Woodstock as a site for this study thus became interesting not only for its historical association with sex workers, but also because of the socio-political constriction that is currently palatable in its sites and citizens. As such this site (Woodstock) that sex workers navigate is worthy of investigation, as subjectivity is likely to originate from the point where identity becomes contested. As the area is in transition and renewal, it allowed for an interesting canvas on which to start exploring previously undocumented experiences and narratives by street-based sex workers, whose identities and performativity<sup>100</sup> are arguably also in flux.

Chapter Three investigated the importance of narrative agency, particularly autobiographical agency in relation to what Butler alludes to in “Giving an account of oneself” (Butler 2005:5). Chapter Two reported on extensive research on the state-archived history of sex work, Chapter Three shifted the emphasis to the importance of having the ability to give a personal account of experience and as such it started to address questions relating to the lack of autobiographical narrative accounts by sex workers themselves. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the value of the

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<sup>99</sup> South Africa is currently facing increasingly challenging dilemmas following the increase in migration, and even more so, spatial integration (Flemming, 2011:3). The Housing Act of 1997 indicated a need for more interspersed “urban planning” as a means for achieving “sustainable and integrated development” (Flemming 2011:3).

<sup>100</sup> In *Bodies that matter* Butler notes that “There is a tendency to think that sexuality is either constructed or determined, to think that if it is constructed, it is in some sense free, and if it is determined, it is in some sense fixed. These oppositions do not describe the complexity of what is at stake in any effort to take account of the conditions under which sex and sexuality are assumed. The ‘performative’ dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms” (1993:59). Investigating the site of Woodstock with the sex workers contested and destabilised these “reiterations of the norm”.

methodological approach employed in this study, namely “walking with video” as proposed by Pink (2007). This methodology became intrinsic to the success of the study, as the aim shifted away from interrogating the spaces that sex workers frequented, and towards an emphasis on a shared corporeal experience that was shared by both researcher and participant. This gave space to recognise the responsibility when asked by another, to notice and accept the responsibility one has as both one who answers, and one who calls another to give a narrative account of oneself/themselves, and thereby become a reflexive being before the Other (Ong-Van-Cung 2011:2).

The chapter also places great emphasis on the potency of language in determining a subject’s social positioning and standing, and in this respect particular attention is given to Butler’s theories in *Excitable Speech* (1997) on injurious speech. Butler refers to “illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts” (1997:3), which in our daily lives highlight that language is inseparable from our existence; it determines our position in society and also our position in social networks.

As sex work is currently still illegal and criminalised in South Africa, the discursive and physical bodies of sex workers are kept in the sphere of the villainous, which is as Butler contends subject to “injurious speech” (1997:3). The embodiment and materiality of sex workers’ bodies are thus subject to linguistic and discursive narratives bound to them by public discourse written *about* them. It is these very discursive constructs that Chapter Three aimed to destabilize with the inclusion of personal accounts and narratives of the interviews with participants through a post-phenomenological lens, where the qualitative data gathered were based on personal experience and memories to start to offer counter-narratives to hegemonic public and state discourses on sex workers.

Whereas Chapter Three positioned the bias towards sex workers in the sphere of linguistics, Chapter Four investigates the genre of documentary photography and then positions an integration of sousveillance and Go-Pro technology as a possible counter to the obstacles of documentary photography. It is in this chapter that the actual value and methodological approach to this research is highlighted.

Recognition is given to artists and curators who are currently attempting to use, and recognize, the limitations of the genre of photography as vessel for truth and expression, such as *interseXion - the art of advocacy* (2015) by Robert Hamblin and the 2016 group exhibition entitled “Sex” by curator Lerato Bereng, which featured work by Steven Cohen, FAKA and Nicholas Hlobo to name but a few. The emphasis is, however, placed on photography as a form of traditional surveillance, especially as the study is also dealing with the still ‘criminalised bodies’ of sex workers.

It is at this point that the study implements a partly post-phenomenological approach. In Chapter Three the emphasis was on the importance of autobiographical narration; Chapter Four answers the initial question posed in the introduction: How do we use the technology available to us to conduct more egalitarian research with/on an “other”? The chapter is structured to utilise the concepts theorised by McDonald, who posits that participatory action research (PAR) aims to focus on the qualitative “features of an individual’s feelings, views and patterns” (McDonald 2012:34). The methodological framework of PAR is operationalised by the incorporation of Go-Pro technology. As Rosenberg and Verbeek contend (2015:12), this technology allows us to avoid alienating human subjects from technology, but instead to look at the possibility that this synthesis of science and technology can aid in gaining an understanding of humans in their world. Chapter Four thus draws attention to the possible disruption that the post-phenomenological use of technology, when combined with autobiographical accounts and narratives, can bring to destabilising hegemonic discourses that permeate the South African media and state archives.

As Pink contends: “Filmic representations of other people’s experiences ... can invoke in us responses that can empathetically comprehend the embodied experiences of those represented” (2008:248). It was/is indeed the aim of this study to uncover, experience and understand the spaces, places (interior and exterior) that sex workers inhabit and live through.

I have concluded and admit that my research initially was voyeuristic; it would be naïve to posit that it was anything else, as my personal cultural capital is vastly removed from that of Lee, Guilam, Gavin, Frida and Monique. I will also have to admit that when I started this research I was under the impression that I knew more than I would be

taught. In my mind, I had conducted historical research into sex work and I was also acutely aware of the bias that they face as precarious individuals in South African society, and I assumed that this would be enough for me to conduct an informed study.

What I did not realise was that I would become part of the study, that my own embodied experiences with participants would inform, challenge and radically change my initial methodological approach to the research. I was no longer interested in recording narratives, rather I became interested in how mutual experiences could foster some sense of respect, acknowledgement and trust that was allowed me as a researcher to enter the public but also very private spaces that the participants occupied and moved through. Upon reflection, I believe this study to be an 'experiment in collaboration' (and I use this term as I acknowledge my own complicity in the event) that endeavours to move beyond the 'normalisation' of sex workers, but to rather acknowledge and celebrate them as individuals. Through using the methodology of 'walking with' Gavin, Lee and Guilam, this study became a collaborative process of creating a new body of knowledge that can offer a more rounded representation of sex workers everyday lives, identities and experiences.

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