

Migration, Gender and Urbanisation in Johannesburg



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by

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Declaration

Student Number: 3660-906-4

I declare that *Migration, Gender and Urbanisation in Johannesburg* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

CAROLINE W. KIHATO

DATE

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Home and home

There is Home with a big, capital 'H' which is where I come from. And there is home ... small 'h' ... where I am living here in Johannesburg. The two are different; they are both my homes, but one is more of my 'Home' than the other ... Does that make sense?

– Migrant woman from Uganda



Summary

This thesis interrogates the dynamics of urbanisation, gender and migration in contemporary Johannesburg through the voices and images of migrant women from the rest of the African continent, now living in Johannesburg. By revealing the lives of a population group that is often hidden from view, it provides details of women's migration to Johannesburg, and their everyday encounters in the host city. Using these experiences, it sheds light on contemporary migration and urbanisation processes on the continent, expanding our knowledge of the contours of power that shape urban life in Johannesburg and elsewhere.

Using the metaphor of the "border" or "borderlands" this thesis explores how women negotiate, cross and remain "in between" the multiple physical, social and imagined borders they encounter in the city. It finds that analyses that read the city through class relationships and capital accumulation do not give adequate weight to the multiple identities and forms of solidarity that exist in cities. Women's narratives reveal that while their class is an important identity, other identities such as ethnicity, nationality and gender also powerfully shape solidarity and modes of belonging in the city. Moreover, state-centric governance frameworks that have dominated urban policy and scholarly work on the continent are often blinded to the ways in which urban dweller's actions shift our understanding of the nature and character of state power. Women's encounters with the state reveal the multiple regimes of power that constitute the city, and the ways in which these subvert, fragment, and yet at times reinforce state power in unpredictable ways.

The epistemological approach and findings of this research bring to the fore broader questions around the paradigmatic lenses used to read, interpret and understand African cities. Dominant paradigms tend to draw on western models of cities in ways that undermine African cities' empirical realities and theoretical potential. For as long as scholars and policy makers fail to see African urbanity in its own terms rather than in relation to how cities elsewhere have evolved, we will continue to miss critical socio-political and economic dynamics that are shaping urbanisation in the twenty first century.

Key terms:

African Urban Paradigms, Borderlands, Everyday Sociology, Feminism, Gender, Home, Liminality, Migration, Power, Urban Governance, Urban Sociology, Urbanisation, Visual Methodologies



A Prelude

It has taken me 37 years to say this: *I am an urban African woman*. I was born in Nairobi, and my way of seeing and understanding the world is shaped by my experiences in the city of my birth and in Johannesburg, the city that I adopted later on in my life. My acknowledgment does not deny how my rural ancestry shapes my understanding of the world.

I belong to and straddle multiple worlds: rural/urban; Nairobi/Johannesburg; local/global. For first generation urbanites on the African continent, growing up in a city, or embracing an urban identity, is often considered shameful. Urbanity is a “lesser than” state. Those born and bred in the cities are accused of lacking morals and losing traditional values. Indeed, they are a lost generation without the wisdom or mores that come with being rooted in rural areas.

Growing up, I remember numerous uncles or aunties asking “Where do you come from?” The scene was typically a gathering in a backyard in one of the housing estates in Nairobi. In between political discussions over beer, sodas and meat, one of the adults would ask a child hovering around the proverbial “Where do you come from?” question. Instantaneously, other discussions would suddenly halt as all attention diverted to the child – as if the very essence of their existence was hanging on the thread of the child’s response.

From very early on I began to perceive this as a trick question. I learnt that depending on how much attention I required from the adults, I could manipulate the conversation and get what I wanted. In those few seconds where I held everybody’s attention, I had number of choices:

“Muramati!” was the “correct” answer and would solicit claps and words of praise. One of the uncles would exclaim, “What a clever girl, mom you must give her another Fanta!” My parents would beam because this was as much a test for them as it was for me. The answer to the question provided an indication of the success or failure of their parenting skills.

“Ihururu!” would be my next option. This response would raise some confusion and a few eyebrows. Those who did not know my parents well, (that is, know where they came from) would wait to hear whether this indeed was the correct answer. “No, that is where your mummy grew up,” a close aunt would say.

I happened to like the place my mother grew up, so why couldn't I come from there? While I loved my paternal grandparents dearly and had a huge fascination for Kikuyu traditional family structure (my grandfather lived with all his four wives, and he died when he was over a hundred years. This made him my hero), Muramati was not a very interesting place to me. It is a semi-desert with not much appeal to a young urbanite. On the other hand I had fun memories of climbing plum and peach trees, milking cows, picking tea and growing cabbages in Ihururu. True, I enjoyed jumping into the crystal clear waters from the melted snow of Mount Kenya in Muramati, but if I had to come from a village, it would be Ihururu. Seemingly the answer to the question was, however, not a matter of my preference, any more than it was tied to where I was born and bred. I lived in a patriarchal society and I assumed my paternal home, Muramati, until I married. These facts would be patiently explained by one of the adults and, once understood, I could get a Fanta.

It was the third answer that would solicit the most interesting dialogue.

“Nairobi!” would be met with disapproving, pained looks that seemed to say, “The poor child has lost her roots.” My parents would be mortified. “Nobody comes from Nairobi” an aunty would say pityingly. “Where does Cucu¹ Wanjiku stay?” my mother would ask, trying to salvage her reputation as a good mother, something now seriously in question. If I wanted to be difficult and not give in too easily I would say: “But you asked where I come from. I do not stay with Cucu, I was not born there, so how can I come from there?” “The children of these days do not know their roots,” exclaims one of the neighbours. “It is a very serious problem. You need to send them there for three months during the holidays, that is what we do with ours.” Knowing words of advice from a parent who understands the problems with the youth of today. I would then be forgotten as a long discussion around how difficult it was to bring up children in the city ensued, and numerous remedies for rooting them to their “real home” were shared.

These discussions and debates fascinated me, and I would sit silently listening to my parents' generation grappling with notions of identity and belonging. Being pioneer migrants from rural Kenya to the city, they have a huge burden of sustaining traditional values and culture. They also carry with them the guilt of not having done a good enough job transferring these to their urban children.

.....
1 Kikuyu word for grandmother.

Once I had had enough of the conversation and wanted my Fanta I would shout “Muramati!” – indulging all in what I understood as communal deception, where the correct answer was, as I saw it, the wrong one. There would be a palpable sigh of collective relief, the adults’ guilt appeased, at least temporarily. “All will be well with you,” a greying uncle would whisper, “All is well with us.”

With the advantage of hindsight I think that the question “Where are you from?” was aimed at the adult audience as much as it was directed at their children. It is a question on belonging, place and identity that pioneer migrants often ask themselves, rooted as they are in both rural and urban worlds. Our responses (as children) would affirm or reject *their own* sense of belonging as much as it would ours as first generation urbanites.

Decades later, having migrated to Johannesburg for 14 years, I come face to face with some of the dilemmas my parents’ generation face: the contradictory, even paradoxical, notions of belonging and dislocation, rootedness and uprootedness in this South African metropolis. For those born and brought up in cities, this is further complicated by an unease about urban life. So while my parents’ generation grapple with understanding their multiple class, traditional/modern, rural/urban identities, having grown up as peasants in rural Kenya and adopted the lifestyle of middle class urban dwellers, I struggle with my own, straddling as I do national, rural/urban, global/local and class boundaries.

As first generation city dwellers our urban identity is consistently undermined in favour of a romanticised rural one. It does not matter whether you were born in a city, took your first steps or uttered your first words there. It is not important that your first school experience was in a city, or that your first friendships were forged there. It is of no consequence that it is where everyday human experiences of hunger, desire, contentment, sorrow and laughter are felt. Indeed, it does not matter that the city is the site of the construction of humanity. It is as if the lives of two generations of post-colonial urban dwellers disappear in this apparent hatred of things urban. This denigration of life, meaning and identity in African cities undermines our conceptions of who we are. In this discourse cities are conceptualised by *what they are not* or *what they ought to be* in ways that are deleterious to their theoretical and empirical foundations. Whether it is against rural life, or life in the “real” cities in the West, life in African cities always measures unfavourably. It is these complexities that embody and shape contemporary African urban subjectivities on the continent.

Chapter 1

Liminal lives: Migrant women in Johannesburg



Introduction

African cities are a conundrum. African urban experiences defy easy characterisation. Cities are at once spaces of opportunity and abject poverty; connectivity to global circuits of people, goods and ideas, yet simultaneously contain spaces of marginalisation; cities are places of hope and creativity and at the same time despair and despondency; they are the harbingers of democracy yet sites where some of the most violent abuses of human rights have taken place. Urban life in Africa often means straddling multiple worlds – the global and local, modern and “traditional”, urban and rural and even roots in numerous countries. Indeed, African cities are complex. They shape and are shaped by layers of history, culture and ideology, making a simplistic rendition of them impossible, if not inaccurate. Women migrants’ lives exemplify these complexities and tensions. Not only are they caught between global and local circuits, but are also, through their movement and ambition, continuously renegotiating patriarchy, livelihoods, moral and cultural norms, and ways of belonging². These tensions infuse almost all aspects of their lives, creating a way of being that, it will be argued, can best be described as liminal.

This thesis explores the nexus of gender, migration and urbanisation in the contemporary African context. Broadly, it seeks to understand how women from the rest of the African continent experience migration to Johannesburg in post-apartheid South Africa. It reveals migrant women’s urban experiences against the background of changing socio-political and economic contexts in their own countries, South Africa’s democratisation and growing post-apartheid nationalist discourses. It explores the ways in which migrant women from the African continent negotiate, navigate and shape the multiple socio-cultural and economic spaces they encounter in Johannesburg. Using gender and mobility as points of departure, this study expands our understanding of how women’s mobility shapes the social and spatial structures of the city. By focussing on their journeys to Johannesburg, notions of home and belonging, economic activities, self-representations and spatial practices,

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2 The notion of “belonging” connotes not just ways in which migrant women “root” in a place, but also the ways in which they position themselves as separate or not belonging to South Africa. This, too, is a way of belonging that I explore.

it reveals how women reconfigure urban space and, in doing so, transform our understanding of power and modes of belonging in the city.

Urban governance has a tendency to construct African cities as problematic spaces in which inequality, poverty, poor service delivery, crime and weak governance institutions conspire to create difficult living conditions for residents (see Tostensen, et al, 2001; Healey et al, 1995; Stren and White, 1989). While these analyses of the city are important, they tend to understand cities through institutional frameworks and the agendas of states, international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The interpretations, schemas and desires of city dwellers remain absent as those of planners and policy-makers define the normative visions for the city. Similarly, urban sociologists have long emphasised the importance of capital in configuring the character of urban social, spatial and class relationships (Castells, 1977; Harvey 1973), with little emphasis placed on how urban dwellers work within these structural forces to produce urban space. While not denying the importance of these works, this study seeks to understand the city “from below”. This research approaches it through the lives of marginal populations, in particular, through how migrant women experience and understand it. This gendered analysis aims not only at drawing attention to the experiences of migrant women in cities, but also at challenging the way in which scholars, policy-makers and urban planners have characteristically seen the city. In other words, this study seeks to understand the city not only through women’s material locations in relation to poverty, crime, levels of service delivery, institutional arrangements and the city’s legal frameworks. For while important, these indicators do not necessarily reflect how women understand their own locations in the city, nor do they necessarily represent the registers that they use to make sense of it. Rather, ***this study approaches the city through migrant women’s voices and eyes³ – using their own vocabularies and ways of making sense of their worlds.*** Their ways of seeing and understanding expand our understanding of the city, forcing us to question the extent to which urban spaces can be “known” through political economy and governance frameworks that tend to view the city “from above”.

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3 This thesis uses both interview material and images taken by some of the women who participated in this study. The images are presented throughout this thesis, both as illustrations to the text and as “stand alone” narratives. This methodology is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

This study reveals that Johannesburg is a border zone. To be in the city is to encounter multiple legal, socially constructed and imagined frontiers. These boundaries manifest between the inner city and the suburbs, home countries and South Africa, natives and foreigners, men and women, and different ethnic groups and nationalities. This border zone is a place of transition – a station rather than destination. People often, however, set up permanent camp in the station, even while imagining their lives to be elsewhere. To quote Victor Turner, Johannesburg is a place that is “between and betwixt”, a “limbo of statuslessness” (1969: 94).

Using methodologies that bring to the fore women’s perspectives on the city, this study highlights the complexities and contradictions of life in the city. The women in this study speak of seeking freedom from social oppression, yet do not necessarily escape oppression in South Africa. They speak of a longing to go back home to their countries of origin, yet also share a fear, and sometimes shame, of doing so without anything to show for their time in Johannesburg. Women talk about the harshness of South African society, its hostility towards foreigners and their inability to participate in the economy, yet also recount how they are ostracised by their own communities because they are divorced, are of a different ethnic group or are HIV positive. When crossing the border into South Africa, they express their fear of the guards and not having the right “papers”. Yet they also express their exhilaration at seeing the city skyline, buildings and infrastructure on their arrival in Johannesburg. Their excitement of Johannesburg is short lived when they confront the difficulty of obtaining work, a decent livelihood, or home to rent, but they are often able to make do through networks in the informal economy.

To explain these contradictions and ambiguities, this study draws on Turner’s notion of liminality (1969) and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) theory of borderlands. Liminality is derived from the Latin word *limen*, which means threshold. Turner used the term to describe a phase that he observed in the rites of passage amongst the Ndembu in northwest Zambia, where initiates no longer held their previous social status, but had not emerged into their new one (1969). Liminality is the “in between” space where a boy is no longer a boy but is not yet a man, or a bride is no longer single, but not yet a wife. It is the “limbo” phase that is defined by the “passage from [a] lower to [a] higher state” (Turner, 1969: 67). Logically, there is no reason why liminality should not also connote a threshold on the way

downwards, as when a feudal lord descends into serfdom or a capitalist becomes a worker. In this thesis, I use liminality to define migrant women's "suspension" in Johannesburg, living between and betwixt their host country and country of origin, and between an often romanticised past and an imagined future elsewhere. The notion of liminality describes migrant women's *de facto* legal statuslessness and the space between their former social and economic status and their aspirations towards economic success and social autonomy and respect. Liminality reveals the multiple borders women attempt to cross both as they enter South Africa and live in Johannesburg. Unlike Turner's notion of liminality, which he defines as transitional, I argue that due to their uncertain legal status, and unfulfilled economic and social aspirations, migrant women generally remain in a permanent state of liminality, in one aspect or another.

The Collins dictionary defines borderlands as the area between two things "which contains features from both things so that it is not possible to say it belongs to one or the other" (1996). It is in defining the "area between" that I draw from Anzaldua's concept of borderlands:

In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (1987: i).

I use the term borderlands to connote the multiple borders women encounter as they journey to and live in Johannesburg – "the physical borderland ... psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands" (Anzaldua, 1987: i). In this research, borderlands are the socially constructed dividing lines between individuals and groups, such as gender, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality. They are the physical political lines drawn between two nations, such as the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe, or Botswana. Borderlands exist when women *create* spaces of safety and trust within, for example, the church and the domestic spaces, but the fragility of these spaces is evident when violence intervenes. Borderlands are psychological when migrant women live as if suspended between a romanticised past and an imagined future elsewhere – permanently in between. Borderlands are sometimes like prisons where women are

trapped, unable to go back or move forward. Borderlands are visible and invisible, porous and solid. Seen in this way borderlands can be empowering and disempowering, real and imagined, reinforced and overcome. Borderlands are spaces in which agency and structure are in constant inter-relationship. Sometimes borders act as barriers, while at other times women are able to overcome these obstacles. It is how women resist, create, traverse or remain liminal in these borderlands within the context of Johannesburg that this thesis explores. These notions of borderlands and liminality allow us to see and understand migrant urban dwellers' encounters with structural forces, difference and power in ways which ecological explanations, political economy and governance analyses do not.

Background

This study is necessary for a number of empirical and theoretical reasons. Firstly, it is estimated that, by 2050, 75% of the world's population will be living in cities (Burdett and Rode, 2008). This figure is remarkable considering that only a century ago 90% of the population was rural (Burdett and Rode, 2008). Within the global context, Africa is experiencing the most rapid urbanisation in global history. "Some 37% of Africans now live in cities and that figure will rise to more than 50% over the next 20 years" (Stern, 2006: ix). These changes are bound to shift the nature of belonging in African cities and the ways in which urban dwellers relate to, understand and interpret their life-worlds.

Secondly, a significant number of those moving to cities are women – a phenomenon to which contemporary policy and scholarly attention are drawing attention. Until recently, little attention was paid to women migrants to cities both internationally and in Sub-Saharan Africa. This exclusion from scholarly literature is attributed to the fact that much of the literature has tended to focus on male migration and, in particular, the contribution of male migrants to capitalist production in the West (Ravenstein, 1885,1889; Lee, 1966; Todaro, 1969; Sjaastad, 1962) and closer to home (Crush and Yudelman, 1991). Although there is significant scholarly work on migrant women in South Africa (see for example, Longmore, 1959; Obbo, 1981; Bozzoli, 1991; Hellmann, 1948; White, 1990; Bonner, 1990; Walker, 1990; Lefko-Everett, 2007), the dominant economic literature has tended

to consider women migrants as unimportant, because of flawed arguments that their contribution to the economy was negligible. Moreover, data on international migration was not classified by sex and a gendered analysis was simply unavailable until the release of the first global data set on international migration by the United Nations Population Division data in 1998 (Zlotnik, 2003). This information, together with more recent numbers released by the same organisation in 2002, began to shed light on the gendered character of international migration. The United Nations' statistics show that the gap between male and female international migration between 1960 and 2000 has been much smaller than previously thought. In fact, since 1960 there have been as many women migrants as their male counterparts, with women accounting for 48.8% of all migrants in 2000 (Zlotnik, 2003). In Sub-Saharan Africa the migration of women accounted for 47.2% of the total number of international migrants in 2000, an increase of only 7.4% that spans the 40 years since 1960 (Zlotnik, 2003). The availability of statistics has forced scholarly attention towards understanding the phenomenon that many now term the "feminisation of migration" (Adepoju, 2004; Zlotnik, 2003; Sander and Maimbo, 2003). These trends are reflected in Sub-Saharan Africa where recent studies show that women are increasingly migrating independently of their spouses or male guardians (Sander and Maimbo, 2003; Kihato, 2007).

Thirdly, Johannesburg is a critical case. The city is the economic power-house of the continent and, as such, an important locus for the movement of people, goods and money to and from the rest of the continent. Census statistics show that in 1996, 4.8% of the population in Gauteng province (where Johannesburg and Pretoria are located) was foreign born. In 2001, the immigrant population had grown to 5.4%. Johannesburg alone had seen a 57% increase in the number of migrants from the continent and the rest of the world, from approximately 66 205 to 102 326 (Peberdy et al, 2004). A survey undertaken by Legget (2003) (n = 1,100) in inner city Johannesburg, found that 25% of residents were foreign born. Yet these figures may be higher given that a significant proportion of the movement across borders into South Africa is not registered in official statistics, either because long tracts of frontier areas are difficult to police or because of corruption at border posts (Crush and Williams, 2001). Nevertheless, the movement is significant, making Johannesburg an important "laboratory" for observing how the dynamics of human mobility affect processes

of urbanisation. The city's location in one of the strongest countries in Africa makes it an important site to interrogate the intersection of state power, human mobility and migrant "settlement". With an administration and state infrastructure equal to none in the region, Johannesburg provides an interesting site to study how migration shapes and is shaped by a variety of urban relationships, and reconfigures state power. For if the transmission of state power can be interrupted here, how much more in other less endowed states?

Fourthly, recent years have seen migration rise onto national and international agendas. The "fight against terrorism", and Western nations' fears of increasing numbers of people moving to developed countries from the South, has drawn attention to human mobility in ways that are unprecedented. Castles and Miller argue that "it is only recently that international population movements have been viewed as so significant that they warrant high-level scrutiny" (2003: 1). International migration has taken on new significance and urgency in the post 9/11 environment. Immigration has also gained importance on national agendas. With the violence against foreign migrants in Western countries like France, Spain, Italy and, closer to home in South Africa, difficult social questions are being debated around the high levels of intolerance, racism and xenophobia in cities. Migration has also come under the spotlight in development circles. Debates around remittances, particularly amongst international finance institutions such as the World Bank, posit migrant remittances as the much needed boost to overseas development aid in developing countries (Ratha and Xu, 2008; Maimbo and Ratha, 2005, World Bank, 2006).

Fifthly, migration raises issues around the nature and character of cities, particularly how it shapes forms of belonging and dislocation, inclusion and exclusion in urban spaces. There is a need to understand not only how economic structural forces shape spatial geographies of lack and opulence, but also how, within these configurations, urban dwellers produce space.

Structural forces create and define spaces or symbols of capital accumulation, opulence and intense activities of consumption and production. They also define spaces of poverty, inner city squalor and places seemingly bypassed by circuits of capital. The interaction between these macro-defined urban spaces, planners' response to them and the everyday spatial practices of urban dwellers, implies that the meaning of urban space is in constant flux. How people use space and the meanings they infuse in it are not necessarily those intended by urban

planners or the clear demarcations of production and reproduction defined by capital. As I discuss later, migrant women's relationships to urban spaces and their actual practices within cities instil varied meanings, producing alternative and multiple social spaces in the city. Following this mode of inquiry, this thesis focuses on how migrant women's modes of belonging, economic activity and social relationships reconfigure urban spatial practices and power in ways that modify dominant economic and governance theoretical models.

Locating my research: Women in liminal and borderland spaces

The lenses through which I have developed this research are informed by my experiences in the field, data and my paradigmatic location within urban sociological debates. This section outlines my methodological location, as well as how I have come to use the concepts of liminality and borderlands in my research.

Urban sociology is dominated by theoretical models that analyse the city from broad macro perspectives; from understanding how capitalism leads to the development of cities (Harvey, 1973) to debates about the emergence of "global cities" as the new sites of "command and control" of the world economy (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982; Friedmann, 1986, Sassen, 1991; Castells, 2000). These significant contributions have tended to understand how broad economic forces shape cities. Moving beyond national economies, global city theorists have tended to draw attention to the urban hierarchy, organising cities according to their ability to control and leverage global capital movements.

As I have argued, micro and macro studies stand in dynamic interrelationship with one another. While locating the research within the political economy, this thesis approaches the city through the micro analyses of women's worlds. This is not to argue that macro analytical approaches are unimportant. Rather, micro and macro analyses are not mutually exclusive – both are essential to providing an understanding of urban processes and the city as a whole. Analyses of urban processes have therefore to be informed by an *iterative* epistemological approach (Keith, 2005), one which considers the inter-relationships between micro and macro processes, as well as subjective and objective knowledges. Micro-analytical work is useful

not because it reveals rich idiosyncratic practices and experiences that are rarely surfaced in dominant discourses, but because it disrupts, questions and overturns normative assumptions about being in cities. It is only by doggedly “taking to the streets”, as Robert Park is said to have enthusiastically encouraged his students to do (c.f. Hamilton, 2002: 105), that we can extend our knowledge of how processes of urbanity differ or are similar to processes elsewhere. Indeed, it is the “misfits” that are unexplained by grand theories which prompt a search for new conceptual tools and potentially produce paradigmatic shifts (Kuhn, 1962).

Thus, this thesis hones in on the particular and the everyday. It is a lens through which to understand broader social processes in an African city. It draws extensively from a rich archive of migrant women’s life histories, narratives and images collected in inner city Johannesburg over a period of five years from 2004 to 2008. The study approaches the urban question through the knowledge and everyday practices of migrant women in the city. Epistemologically, this means putting on an analytical par women’s modes of knowing the city and the dominant modes of understanding, organising and making sense of the city, and analysing each on its own terms. This requires a methodology that reveals migrant women’s subjectivities – the discursive, representational and material spaces they occupy. It needs an approach that validates how they explain, understand and represent their situations and foregrounds their words, their self-representations and signifying practices. I employ a synthetic approach that is less concerned with methodological purity than with revealing the disjunctures, multiple valances and the fragments of migrant women’s lives that together create the rich tapestry that is the city. In order to analyse and make sense of women’s everyday lives, I have drawn from feminist standpoint theory and, in particular, the work of Patricia Collins (2000). Women’s migration to and practices in Johannesburg cannot be understood outside the socially constructed boundaries of gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and nationality in which they are located. Boundaries can be fluid, allowing mobility and movement, and solid, preventing or limiting such movement. The extent to which boundaries permit and prevent mobility is mediated by a number of factors such as class, gender, age, nationality together with physical and legal structures. Using these intersecting and overlapping identities reveals dimensions of urbanisation that are displaced in theories that emphasise class and economic relationships, at the expense of non-economic relationships.

Why liminality and borderlands? Three vignettes

In order to expand earlier works on the city, this thesis looks critically at how women use and negotiate urban spaces. As I have mentioned, to achieve this, I draw on the concepts of liminality and borderlands to explain some of the women's experiences. Three issues lead me to use these concepts to guide the analysis of this research and highlight the complexities and ambiguities that shape urban women's existence.

The first was my experience collecting data. Early on in the data collection process, I became aware of the transitive nature of migration to Johannesburg. Johannesburg seemed to be a place that migrants passed through rather than settled in – a station rather than destination. This is even truer for the inner city where majority of migrants see themselves living there for only a short duration of time – their sights set on the northern suburbs of the city or on cities in North America or Europe. These findings are supported by other research in the inner city that shows that foreign migrants “saw South Africa and Hillbrow as a temporary stop. The more skilled immigrants with jobs were more likely to say that they might stay on even after stability returned to their countries but none of the interviewees said they wanted to stay in South Africa indefinitely” (Morris, 1999: 327). After an interview with a migrant woman, I would ask whether she would be available for a follow-up interview or comfortable with me contacting her to clarify what she had said. Almost always the women would reply: “That is fine, but you better catch me quickly, because I do not plan to be here for long.” Workshops were similar. At the start, few women thought they would be able to participate for longer than a month. “I am not sure I will be around” was a common response amongst the women who participated in the groups that were convened, and the longest a group was maintained without losing any of its members was four months. Two issues struck me about these responses. The first is the ephemeral nature of life in the inner city, characterised by high levels of mobility. Whether it is spatial mobility within the city, or between Johannesburg and other South African, African, North American or European cities, or shifts in life changes, much happens here as more migrants find their first foothold into Johannesburg. Paradoxically, the other issue is that a lot about women's narratives concerning leaving Johannesburg and moving to Europe, North America or

elsewhere was more imagined than real. Women I interviewed often told me they were leaving “next week” or “soon”. Some have left but I still continue to see, and talk to, many of them five years on.

The second reason for focussing on the concepts of liminality and borderlands is drawn from survey data conducted in inner city Johannesburg that supported this sense of mobility and transition that I was coming across in the qualitative data.⁴ The survey reveals high levels of mobility amongst populations in inner city Johannesburg. There are a number of likely reasons for this. Demographically, the majority of those living in the inner city are young adults and are therefore likely to be mobile. Fully, 86.3% are less than 40 years old and 72.7% are less than 35 years of age. Levels of mobility are enhanced by the fact that only 9.8% of those interviewed live with a partner, and the majority felt that they did not want to have children or their families in the inner city. Few build roots in the inner city. Only 8.5% of the population have lived there between eight to 10 years and most residents, foreign born and South Africans, live in the inner city for an average of three years. Fully 52.9% of the foreign population consider going to other places such as North America, Europe and other African countries, and see Johannesburg as a place of transition. At least 72.9% keep monthly or more frequent contact with their country of origin, often showing a keen interest and participating in politics at home. Fully 78.1% claimed the importance of maintaining their customs in Johannesburg, revealing a straddling of at least two cultures. These statistics allow us to see broad patterns of mobility and levels of rootedness and dislocation in inner city Johannesburg. They reveal a population that lives as if suspended in society. The majority imagine their lives elsewhere in the city or outside the country. Both nationals and foreign born migrants keep strong ties with kin and communities elsewhere, even as their everyday lives are physically rooted in the city. Few who live in the inner city have plans of staying there, perceiving it as inappropriate for raising a family or living with a spouse. These population dynamics locate foreign born migrant women’s own experiences of the inner city within broader social trends. Honing in on the particularity of

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4 The survey is a collaborative project between the University of the Witwatersrand’s Forced Migration Studies Programme, Tufts University, Boston, and the French Institute of South Africa, (2006)

migrant women's experiences allows a deeper exploration of these trends and a greater understanding of the ways in which women's mobility shapes urban processes in Johannesburg and elsewhere.

The third reason was my experience working with displaced migrants in Glenanda camp, south of Johannesburg, where temporary shelters were set up to house migrants displaced by the xenophobic violence that erupted in May 2008 in major cities across South Africa. During interviews with men and women in this shelter, I was struck by how the majority of those I spoke to told me that they were seeking third country relocation. Many said their relatives or friends in Canada and Australia had told them about negotiations taking place between the South African government and other Western governments about relocating victims of violence. Both local and international networks were activated to find passages out of the continent. For many migrants, the "third country relocation" discourse brought to the fore an important aspect of contemporary migration from the rest of the continent – South Africa, and indeed Johannesburg, is considered a temporary stop, one from which migrants find routes to other destinations in Europe and North America. In many ways, growing levels of hostility towards African migrants have reinforced migrant desires to use Johannesburg as a transit location. May 2008 was not the first time that there had been attacks on migrants from the rest of the continent. In previous years South Africa witnessed systematic attacks against Somali nationals with businesses in township areas in the Eastern Cape (CORMSA, 2008), and violence continues to occur in some townships (Lewis, Davids, Du Plessis, 2008; UNHCR, 2008). Although it seems that the South African government was taken by surprise by the violence, and its scale and intensity, many experts had been warning that levels of xenophobia would lead to violence if not curbed (Crush et al, 2008; Danso, and McDonald, 2000). A survey conducted by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) on xenophobia shows that the breakout of violence in May 2008 was, at least for those working on migration issues, not a surprise. Survey data illustrates that South African attitudes towards foreigners, particularly those from the African continent, have been hardening since the late 1990s and that the violence in May 2008 was by no means "sudden". The report provides evidence that the violence and exclusive nationalist discourses have been building up since 1994 (Crush et al, 2008). Other qualitative studies reveal that

tensions between foreign migrants and South Africans have been brewing since the early 1990s (see Morris, 1999; Nyamnjoh, 2006).

Migration is not new to South Africa, and neither are current problems of undocumented migration (Vigneswaran, 2008). Indeed, migration has been a central feature of South Africa's history and has shaped this society in significant ways. The details of the violence are not the focus of this thesis. Rather, the point made here is that increasing hostility and the violence of May 2008 have unwittingly strengthened the idea, in the minds of some migrants, that Johannesburg is a point of transit – a station, not a destination. Now more than ever, migrants affected by the violence, or in fear of future attacks, are convinced that the idea of rooting permanently in Johannesburg is unviable and insecure.

Sociology and the vocabulary of mobility and stasis

With these observations, one of the key questions facing the study was how to capture high levels of mobility and stasis at the same time, particularly within a discipline (sociology) that has emanated from a tradition that has sought to develop concepts that “anchor” and fix facts (Urry, 2000). Early sociology was mistrustful of what Durkheim called “sensuous representation” (Durkheim, 1968), described by adjectives like fluid, unstable, flux, which are inexact. Durkheim was, of course, concerned with establishing social facts and developing scientific concepts on which sociology could be based. As such, its concepts had to be “fixed and immutable” (Urry, 2000; 26), and sociology could not be seduced by elusive concepts with constantly shifting meanings. Durkheim's concern around developing the discipline on what seemed like ephemeral concepts may have been justified. But the levels of mobility that characterise the 21st century – the intensity of global communications, proliferating global networks, and the movements of goods, capital and people require vocabularies that aptly represent mobility and flux. In a compelling argument, Urry makes the point that sociology needs to move beyond its outmoded concepts that denote “stasis, structure and social order”, and replace them with ones which appropriately signify the diverse mobilities and flows of the 21st century (Urry, 2000: 18).

In many ways, globalisation literature has made this possible. Indeed, it is replete with metaphors, concepts and theories that describe what has been

identified as the intensification of flows of trade, capital and people (Sassen, 2002; Held and McGrew, 2000; Giddens, 1990). Globalisation theorists celebrate the transcendence of the mobile global elite from the bounds of territory, time and the nation-states (Sassen, 2002; Urry, 2000; Bauman, 1998). This global citizen is a transgressor, who has no bounded loyalty to one single nation and is able to cross borders, trade across space and time effortlessly with few constraints. In fact, distance shrinks and the modern constraints of geography and social time are eliminated, no longer imposing “fixed barriers to many forms of social interaction or organisation” (Held and McGrew, 2000: 3). Much of globalisation theory has developed a body of concepts that connote changing urban socio-spatial relationships – “network society”, “spaces of flows” (Castells, 2000), time-space compression (Giddens, 1990) and so on. The traveller in this global world has been variously named the “deterritorialised” citizen, (Sassen, 2002), tourist (Bauman, 1998), nomad and pilgrim (Deleuze and Guattari 1986; Braidotti, 1994).

Johannesburg is a “space of flows”, but it is also characterised by numerous structural obstacles and thresholds which limit migrant women’s social, spatial and economic mobility. While the imagery of flows may be apt for an elite minority, the mobility of the majority of populations in the global South remains constrained by an over-regulation of borders. While borders may be porous, there are many physical barriers to cross. In the celebration of the global transgressor of time and space, globalisation literature misses these “in between” spaces – the interstices – where the majority struggle to cross. If globalisation literature refers to people who live beyond thresholds – the weightless or mobile global elite (Bauman, 1998; Sassen, 2002) – this research is about “threshold people”: ordinary women on the continent from various class and cultural backgrounds who have in common their desire to travel, but who also in their travels encounter numerous thresholds. How these ordinary women navigate boundaries, negotiate frontiers, or remain behind thresholds is the focus of thesis.

It is the thresholds encountered, negotiated and sometimes crossed that sets the migrant women in this thesis apart from the Bauman’s weightless or Sassen’s deterritorialised elite. To use Bauman’s analogy, while tourists encounter bridges that allow them free passage across frontiers, migrant women in this study encounter drawbridges which prevent access. Where tourists’ citizenship and resources allow them free flowing passage through borders, the migrant

women's citizenship (or lack of it) and often limited resources mean that they encounter obstacles standing between them and the other side. They are like Bauman's "vagabonds", with many drawbacks and thresholds to negotiate. In this globalised world, movement across territories is differentially experienced. It is "green light for the tourists, red light for the vagabonds" (Bauman, 1998: 93). With these obstacles in the way of those on the margins of society, the appropriateness of analogies of movement, particularly their effortlessness, is called into question. A minority elite may be able to transgress boundaries, but their experience cannot be universalised for a majority of people who remain in conditions of material poverty, and whose location in the global South means, at a very practical level, endless bureaucratic struggles to get passports and obtain travel visas. Those who travel without these passes use their wit and negotiating skills to navigate border guards or cross electric fences, crocodile infested rivers and other obstacles, risking their lives in the process. This "globalisation from below", is movement that encounters multiple boundaries and is characterised by fitful starts and stops as people negotiate, manoeuvre around, cross or remain behind the borders they encounter.

Conceptual and theoretical foundations

This section introduces the broad debates in urban sociology, and locates my research within this debate. It argues that urban debates have tended to a) emphasise structure over agency, b) smooth over the contradictions and complexities of urbanisation and, c) misunderstand urban trajectories in the global South in ways that are detrimental to understanding urbanisation processes in developing contexts.

Ways of reading the city: The global debate

What are our ways of knowing the city? From what pools of knowledge have social scientists drawn to understand and interpret it? In his article, *Six discourses on the postmetropolis*, Ed Soja engages in a raging debate in urban studies: are cities best "known" or understood through macro analytical lenses or can the micro-worlds of everyday life offer insight into changing urban processes? In an

attempt to revive grand theories of the city in sociology, Soja (1997) critiques the “over privileging” of the “view from below” that is characterised by De Certeau’s work. Soja contends that focus on the micro-worlds of everyday life in cities is at the expense of macro analyses of the nature of contemporary urban structures: “... ‘the view from below’ – studies of the local, the body, the streetscape, psycho-geographies of intimacy, erotic subjectivities, the micro-worlds of everyday life – [are] at the expense of understanding the structuring of the city as a whole, the more macro-view of urbanism, the political economy of the urban process” (Soja, 1997: 21).

But the polarising debates about macro versus micro urban studies are, as Soja himself points out, unproductive. These modes of analysis are not mutually exclusive. Grand theoretical perspectives rely on understanding how actors respond to and shape urban spaces for their relevance. So the significance of macro theoretical perspectives, and the importance of empirical work in developing these, is not in question.

Dominant urban paradigms tend to read the city from “above” – by understanding the socio-economic and political forces that shape its spatial form and social relationships. Two broad paradigms have dominated urban theory: the urban ecology and the political economy paradigms. While making significant contributions to our understanding of urbanisation processes, these models have tended to understand how broad macro political and economic processes shape cities and urban dwellers’ relationships with each other. And, although I acknowledge the importance of these traditions, this thesis is concerned with bringing urban dwellers’ lived experience to bear upon urban theory. I argue that what people experience and say has greater theoretical significance than scholars admit and theoretical models acknowledge. By bringing to the fore migrant women’s voices and lived experiences, this thesis contributes to an urban theory from “below”, building from their lived experiences in Johannesburg and their relationships to other cities elsewhere. This is explained in more detail later in this chapter and in the following chapter on methodology. For now, let me provide an overview of the two paradigms that have dominated urban sociology, and how these are blind to the ways in which ordinary urbanites shape urban form and reconfigure power relations in the city.

The urban ecology paradigm

Urban ecology has its roots in the Chicago School, specifically in the work of Ernest Burgess. Although Burgess, like other Chicago School members, Robert E. Park, William I. Thomas, Louis Wirth and Roderick D. McKenzie, had varied approaches to the city, his ecological approach has had a lasting effect on urban studies. Set in a fast industrialising city, intense population growth from rural and European migrants, two World Wars and the Great Depression, Chicago provided an important laboratory for exploring social relationships in the first half of the twentieth century. Burgess' interests in urban ecology and geography, lead him to investigate shifting patterns of land use and population in the city. Using biological and ecological framing devices, he considered the growth of the city to be similar to plant and animal kingdoms which compete to survive through natural processes of invasion and succession (Burgess, 2002). Reading urban growth as 'the resultant organisation and disorganisation analogous to the anabolic and katabolic processes of metabolism in the body' (Burgess, 2002: 246), Burgess developed a model of how Chicago's growth could be understood spatially. As a city grows, intense competition for space sifts populations and space according to occupation and land use. This results in an urban spatial pattern that radiates from its commercial centre in concentric circles, each circle representing a specific land use – factory zone, workmen's homes, residential zone, and commuter zone (Burgess, 2002: 245).

Although from different scholarly traditions, and use different concepts to understand the socio-spatial structure of the city, the ecological paradigm echoes neo-classical urban schools which view cities as organised according to economic principles of demand and supply. Neo-classical urbanists understand the city as a market place (Bridge and Watson, 2002) where the supply and demand for land, housing, and public and private goods determine the spatial location of industry, central business districts, low and high income housing and so on. Proponents of this theory argue that spatial differentiation occurs as a result of a self-regulating market system. Industries will congregate in areas close to raw materials, wealthy urban dwellers move out of cramped inner city locations to suburban locations, while the poor find accommodation in decaying inner city housing where rents are low. Thus, through a bidding process (underscored by free competition) those outbid move further away from the city centre, resulting in the spatio-functional concentric

circles that characterise ecological urban analyses (See Burgess 2002). Where for the ecologists it is invasion and succession, for neo-classical theorists it is competition and bidding that sift populations and land use across space in cities. Neo-classical economists, believe that cities eventually reach “equilibrium” as land is allocated to its “optimal” use. This urban model vests power in the invisible hand of the market: free competition, and the supremacy of demand and supply forces, eventually brings about a city in which all resources are optimally distributed. Numerous critiques have been levelled against ecologist and neo-classical readings of the city which tend towards ahistorical reifications of cities (see Castells, 1977; Harvey, 1973). The unwavering belief in a free and fair market, where all have equal opportunity and access to information, has been one of the most significant flaws in this model. Its failure to recognise the dynamics of power relations between urban actors – the state, entrepreneurs and workers – has resulted in its inability to understand how *urban actors* (and not supply and demand forces) shape urban space.

The political economy approach

The urban ecology paradigm dominated urban theory for much of the early 20th century until the development of the Marxist political economy approach, characterised by the seminal work of Castells in the *Urban Question* (1977) and David Harvey in *Social justice and the city* (1973). Unlike ecologists, who emphasise self-regulating markets and population growth, Marxists argue that space is organised and restructured by industrial capitalism and differential power and economic relations amongst urban dwellers. Cities are understood as both the agents and outcome of capitalist patterns of accumulation. Harvey’s writings in particular have drawn attention to the twin themes of capital accumulation and class struggle as the key organising principles of urban space (Harvey, 1973, 1982, 2002). In fact, for Harvey, capital investment in cities – in the fixed assets of the built environment – is an essential part of revitalising the system and deferring its collapse (Harvey, 1982). For both Harvey and Castells (particularly the latter’s work on the *Urban Question*), the master identity in the city is class, and urban crises are mediated through conflicting interests between capitalist and working classes. Both Harvey and Castells contend that there is something unique and telling about urban space which is both shaped by, and in turn shapes, capitalism. Echoing Lefebvre, both recognise that space is not merely a neutral backdrop, but rather is embedded in social relations of production.

The political economy approach to the city, that embeds city formation within a macro geographical context shaped by the expansion and patterns of capitalist accumulation, is a method of analysis quite unlike the tautological ecological argument. It became possible through this analysis to understand how capitalist development created unequal geographical spaces not only at city level, but also at national, regional and global levels (Brenner and Keil, 2006).

In many ways, the multi-scalar approach in the political economy paradigm created a platform for the development of global city theories. Critically, the restructuring of the global economy, and the ascendancy of certain cities – New York, Paris, London – as “control and command” centres of world capital, shifted the scalar location of urban theory. The foundational work of Friedmann (1986; 1995) and Sassen (1991; 1999; 2000; 2002) has underscored the global restructuring of capitalism in ways that are at once hierarchical and that emphasise a new spatial division of labour. This work has, in turn, influenced debates on the importance of nation-states, as increasingly powerful cities reconfigure political power and question national sovereignty (Keohane, 2000; Mann, 2000), and interrogated conventional notions of citizenship arguing that it is increasingly a post-national form of belonging (Sassen, 2002; Soysal, 2001; Bauman 1998).

While these urban theories, and particularly political economy models, provide powerful explanatory frameworks for understanding changing urban processes, a number of critiques have been levelled against these approaches by feminists and race and identity theorists (Bridge and Watson, 2002). At an epistemological level these models tend to privilege class over ethnic, race or gender identities. Feminists, for example, have shown that urban studies “has long reflected a gender bias in both the construction of theory and the avoidance of research that directly addresses women’s lived experiences” (Miranne & Young, 2000: 1). The Marxist approach constructs class as the master identity that determines socio-spatial urban divisions. It cannot explain how gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality or disability influence the geography and spatial form of the city (Bridge and Watson, 2002). Furthermore, in its construction of class divisions, the approach tends to homogenise within class categories in ways that fail to highlight the power differences and complexities that exist between people in the same class.

More broadly, its multi-scalar approach allows the political economy paradigm to explain inequalities between certain regions or cities, as the consequence of unequal capital accumulation patterns. Given this, cities in the global South are

understood as occupying the lower rungs of the world economic system. The model assumes a linear progression of economic growth of cities without allowing for the possibility that urban experiences in the South have followed different economic trajectories from Western cities. Indeed, these theories, that have had significant impact on theorising cities in the South, assume what Chatterjee refers to as “homogenous time” utopian and unruptured by the specificity and agency of locality (Chatterjee, 2004). Or what Mamdani labels the fallacy of “history by analogy” (Mamdani, 1996) – as it happened in the Western cities, so it shall be elsewhere:

Such a conception of the politics requires an understanding of the world as *one*, so that a common activity called politics can be seen to be going on *everywhere*. One should note that time in this conception easily translates into space, so that we should speak here of the time-space of modernity (Chatterjee, 2004: 6).

By their very nature macro analyses smooth over contradictions inherent in urban processes, capturing only the dominant narrative which is often presented as a coherent or uniform story. They are unable to explain the “anomalies” to borrow from Kuhn (1962) that deviate from the model. While grand theories provide useful viewpoints, they erase individual experiences, particularly the experiences of those that occupy marginal social spaces. The experiences of those living in the interstices of the urban fabric are mere glitches or blips on the screen. Where those in the margins are the majority, this is problematic⁵. Grand theories are hegemonic and located in power/knowledge relations that undermine an adequate understanding of socio-economic processes in the global South generally, (Zeleza, 2003; Mamdani, 1996 Chatterjee, 2004) and in its cities in particular (Bakare-Yusuf & Weate, 2005)⁶.

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5 The majority of urban dwellers are located in cities such as Mumbai, Sao Paulo and Lagos in the global South (Burdett and Rode, 2008). Moreover, it is well known that most urban dwellers in Africa live in “illegal” settlements and eke out a living in the informal sector (Stren, and Halfani, 2001; Hansen and Vaa, 2004). Of particular relevance to this study, almost 50% of international migrant on the continent are women, many of them refugees living in cities (Zlotnik, 2003). Yet the way in which cities are theorised and understood remains located within a masculinist, middle class viewpoint.

6 For a general discussion the unequal knowledge power relations in Africa see Zeleza (2003) & Mamdani (1996).

Although the political economy paradigm introduces notions of power and class as determining the socio-spatial patterns in the city, it fails to recognise the relative influence of other relationships – race, gender, nationality and ethnicity – that are inscribed in urban social and spatial geographies. In order to understand the city, individual experiences need to be located within this “matrix of domination” (Collins, 2000; Martinez, 2005). Using methods that understand the city from below, this study illuminates how migrant women in Johannesburg navigate, reinforce and resist the matrix – and in doing so reveals the character of the city they live in but that political economy conceptual frames are blind to.

Legacies of reading the African city

Studies of African cities are plagued by methodological and conceptual blinders which are linked to their particular theoretical locations and normative projects. Each of these present some elements of the city but tend to devalue others, leaving us with inchoate understandings of urban practices. I argue in this thesis that what is needed is a multi level approach that steps outside of prescriptive normative critiques and economic analyses in order to understand alternative moral and social systems of those who live in the city.

Governing African cities: The normative rupture

Within the urban literature, particularly on globalisation, African cities remain largely absent because they are not seen as significant players in world capital flows (Robinson, 2003). For scholars interested in understanding the dynamics of African cities, this literature is unhelpful and methodologically flawed. By reading cities through their location in global capital networks, African cities are disappeared in the analysis in ways that prevent an understanding of the urban dynamics in these cities.

Where African cities are discussed, the literature tends to focus on the broadening socio-economic gap between global cities and those in the South, and on the social pathologies of inequality, poverty, crime, poor infrastructure and so on. As Demissie remarks, “... African cities are often perceived as spaces of disorder, chaos, ungovernability, poverty, physical and symbolic violence” (Demissie, 2007: 161). It is no surprise then that the emphasis in the literature lies in developing governance and management models that reduce urban

inequalities and social problems. Consequently, questions of urban governance and management, service delivery, decentralisation, participatory democracy and institution building tend to be high on urban scholarly and policy agendas.

Two things are striking about this literature. The first is its normative biases – defining how the city ought to work and the ways in which urban dwellers and the state need to relate to develop strategies that reduce inequality, poverty and other urban social pathologies. The second is its level of analysis which tends to look at the city from the purview of the state. Governance literature reads the city “from above” – as written by planners, policy makers, public administration experts and economists. Implicitly or explicitly these studies are influenced by a modernist reformist agenda aimed at developing frameworks for controlling and directing a more integrated and equitable process of urbanisation. This is what Murray aptly refers to as “taming” the disorderly city (Murray, 2008). Not unlike urban reformist Le Corbusier’s plans, much of the focus on cities is aimed at “mastering space”, eliminating the apparent unpredictability, illegibility and chaos in cities (Le Corbusier, 2002; Scott, 1998). This modernist utopian reading of the city – as a malleable entity which, through its built form, regulations and policies, can shape social behaviour – is a predominant theme in African urban literature.

The late 1980s and 1990s saw the emergence of the governance paradigm in African urban analyses (see Stren and White, 1989; Halfani, 1996; McCarney, 1996; Swilling, 1996). The starting point in this analysis is that African cities are in crisis⁷ (see also, Tostensen, et al, 2001; Healey et al, 1995). Many authors write within the context of growing poverty, political crises, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and crumbling infrastructure. Their *raison d’être* is to find management and governance solutions to this myriad of problems. Literature, particularly on urban governance⁸, has made significant contributions to understanding the relational complexities of urban institutions and organisations. Moreover, it made significant

7 A recent conference organised in June 2008 by the United Nations University, entitled Beyond the Tipping Point: African Development in an Urban World, suggests that this crisis is still with us.

8 It is important to understand the broader context within which this interpretation of the urban problem was occurring. Under the Reagan and Thatcher regimes in the 1980s a vocal critique of the Keynesian state emerged. Governments across the world began cutting back on the size and functions of the state. In developing countries, these changes emerged as part of the Bretton Woods’ SAPs. Decentralised governance was perceived as part of the solution to a more effective and responsive government.

conceptual breakthroughs in moving beyond state-centric models of urban management. By recognising that cities are an agglomeration of a variety of actors, each with an important stake in shaping urban spaces, these authors suggest that these spaces are best managed through dynamic and relational engagement between the state and other civil society actors. At a time when urban management was narrowly considered the responsibility of urban governments, this was a significant movement from classical technical urban management concepts.

Urban governance thus allows us to reconsider local government as more than just a technical or administrative arm of central government in the developing world. In the context of decentralisation, governance permits an understanding of local government as more than just a bureaucratic structure with new autonomous powers and functions. When urban governance is introduced as the relation between actors in civil society engaging with local state structures, new territory is opened up for reviving local government (McCarney, 1996: 6). Nevertheless, it presents only a partial understanding of urban dynamics which privilege urban relationships that are forged along institutional lines: between the state and civil society. In doing this, it fails to see how “urban Africans are reworking their local identities, building families and weaving autonomous communities of solidarity, made fragile by neo-liberal states” (Demissie, 2007: 155).

South African cities within the global context

Echoing trends within the global and continental urban literature, South Africa’s urban studies have historically been dominated by political economy readings of the city that assert the predominance of economic relationships in shaping the socio-spatial configurations. Drawing on Marxist analysis, Bond argues that South African cities have been formed by patterns of capitalist “over-accumulation”:

Capital in a state of overaccumulation, evident from the later 1960s, thus searched and found a short-term *spatial fix* in the 1970s. Space, in other words, came to capital’s rescue as the basis for offloading overaccumulated capital. This mainly took the form of the expansion of the geographical boundaries of capitalism, one aspect of which was the upgrading of transport, storage, communications, and other functional components of the built environment (Bond, 2000: 9).

The specifically *racial* character of apartheid cities added to South African political economy analyses the fact of race as an important determinant of urban spatial organisation (see Swilling, 1991; Beavon, 2004; Davenport, 1991; Posel, 1991; Mabin, 1991). This literature reads the city as a particular socio-spatial form configured by racial capitalism and analyses the detrimental impact of the inimical racial inequalities, social injustices and segregation on urban space. Here, the interests of capitalism and a racist apartheid system coalesced to develop unequal power relationships that manifested between a white capitalist and ruling class and a largely black working class. Capitalist development in urban areas in South Africa cannot be fully understood without understanding its racial character:

Urban apartheid was premised on a very specific conception of the articulation between industrial time, urban space, and political citizenship. Under classic apartheid, industrial time was seen as the exclusive prerogative of South Africa's white managerial class. All formal rights to regulate the length of the working day and its value lay in the hands of employers until 1979. ...The organisation of industrial time was supported rather than subverted by the racially based spatial structure of the city that the apartheid state enforced via a gamut of urban regulations, such as influx control and the Group Areas Act (Swilling, 1991: xiii-ix).

While the racial imprints of apartheid inequality remain with us, more recent post-apartheid literature draws attention to the diminishing significance of race as a determinant of inequality rather drawing attention to class inequalities between races (see, Beall, Crankshaw, Parnell, 2002; Gelb, 2004). Reading the city through the twin lenses of the state and the market has led to a focus on "the various forms of dispossession and spatial exclusion of the black population from the apartheid city and polity" (Mbembe & Nuttall, 2004). While it has had significant effects on entrenching a reformist democratic agenda, the approach has conceptual blinkers that prevent a sociological analysis of other forms of inclusion and exclusion in the apartheid city and how people extended apartheid boundaries and found agency within them. Here Bozzoli's (2000) article on space power and identity is particularly illuminating. Alexandra township shows how communities created a rebellious space that challenged apartheid. Robinson raises pertinent questions about this way of reading the city:

Were those [apartheid] spaces so fixed, so divisive, so certain in their form? Our imaginations have lived for so long with the lines of apartheid space, with the blank spaces in between, the deadening images of power drawn on the ground. We have uncovered many reasons for the emergence of these dividing lines: sanitation, health, planning, government, administration, policing, racism, disgust, employment, class, development strategies, industrialisation, political order ... Can we begin to shift our experiences and our visions to capture and understand the world of always-moving spaces? ... In what sense was even the apartheid city – a city of division – a place of movement, of change, of crossings?” (c.f. Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004:356).

International discourses on urban governance, which were often coupled with democratisation, found a home within South African urban literature which, at the time, was grappling with the transition from an undemocratic apartheid urban form to developing democratic cities. In fact, these international discourses on urban governance, decentralisation and democratisation bolstered the intellectual momentum for envisioning new futures for South African cities (see Swilling, 1997; Parnell et al, 2002; Beall et al, 2002; Harrison et al 2003).

Within this literature is a reformist planning agenda that seeks to influence urban development in ways that address the fragmentation, inequality, poverty and marginalisation that resulted from apartheid planning. This literature, as Chipkin (2005) notes, is located within normative frames that articulate a certain vision of the city: a “united”, rather than “divided”, city (Beall et al 2002); a city that is “integrated”, rather than “fragmented” (Harrison et al, 2003); an “inclusive” rather than “exclusive” city (SACN, 2008); a local authority that moves towards “consolidating” its “developmental” objectives (Pieterse et al 2008). A large focus of this literature reflects on how best to deliver urban services in ways that meet the objectives of a developmental local government and address the needs of the urban poor (see Pillay et al, 2006; Harrison et al, 2003; Huchzermeyer and Karam, 2007; Van Donk et al, 2008). The other stream emerges from a more political democratic tradition which argues that the social contradictions of urbanisation, such as inequality, poverty and exclusion, can be resolved by strengthening democratic practice in cities and giving voice to marginalised communities (Friedman, n.d., 2005; Lodge, 2001, 2005). A third stream concerns itself with urban management, and in particular the influence of New Public Management principles in develop-

ing systems of accountable, client focussed, transparent, performance oriented local authorities (Harrison, 2006; 2001).

While these debates in South Africa and the rest of the continent have been instrumental in transforming how urban governments work and introducing a new “consultative” and “democratic” ethos in their decision-making processes, the methodological focus on the state and civil society institutions has neglected questions around how urban dwellers manipulate, manoeuvre, and submit to these institutional frameworks.

Governance studies are located within particular regimes of knowledge which underpin how state, donors, and other modern institutions order and make sense of the city. Governance is defined as “the relationship between civil society and the state, between rulers and the ruled, the government and the governed” (McCarney, 1996: 4). In doing this the literature organises urban space as a site of contestation between two independent, yet interrelated, spheres – the state and civil society. “Getting the city right” requires getting the urban institutional frameworks, relationships and processes between these spheres right. These include developing participatory mechanisms, devolving authority to lower levels of government to create more “responsive” management mechanisms and so on. In this ordering of urban space, urban residents’ primary locus of identity and mobilisation is organised around engaging the state through its civic associations (Halfani, 1997; McCarney, 1996).

While viewing governance as *relational* may imply, at least in theory, that the locus of authority and power does not lie in a single urban actor or institution, in practice city strategies and frameworks remain state-centric. In other words, in the actual practice of urban governance, it is the state that sets the nature and character of civil society participation and decision-making – it determines when, where and how civil society engages with it. In South Africa this can be seen through the way in which the notion of democratic governance has been reduced to a “technocratic” managerial exercise in fulfilling certain legislative requirements around Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and Land Development Objectives (LDO’s) (Heller, 2003: 170). Elsewhere, other scholars have also shown that inner city regeneration in Johannesburg has tended to be driven by powerful business and commercial interests, with the city paying “lip service” to the participation of ordinary urban dwellers (Beall et al, 2002: 128). The nature and character of relationships between the state and its subjects continue to be shaped by processes determined by the state.

In addition, in privileging state and civil society relationships, governance literatures fail to see how other forms of belonging and relating in the city have an impact upon urban space. By understanding urban relationships as conditioned by the state and civil society, the analysis misses other forms of sociality organised around ethnicity, gender and nationality. Moreover, by making moral judgements on “uncivil” and particularistic relationships, this literature precludes an in-depth sociological understanding of the workings of these parallel moral registers. As such, while we have a rich understanding of African cities through urban formal institutions and the logic of government, we lack in-depth knowledge of urban dwellers’ subjectivities: their ways of knowing and organising the city. In these analyses, we are blinded to alternative registers of sociality – how ethnic, national, and gender relations are activated when individuals negotiate socio-economic and political forces in the city, and how these interactions in turn produce alternative conceptions of urbanity.

Informality in African cities

One of the marked differences between urban literature in the global North and the global South is the latter’s focus on the notion of informality. Because of this, it is worth mentioning how literature on informality has influenced the lenses through which we understand urban processes in developing contexts. There are two distinct trajectories in this literature that are relevant to my argument: one that pathologises informality and another that celebrates it.

Although urban literature on the informal sector recognises that it provides an important safety net to urban dwellers excluded from the formal economy, there is a tendency to pathologise informality and approach the sector through normative lenses. Much of this way of understanding African cities is located within normative governance frameworks that tend to see informality as “uncontrolled or disorderly” urbanisation (Abdoul, 2005: 235). In policy circles and urban scholarship there is a tendency to conflate “informality” with an urban crisis brought on largely because of the inability of cities to cope with the ever-increasing demand for services, employment and housing. The option for many urban dwellers has been to seek these outside of formal state regulated areas and in the informal sector. The association of informality with crisis is crystallised in South Africa in the debate on the “first” and “second” economy. Debates amongst leading institutions like the Presidency, Department of Housing and the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), among others, perceive

the second economy as the arena of poverty, exploitation, underdevelopment and unemployment and the first economy as characterised by growth, employment and prosperity. This tendency to create binaries between the formal and informal city, activities and economy is evident in urban literature:

Informal activities and practices may be illegal or extra-legal but are not necessarily perceived as illegitimate by the actors concerned ... In contrast to the normal city, the formal city consists of the urban government and its agents, institutions and rules and regulations that have over time been introduced in order to control urban space and economic life. The registered segments of the urban economy and buildings and infrastructure that have been established legally, are also part of the formal city (Hansen and Vaa, 2004).

The governance impulse is to seek reform in the informal sector. In the words of Hansen and Vaa, this is to “incorporate the informal city into city urban management and governance” (Hansen and Vaa, 2004: 19). The ways in which the incorporation of the informal occurs varies significantly, from punitive interventions, such as bulldozing slums or getting rid of street traders, to more humane responses, such as building organised and regulated facilities for street trading and upgrading informal settlement areas. These methods are not the focus here, but the assumptions that equate informality with “bad”, exploitative, protectionist, corrupt (Bank, 1991) and messy and formality with “good”, regulated and orderly. In doing this, the literature fails to see informality as a resource which urban dwellers use to survive in the city. When the frameworks for analysis are aimed at “correcting” informality, they leave little room for exploring what it is about informal activities and relationships that work for urban dwellers. Having labelled these activities “morally” suspect, they are unable to consider parallel moral spheres or alternative moral registers as a resource.

Additionally, these analyses read the city from above, developing normative and holistic frameworks or models that aim to “fix” urban problems. These modernist visions are embedded in an unwavering belief that urban political, economic and institutional systems and frameworks shape individual behaviour, and that the failure of these systems has resulted in the African urban “crisis”. While they are important in explaining how broad economic and political forces have shaped cities in Africa, they remain blinded to the ways in which urban dwellers respond, understand, value and use these frameworks to produce urban alternative urban spaces.

Moreover, by bifurcating the formal and informal, we fail to see how intricately intertwined the two sectors are. It is not only that there are established trading relationships between the informal and the formal sectors, but actors in formal institutions of the state, for example, are important actors in informal networks and ties. Migrant women's narratives show how collusion with Johannesburg Metro Police supports street trading in areas where such trade is prohibited by law. Within the Department of Home Affairs, they show how a cast of state officials, agents and migrants create an economy around producing refugee and asylum seeker "papers" – a network which would be far less effective without state collusion. By separating the sphere of informal activities from the formal ones, we fail to see how they are mutually reinforcing, resulting in the production of hybridised parallel systems of authority and moral registers.

Reading the African city from below

Located broadly within a model that critiques "how states' see" is a body of work on the city that provides an alternative approach to reading the city (see Scott, 1998; Certeau, 1984; Grosz, 1995). This literature tends to read the city "from below" – looking at the micro geographies and social relations that shape the city. Underlying this corpus of work is the belief that the state is not the sole architect of the city – that is, alone, it cannot define the outcomes, meanings or functions of urban spaces, nor control the kinds of social interaction that occur within it. Pieterse draws our attention to the multiple ways of being in the city and the importance of understanding the everyday practices of urban dwellers (see Pieterse, 2008). By drawing upon traditions that aim at highlighting views "from below" this and other contributions on urban Africa shift previous analyses on the city in significant ways (see Simone and Abouhali, 2005; Bakare-Yusuf & Weates, 2005; Simone, 2004):

The critical emphasis here is on what residents actually do in order to enlarge their spaces of operation, or conversely, to demarcate territories of habitation that are liveable, and where the negative impacts generated by the undermining of local livelihoods by global economic processes might be partially mediated. This is a book then that seeks to valorize urban Africa's own agency, its own constructive powers (Simone, 2005:1-2).

More critically, Simone turns the dominant urban research question on its head and asks of the city: how do *urban dwellers* shape and produce urban space. In other words, how do their everyday urban practices interact with formal urban systems, such as by-laws and urban codes, to produce alternative meanings and functions of urban space? This approach to the city has added an interesting dimension to urban studies on the continent. It is counter-hegemonic, moving away from dominant institutional ways of knowing the city and arguing implicitly that the practices of everyday life are located within certain logics of production and knowing the city that do not necessarily reflect the logics of dominant theories. Moreover, by looking at urban dwellers as productive agents in the city, we see them not as victims of forces beyond their control, but as actors that manoeuvre and shape urban life. Indeed, Simone's metaphor, "people as infrastructure", is instructive (Simone, 2004). In the midst of cities with crumbling and often non-existent infrastructure, the body becomes a resource for mobility (both literally and metaphorically) and survival. In addition, the metaphor connotes the agency of the body to transform otherwise dire situations, into its favour.

But celebrating the heroic African urban dweller masks the real and often debilitating structures that limit individual and collective choices. For Simone, the African city is a space of subversion – constantly challenging, opposing and defeating attempts to constrain or fix actors to space or specific social relations. The urban dweller is constantly making do, using logics that confound planners, policy makers and demographers. But as migrant women show, urban dwellers do not always exist in counter hegemonic spaces.

Le Marcis' approach to the city bears some similarities to Simone's way of reading the city – by looking at the city through individual spatial practices. Using the life histories of HIV/AIDS sufferers in Johannesburg Marcis' work on *The suffering body of the city* (2004) takes the reader through the city inscribed in a suffering body. Using the body as the starting point, he illuminates the complex contours of the city's social and physical geographies uncovering both the official and unofficial, visible and invisible locations and sites of support for those seeking treatment for HIV/AIDS. Such an understanding of the city challenges conventional notions of urban space as knowable and navigable by Cartesian rules. Reading the city through the suffering body reveals how people negotiate official and unofficial spaces of health care, connect to local and international drug networks, and

negotiate their identities to gain access to health and support from their communities. The city is both official and unofficial, visible and invisible, hostile and compassionate. Rather than seeing cities in the global South as marginalised by patterns of accumulation, these approaches allow insight into spaces that are outside of the purview of global capital networks. They also illustrate how ordinary urban dwellers navigate the unofficial cartographies of urban space in ways that texture governance analyses, whose tendency to focus on formal relationships between state and civil society, blind them to alternative modes of belonging in the city.

What much of the African urban debate seems to be missing is the gendered aspects of the city. This is not to say that there is no scholarship in this area. Significant works by African scholars (Bujra, 1975; Bozzoli, 1991, Obbo, 1980; White 1990; Bonner, 1990; Walker, 1990; Musisi, 1995) provide accounts of women's lives in colonial and post-colonial cities, and their critical role in the informal sector of urban economies. More recent discussions on gender focus on women's exclusion in planning and decision-making frameworks, and the gender blind frameworks that structure life in the city (Van Donk, 2002; Van Donk, 1998; Todes, 1995; Todes and Williamson, Forthcoming).

While these studies are critical to exposing gendered forms of exclusions and marginality, and lobbying for equity in spaces that have historically been dominated by men, there is an even more critical function that gender studies can play: interrogating the conceptual frameworks used to define and produce urban spaces. By analysing migrant women's experiences through their gendered, ethnic, class and national locations in the city, this thesis provides insights that *explain* power, space and belonging in Johannesburg. Women's experiences modify notions of the state as sovereign, and show the diffuse nature of power and shifting boundaries of sovereignty in the city. Their movements and spatial practices in the city illustrate how they produce urban spaces that are off official maps. Their locations as migrant women, of various nationalities, with specific ethnic ties and different class backgrounds, highlight their shifting identities and the multiple alliances they forge as they weave through the city. These urban practices call into question common assumptions about urban socio-spatial forms of organisation in ways that significantly alter our understanding of cities.



The structure of the thesis

This chapter locates the study of migrant women within broad debates on urbanisation. Using gender and migration lenses, the thesis explores processes of urbanisation in Johannesburg, in particular, how gender and mobility reconfigure the socio-spatial character of the city. In doing this, this study argues that it turns on its head commonly held assumptions about belonging, power and space in the city.

The second chapter entitled “Ways of reading the city: Methodologies of the interstices” frames the study’s approach to research in the city presenting its epistemological grounding and research methods. This chapter locates these within the broader debate in urban sociology around macro and micro approaches to the city, and argues for the need to develop iterative methodologies that locate urban dwellers’ everyday realities within structural social, economic and political frameworks. This implies a need to understand the political and economic processes that marginalise urban actors. Conversely, an understanding of how these actors interpret their location in the city and act to subvert, reinforce and manoeuvre around broader socio-economic processes is also required. This thesis is thus located at the nexus of two distinct epistemological traditions: one which asks of the city what socio-economic and political forces shape urban spaces, and another that seeks to understand how the actions of urban dwellers in the margins of society produce and shape urban space.

Chapter Three contextualises migrant women’s journeys to Johannesburg. It highlights some of the structural constraints that have led women to leave their countries of birth and move to Johannesburg and, within this context, examines the subjective reasons they provide for migrating. By exploring their subjective motivations, women’s experiences show that economic understandings of migration offer only partial explanations for why they move. Citing social pressures and stigma, patriarchal and community discipline, and desire to travel, women’s narratives reveal the multiple and overlapping motivations for their migration to Johannesburg. The chapter concludes that no single causal mechanism can explain fully the phenomenon of migration.

Chapter Four unpacks the nature of women’s journeys to Johannesburg. Using the metaphor of borderlands, it poses women’s experiences in Johannesburg

as encounters across borders of nationality, gender, ethnicity and class. In doing so it highlights how new urban spaces are produced as these borderlands are subverted. Similarly, it shows how borderlands are also places of blockage and, rather than being subverted, they are at times reinforced and strengthened in women's everyday urban practices. Finally, the chapter argues that Johannesburg is a liminal urban space, where women's real and perceived pressures to succeed in the city leave them trapped, as if suspended in society. This suspension has consequences for understandings of rootedness and belonging in the city, a theme that is explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

Using notions of home as a heuristic, the fifth chapter interrogates women's understandings of belonging in Johannesburg. Drawing directly from how migrant women organise and interpret notions of home, it uses Home with a capital "H" to represent women's countries of origin and links to ancestral, kinship and communal bonds. home with a small "h" designates their ties with communities in Johannesburg and the domestic spaces that they create in the city. This chapter reveals the nature of the city as borderlands – how women straddle multiple geographies, living as they do in Johannesburg yet maintaining strong links with communities at Home. It unpacks the multiple registers of belonging and dislocation, as the contradictions of both Home and home become apparent in Johannesburg. As the chapter navigates through the tensions between autonomy and solidarity, obligations to the self and the community, it traces the implications these everyday struggles have on women's self-hood and the spaces they traverse.

Chapter Six analyses the theoretical and empirical insights of the previous chapters. This concluding chapter shows how migrant women's lives in the city generate urban spaces that challenge governance and economic renderings of the city. The chapter reiterates the need for an iterative epistemological approach, one that recognises that urban spaces are produced by the intersection of structural forces and individual experiences and subjectivities. Migrant women are not merely objects of study, but are conceived as agents that both mediate and express contemporary processes of urbanisation on the continent. It argues that it is by locating the research within this epistemological nexus, that new ways of conceptualising power, belonging and space in Johannesburg are revealed. Understanding women thus transforms the way we view power boundaries in the city, moving beyond statist understandings of sovereign power, to seeing power as

diffuse and embedded in multiple non-economic, non-statist relationships. Urban space is redrawn, revealing how migrant women, together with state agents and other urban actors, create spaces that are off the official map. Finally, it underlines the enduring struggle between belonging and dislocation that has characterised urban life since Simmel's seminal work on the city and mental life at the turn of the 20th century. It reveals the city not only as a site of collective class struggles, but also a space of struggle and co-operation between the individual and the collective, between autonomy and solidarity in ways that reinforce the need to see urban space as conditioned by power relationships that move beyond economic relations and state-centred frameworks.

In sum, the thesis analyses the spaces in and through which women create alternative urban frameworks which are at once structured by broader social and economic forces, yet not reduced to them. I argue that the spaces women traverse in the city are not predictable or understandable using political economy theoretical models or governance frames of analyses alone. Approaching the city from below, we gain insight into the ways marginal groups survive and understand urban living, and, in doing so, come into contact with the textures and contours of urban processes that are disappeared in broad theoretical analyses.



Chapter 2

Talking back: The methodologies of borderlands



Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the methods used for this study and their underlying epistemological location. I build on my argument that understanding the character of urban spaces requires analysing the city not only from the structural and institutional forces that shape it, but also from the ways in which urban dwellers live and experience it. Urban spaces are inter-constituted by a variety of factors which are not only defined by institutional and structural conditions, but also how urban dwellers overcome, reinforce or succumb to these. I argue that to better understand urban processes, in particular gender, mobility and urbanisation, we need to approach the city as a space that is the outcome of a dynamic interrelationship between structural forces and migrant women's actions (or lack thereof) towards these. In this chapter, I elaborate on the data collection techniques used in this study, arguing that they aim to give voice to migrant women's world views, the meanings that the women attribute to their experiences and how these are shaped, and in turn shape, the nature of the city. By doing this, I argue that the study gains insight into how a group of migrant women in contemporary Johannesburg experience and negotiate the city in sites that are often hidden from view. Their experiences shed more light on contemporary urban life and sometimes overturn the assumptions that have been made about the city. By focussing on their ways of seeing the city, the study reveals how migrant women respond to the multiple borders they encounter. At times their responses overcome the structural socio-economic and political boundaries they encounter, while at other times these remain barriers which they are unable to surmount. Whatever the outcome of their actions, they create urban spaces that remain unexplained by theories that focus solely on political economy and governance models. The interrelationship between migrant women's urban practices and structural forces produce far more complex understandings of the city. This chapter makes a broader epistemological point on knowledge production: that the experiences of migrant women and their unique gendered, national, ethnic and class locations *create* an alternative knowledge of the city that improves our understanding of urbanisation processes on the continent.

Thus, a study that seeks to understand the city through the liminal spaces migrant women occupy needs a way of reading the city that reveals more than

just their material locations in relation to poverty and crime, levels of service delivery, institutional arrangements and the legal frameworks. These are how state, donor organisations and other modern institutions make space legible – the tools of “modern statecraft” which organise society into readable administrative registers (Scott, 1998; Foucault, 1994). The city is, however, not only an ensemble of these policy regimes and modes of control, which are underpinned by particular modernist knowledge drawn upon by planners, policy makers and city officials to organise the city. The city is also the location of migrant women’s own systems of knowing and understanding their experiences – the codes and symbols *they* use to interpret their experiences; the tactics they employ to navigate it; the vocabularies they use do describe it; and the images they see in their imaginings of it.

To understand migrant women’s subjectivities, we need to read the city as characterised by a physical and a conceptual reality. By subjectivities I mean the way in which women reflect on and interpret their own unique experiences. Simmel’s work on the city and mental life at the turn of the 20th century provides a methodological basis for understanding the city as more than its physical manifestation, as it also incorporates modes of behaviour, socialisation and imaginings of the urban dweller (Simmel, 2002). Drawing from Simmel’s subjective approach to the city, Donald argues that “the city is the way we moderns live and act, as much as where” (Donald, 1999: 8 & 13). This lays weight on understanding urbanisation as a subjective experience, yet does not discount the materiality of cities. Processes of urbanisation cannot be understood simply through the material/objective existence of cities, but also how this reality interacts with urban dwellers’ own ideas, meanings and interpretations of urban space. Thus, the city exists in its physical realm and in the way people talk about, conceptualise and imagine it. It exists in discursive practices, in visual signs and as thought. Importantly, it lies not only in what people say, but also in their silences; not only in their images, but also in those images that cannot be seen. To understand a city therefore necessitates a methodology that examines both urban dwellers’ subjectivities and the environment in which they are produced. In doing so it reveals how urban residents react to, and interact with their environment and, by doing so, create new knowledges of the city.

Methodologically, to read the city in this way requires an approach that analyses dominant regimes of knowledge and, at the same time, interrogates how urban dwellers in the interstices engage and make sense of their lives in cities. It

needs a methodology that not only unpacks the logics of global capitalism, state institutions and laws, planning and policy systems, but also analyses how marginalised populations produce new logics and systems of knowledge within these structures. For this thesis, it means interrogating migrant women's subjectivities, the environment in which they are produced and to which women react and develop ways of being. It requires illustrating how structural conditions shape migrant women's perceptions and schemas⁹, but also revealing how women operating within these structural grids, find agency or remain constrained by their circumstances. Their actions (or inaction) within their contexts generate new discourses, symbols and practices that manipulate, or "talk back" at, dominant systems of knowledge or, at other times, reinforce these systems. My methodologies are underscored by two assumptions:

- 1 That migrant women's marginality and socio-economic locations create certain subjectivities which are not necessarily subsumed in dominant knowledge and power regimes but which, in fact, produce ways of knowing that either counter or reinforce existing dominant discourses.
- 2 That these ways of knowing create knowledge on urban processes that help us understand better contemporary African urbanisation.

Epistemological location

This research aims at putting women at its centre not just as case studies, but as sources of knowledge produced by their lived experience as migrants in Johannesburg. Drawing from their location within intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class, nationality and ethnicity, they narrate the socio-spatial and economic geographies of Johannesburg. The methodologies move migrant women's experiences from the margins to the centre (to borrow from bell hooks, 1984) in ways that have a significant impact on understanding and theorising urban spaces.

In developing its epistemological location, this work is indebted to feminist standpoint theory and the idea that from women's specific gendered, class, national, sexual location certain understanding or ways of seeing are revealed that

9 I define women's schemas as the ways in which migrant women organise, understand, interpret and infuse meanings in events in their everyday life.

would not otherwise be visible from other viewpoints. In other words, women's specific locations produce particular knowledges related to their contexts and the place from which they look. It draws from Collins' thesis that black women's social locations "have created independent, oppositional yet subjugated knowledges ..." (2000:13). By asserting black women's everyday experiences as constituting independent, oppositional and subjugated knowledges, Collins challenges the power relations in knowledge production that define what is constituted as knowledge and erase black women's ways of knowing. Standpoint theory acknowledges women as "knowers", and their experiences as producing and shaping theoretical understandings of social dynamics (Hughes, 2002).

Collins invokes the metaphor of the "matrix of domination" to explain the women's varying and dynamic relationships to power (2000) in ways that are useful for understanding borderlands. She argues that the matrix is dynamic in two important ways. Firstly, that the relationship is more complex and that power is not uni-directional. Women can and do exercise agency within the matrix of domination. The degree to which they are able to overcome structural constraints is, however, determined by their context. In other words, "this relationship [between structure and agency] is far more complex than a simple model of permanent oppressors and perpetual victims" (Collins, 2000). Secondly, women possess multiple identities and are located within intersecting oppressions which become dominant depending on the context:

Another way of approaching power views it not as something that groups possess, but as an intangible entity that circulates within a particular matrix of domination and to which individuals stand in varying relationships. These approaches emphasise how individual subjectivity frames human actions within a matrix of domination (Collins, 2000: 274).

The matrix of domination is therefore fluid: a migrant woman may be attacked on the street because she is a foreigner and does not speak isiZulu or because, as a woman, she is perceived as an easy target. An employer may not hire her because of her race or nationality. She may find it difficult to access housing in the inner city because she cannot afford it. These multiple identities and points of oppression help to highlight the shifting nature of the borderlands she encounters.

These depend on the context and the way in which her intersecting identities encounter structural barriers.

I also draw on De Certeau's analysis of everyday life, particularly on the notion that urban dwellers' actions are not merely background activities that mirror dominant consumption or cultural patterns. Rather, they produce cultural practices that subvert and manipulate dominant cultural practices "in order to adapt it to their own interests and rules" (De Certeau, 1984: xiii). The point I draw from De Certeau is not that migrant women's actions are always oppositional (in fact, as I shall show in later chapters, they sometimes not only reflect dominant discourses but actually *reinforce* these), but that women employ certain tactics to engage with the city's dominant economic, social and political structures. Importantly, women's urban practices may sometimes challenge governance and institutional regimes, in ways that allow them to "*escape*" the dominant order, but they do so "*without leaving it*" (De Certeau: 1984: xiii, emphasis added).

De Certeau argues that individuals are located within a structural grid of dominant institutional and cultural practices and, further, that people's actions are productive and result in alternative systems of knowing that respond to the dominant structure, but are not reduced to it (De Certeau, 1984). His analytical framework allows for the recognition of the existence of multiple regimes of knowledge and ways of knowing which are underpinned by different logics. It also allows us to dismantle the hegemonic character of knowledge by putting on analytical par, dominant regimes of knowledge, and the logics of everyday knowledges, analysing each on its own terms. For De Certeau, the privileging of dominant institutional practices obscures the infinitesimal procedures that exist alongside the practices shaped by disciplinary control:

A society is thus composed of certain foregrounded practices organising its normative institutions *and* of innumerable other practices that remain "minor", always there but not organising discourses and preserving the beginnings of remains of different (institutional, scientific) hypotheses for that society or for others (De Certeau, 1984: 48, emphasis in original).

In effect, he allows the practices of everyday life, which do not necessarily mirror or reinforce scientific or institutional practices, to be taken seriously:

It remains to be asked how we should consider other, equally infinitesimal, procedures, which have not been “privileged” by history but are nevertheless active in innumerable ways in the openings of established technological networks ... These techniques, which are also operational, but initially deprived of what gives the others their force, are the “tactics” which I have suggested might furnish a formal index of the ordinary practices of consumption (De Certeau: 49).

Although emanating from diverse scholarly traditions, both Collins and De Certeau make a point that I wish to draw upon in this research – that structure and agency are always in an inter-relationship, the outcome of which is dependent on specific contexts. With regard to urban space, this means city dwellers are constantly negotiating and renegotiating meanings and actions that are possible or not possible in particular spaces. I have characterised these fluid spaces as borderlands.

Thus, urban borderlands are inter-constituted by a variety of factors that include women’s location as well as the matrices of domination. These analyses allow us to see urban spaces as the outcome of a dynamic interplay between structural forces – political, institutional and economic – on one hand and migrant women’s responses and actions on the other. Understanding urban space in this way helps us see migrant women not simply as heroines who overcome difficult structural conditions, or as a passive, oppressed group. Rather, it shows how women actively negotiate, navigate and manipulate structural conditions to their favour, while remaining largely within them. It also illustrates the fluidity of urban space through the constant shifting of the matrix of domination. Urban borderlands are shaped by multiple contours of power which constantly define and redefine the socio-spatial configurations of urban space.

Research methods

The data for this research is drawn from a range of qualitative methods – participant observation, oral histories and visual diaries. This section discusses each of these categories of data collection processes and justifies the choices that I made.

The location of the research area

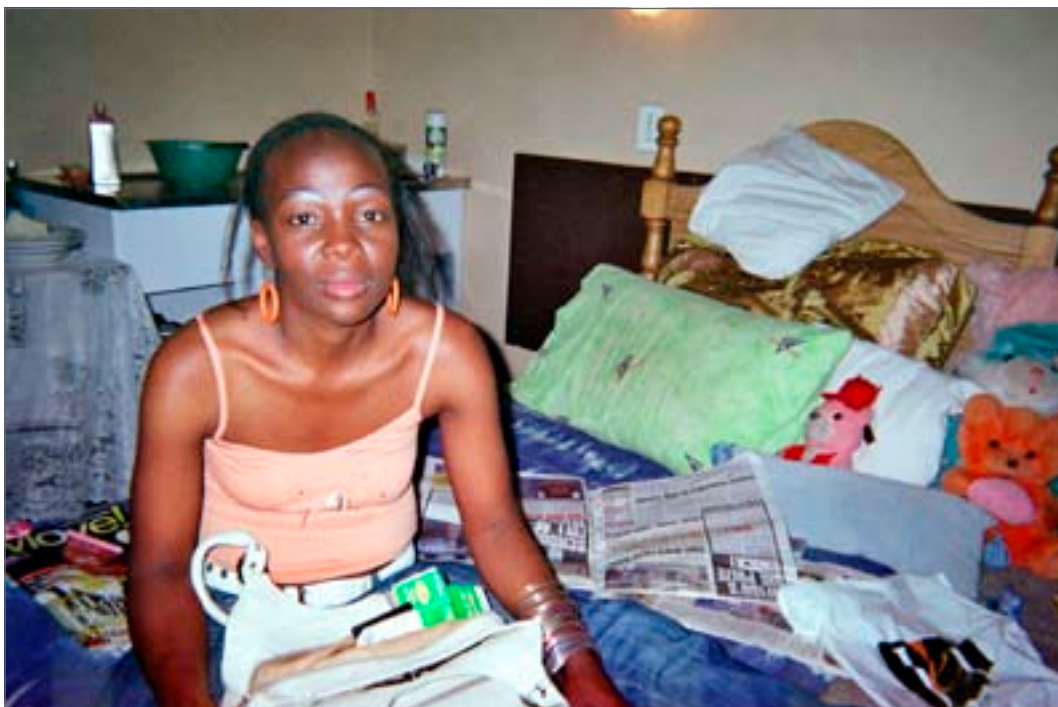
The data presented in this research project is drawn from material collected through interviews, workshops and observing migrant women in inner city Johannesburg in the period 2004 to 2008. The women, who are from African countries including Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo Brazzaville, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, were selected through snow-ball sampling. This technique has some limitations, as it may result in the bias of some migrant networks over others (Jacobsen and Landau 2003). The aim of the study is, however, not to obtain a representative sample, but rather to gain in-depth information on migrant women's subjectivities and experiences. The case study area is also limited to the suburbs of Berea, Yeoville and Hillbrow, Rosettenville and inner city Johannesburg, all of which were chosen because of the high density of migrant residents. I used three qualitative methods: participant observation; interviews which aimed at accessing women's biographical material on their journeys to South Africa, their first experiences of the city and their current experiences in the city; and visual diaries for which women took images of their everyday lives in Johannesburg. The techniques complement each other by bringing multiple lenses and material through which migrant women's lives in the city can be understood.

Map of Johannesburg locating the research site.



Presentation of the data

In order to remain true to the project of surfacing women's schemas and ways of knowing, I highlight migrant women's words and their images of Johannesburg in the text. These have formed the basis for making broader theoretical points on gendered processes of urbanisation and migration. The presentation of the images in this thesis has drawn inspiration from Berger and Mohr's (1975) book *A seventh man: The story of a migrant worker in Europe*. Some images are anchored to women's stories, and are used to illustrate their words, and the text. Most of the pictures are, however, not directly attached to any text, and should be read in their own terms. These images are used to develop a visual narrative of women's lives, and tell stories 'which are beyond the reach of words' (Berger & Mohr, 1975: 7). This approach reinforces a reading of the city 'from below' by providing a visual perspective that is often invisible to 'outsiders'. Our visual registers of inner city Johannesburg are often informed by images taken by professional photographers looking from the 'outside in' (See for example Tillim: 2005). The importance of these works is not in doubt, but women's images add to existing visual documentation of the city through their 'insider' perspective.



In many ways, I could not have predicted the content of this thesis. Although I knew the topic and questions I wanted to ask, I could not have guessed, for example, that I would have a chapter discussing “home”, nor could I have predicted that using women’s images of the city would be a basis for challenging dominant representations of it. Much of what is contained in this thesis “leapt out” of the raw data that I collected over a period of five years, and I could not have determined *a priori* the key concepts that would structure the content of my chapters. This approach was informed by the nature of the study which, rather than seeking to understand how urban women responded to a set of predefined set of variables, sought to explore their experiences and ways of being in the city without having a fixed idea of what I would eventually discuss. Thus, rather than a rigid research path, I opted for an openness to seeing through women’s own lenses and voices, even when that meant entering unfamiliar territory.

I have presented my primary data in different ways. I have used the women’s own words as these conversations capture not only a two-way dialogue between an interviewer and interviewee, but also discussions amongst the migrant women who participated in the workshops. This form of data is dynamic and provides a sense of what women found interesting in other people’s stories, including others’ narratives that mirror their own lives. Some of the data is also presented as quotes from in-depth interviews. In all cases, the words of women have been presented verbatim, with very little editing except where necessary for clarity. In addition to verbal communication, I use women’s images of the city drawn from workshops convened between 2007 and 2008 and completed just before the violence in May 2008. The decision to present raw data in multiple ways, particularly in its “uncut” version, may seem disconcerting to the reader, but is one that has been made to remain true to women’s voices within an increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan Johannesburg. By privileging women’s lived experiences, I aim to nuance and texture macro analyses that have dominated urban theoretical models, and contribute to a more grounded urban theory.

Participant observation

Through less formal interactions and “hanging out” at hair salons, restaurants and the Yeoville market, listening to people’s narratives, gossip and debates, some of

the most rewarding data on issues that women cared about was collected. I would spend many hours at Betty's salon in Yeoville, having my hair done, listening and participating in conversations. Betty is Kenyan, and her salon was a central point to which many East African women from Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi would converge. Sitting in the salon often two days a month, I came to learn much about that community's "stories". After leaving Betty's I would write field notes of what I had heard, the debates, and the important events taking place in the community. At other times, I would sit at a market stall and help sell goods. As often happens with consistent social interaction, I developed strong bonds of friendship with some of the women, becoming more involved in their lives, attending birthday parties, funerals and other important social occasions as part of their extended family in Johannesburg.

Some of these interactions are documented, but where I attended private events as a friend rather than a researcher, I have not used the information directly. This has, however, not meant that I have disregarded the experience. My participation in migrant women's lives through these personal connections has provided an important contextual backdrop to understanding their words, images and social practices.

Oral history

I interviewed 30 women about their journeys to Johannesburg, and their experiences and views of the city. The questions were biographical, requiring women to remember how their decision to come to Johannesburg was made, their journey and their first encounters with the city. I used an oral history technique, although I also wanted to know about their everyday lives in Johannesburg. Where women could not speak English or Kiswahili, I worked with a Congolese, French speaking male assistant. We held at least three interviews with each of the women over a period of three to four months. This helped build relationships of trust and later interviews revealed greater detail and nuance. The interviews took place in their stalls in the market or in their homes.

In designing the interview structure, I sought to avoid betraying my preconceived ideas about migrant women's marginalisation. This reflects Geiger's (1990) suggestion that "marginality cannot be assumed, nor will questions that

predict the marginality of the person to whom they are put yield particularly interesting insights into the self-perceptions or life of the oral historian". In conducting the interviews, the only structure I imposed was that women narrate their journeys to South Africa through windows that framed different stages of the migration process: the pre-migration stage, the transition stage and the post-migration stage.

My research methods aim at recovering women's agency. By recording and documenting social events through women's ways of seeing, their oral testimonies shift the imbalances in history-making which has, for the most part, been told through the experiences of men (Geiger, 1990; Sangster, 1998; Anderson and Jack, 1998). Oral sources acknowledge and validate women's roles in history, and provide an opportunity for a gendered treatment of historical and contemporary social processes, as well as the possibility for challenging dominant discourses on the city, history, migration and culture. Urbanists like Forester have written about the importance of "listening and talking" in producing knowledge about the city (Forester, 1989). Mirianne and Young argue that women's perspectives should be seen as "primary and constitutive of their everyday [urban] experiences" (2000: 3). The recovery of women's voices in the narration and interpretation of contemporary and historical events is part of an even larger feminist project – that of developing an alternative epistemology. More generally it is an acknowledgement that knowledge can emanate from "the Other":

Feminist oral history has often implicitly adopted (though perhaps not critically theorised about) some elements of feminist standpoint theory in its assumption that the distinct material and social position of women produces, in a complex way, a unique epistemological vision which might be slowly unveiled by the narrator and historian (c.f. Sangster, 1998: 92).

But the use of oral sources as historical evidence is not without its controversies. As Magubane (2004: 2) notes, narratives are "often dismissed as invalid sources of academic knowledge". One of the major debates amongst oral historians is the value of oral evidence, given the subjective nature of narrating and remembering (see White et al, 2001; Grele, 1998; White, 1998). In fact, early generations of African historians spent much of their energies defending the "objectivity" of their data, anxious to ensure positivist standards of reliability and validity (White

et al, 2001). Later generations of African historians seem less interested in subjecting oral history to positivist conventions than in problematising the uncritical feminist celebrations of oral history as emancipatory¹⁰, and theorising about it (White et al: 2001). At the heart of recent debates on oral sources is the acknowledgement that they are not simply reflections of past or contemporary events: how people narrate events is mediated by a host of variables – class, race, gender, ideology and registers of important life-events (Sangster, 1998). For some, the subjectivity of oral evidence makes it an unscientific and invalid source. Its usefulness is always in question, particularly in presenting historical events accurately. Yet objections around oral sources are countered by convincing arguments that their usefulness depends on what the researcher is looking for. Sangster makes the point that:

When people talk about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a little, exaggerate, become confused, get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths ... the guiding principle for [life histories] could be that all autobiographical memory is true: it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, and for what purpose (1998: 87).

If the researcher is looking for factual information around an event, then oral testimony would have to be triangulated with other sources of evidence. Indeed, wherever necessary, I have shown, using survey data, that the state of liminality is a phenomenon that is experienced across other African cities by men and women. The purpose of oral evidence in this research is less on the accuracy of dates and times of particular events than on identifying the frameworks that shape how people explain their life-worlds. This is not to say that substantial inaccuracies are considered permissible as there has to be a level of credibility in the story narrated by the interviewee. Indeed, interviewing respondents a

.....
10 This is an important theoretical point and raises critical questions. Is oral history emancipatory by virtue of allowing a more direct form of self-expression to the interviewee than is the case with the written word? Should it be a preferred source of information for scholars committed to a democratic rendering of history that gives voice to those who experience it? My preference in this research has been to use women migrants' voices to lead the content and direction of the research. This is emancipatory in as far as women's voices are heard by the reader, but I cannot claim that this research has or can free migrant women from the constraints they face in their everyday lives.

minimum of three times, and working with the same group of women for half a year, provided me with the opportunity to test the validity of their narratives.

How women construct their realities – how they explain, rationalise and make sense of their lives – offers insight into the material and cultural frameworks in which they operate in urban contexts. This is, in itself, a worthwhile research cause, as a younger generation of oral historians working on a collaborative oral history project on Africa made clear:

The younger participants were less interested in how Africans recalled the past than how they felt about – or understood and represented the experience of being African or being male or female, or poor, or sick in the heady conditions of the 20th century. Far from seeing their sources' subjectivity as a problem or hazard, the younger scholars took subjectivity to be their core interest (Cohen et al, 2001).

My approach to oral sources takes its cue from these observations. Thus, the import of oral sources is less in their dedication to “social facts”, in the Durkheimian sense, than in providing clues to what women find important. I use women's narratives to uncover their individual ways of grasping and understanding their experiences. I am less interested in whether women remember exactly how many borders they crossed or in what sequence, than how they *felt* crossing the borders. I am less interested in whether they remember the exact date or time of their arrival in Johannesburg than their first *impressions* of the city. I seek to understand the material and cultural frameworks that shape their lives.

Reflecting on the interviews, I realise that my attempt to “organise” the women's journeys into chronological stages did not have the desired effect. None of the women stuck purely to these frames and, often, discussions around how they negotiated life in Johannesburg referenced elements of their lives at home. Conversations about how women discussed their migration with their families sometimes wound up revealing how they negotiate with the police or Home Affairs officials in Johannesburg.

Social scientists working with oral testimony write about the complex nature of remembering and narrating (see Sangster, 1998; White, 1998). But while the events may seem disparate and unrelated to the interviewer, the underlying

feelings they triggered may be the same. What may seem like a non-linear and irrational leap between one event and another is often related in ways not immediately obvious. As Anderson and Jack demonstrate, listening to women's oral sources is a honed skill, one in which "we have to learn to listen in stereo, receiving both the dominant and muted channels clearly and tuning into them carefully to understand the relationship between them" (1998: 157). In listening to women's narratives, I was aware of the complexity of words and their hidden meanings. I tried to overcome this by using multiple methods, having repeated conversations, and understanding contexts as much as I could. I am aware, however, that despite these checks and balances, there will be misinterpretations.

Visual diaries

Together with Terry Kurgan, a professional artist, we invited 11 participants from various countries on the continent to participate in bi-weekly workshops held over a period of six months from November 2007 to April 2008. There were two women from Cameroon, two Kenyans, three from the Democratic Republic of Congo, one Zimbabwean, one from Burundi, one Rwandan and one Ugandan. Two broad questions directed the activity: What happens in a typical day in your life in Johannesburg? What are the markers that punctuate your day? We held a series of initial workshops with participants to introduce the concept of a visual diary and provide a basic lesson on taking photographs. Subsequent workshops discussed the images that had been taken. Each participant was asked to explain her photographs and the explanations of each frame and ensuing conversations were digitally recorded. There were two primary reasons for using photography in our methodology. The first was to complement verbal questions by using photographs as prompts to encourage conversation. The second was to obtain a visual archive of women's everyday lives in Johannesburg and to prise open spaces that are often concealed to outsiders.

The decision to use group rather than individual interviews was a combination of the limited time we had for the project and the need for us to capture conversations between the women, rather than conduct two-way conversations between interviewer and interviewee. Groups can be particularly interesting in uncovering burning issues, triggering memories of other group members, verifying facts, challenging different views and, overall, obtaining a robust discussion about

things women find important to them (see Slim, Thompson, Bennett and Cross, 1998). Working with the group enabled spontaneous conversation amongst peers. As the women got to know each other better, the conversations became more candid. In some of the workshops, participants took over, and directed discussions as they debated common themes in their experiences. In these discussions, our roles shifted from interviewers to moderators – instigating initial questions, but leaving the conversation to take on its own identity and direction. Our aim was to get to the issues and experiences that women found important without imposing upon them any preconceived ideas. Typically, the questions we would ask were: Which of your pictures evoke the deep emotions? Are there pictures that you would like to be part of your daily life that are currently missing? Are there pictures that are in your daily life that you would like to erase? Which are your most and least favourite pictures? Do these pictures capture your life? What is the most important thing you have lost as a result of migrating to Johannesburg? What is the most important thing you gained as a result of moving to Johannesburg?

Not all group interviews work as they should, particularly if there are dominant characters that inhibit the voices of shy or quiet participants. We had to ensure that everyone in the group was able to participate. In this, the photographs provided a good platform for all participants to speak about their own images and experiences. However, we realised that we were sometimes out of our depth, particularly when women were discussing traumatic matters and events in their past or present circumstances. In a session about the past, one of the women talked about her experience of the Rwandan genocide. In another workshop a woman told us that she had just found out that she was HIV positive. As researchers, we found ourselves without the necessary counselling skills and frequently questioned ourselves about whether we had made the appropriate responses. Due to the intensity of some of the sessions, we linked women to a service which provided free professional counselling.

Working with oral techniques I was consistently aware of some of the failings of language to convey women's experiences. My first reaction was to blame language barriers – particularly where I could not converse directly with interviewees because we spoke different languages. As the research progressed, I became convinced it was not just that there were language barriers, but that there were times when no words *in any oral language* could have articulated the

women's feelings, memories and ideas. This is not uncommon in oral techniques, particularly when interviews relate to, or trigger, traumatic events (see Motsemme, 2004; Gasa, 2007; White, 1998). Feminist authors have written about the importance of reading bodily and spatial practices (Giles-Vernick, 2001) and silence (Motsemme, 2004; Gasa, 2007; Sangster, 1998; White, 1998) to gain more insight into women's lived experiences. As White argues:

When listening to survivors speak about their experiences during the war we are left with the sense that ultimately our language fails us. The words we have available to us are inadequate to the task of conveying the systematic humiliation and degradation experienced by European Jews during World War 2; they cannot express the complex, anguished feelings and mental imagery of the survivor (1998: 174).

Thus, in an attempt to overcome some of the barriers of oral languages, I added a visual component to my data collection techniques. The method had the added advantage of providing visual evidence of migrant spaces, which are often hidden from view. Moreover, I hoped that it would break through the barrier of words and provide a new way of seeing migrant women in the city. Indeed, I believed, as the old adage goes, that “a picture speaks a thousand words”.



Theorising migrant women's voices and images

If, as I have argued, an empirically grounded approach is best suited to “see” migrant women's liminality, what conceptual frameworks should be employed to make sense of the data and interpret the significance and meanings of their experiences and practices? As mentioned earlier, I used a number of methodological techniques to inform my research. In interpreting both the images and oral narratives collected for this study I have drawn mostly from cultural and feminist studies. The following section explains how I have used these bodies of scholarship and why it is I chose these frameworks to make sense of migrant women's experiences.

Part of the purpose of this research was to surface women's subjectivities and the material conditions of migrant women who are unaccounted for, except as superfluous, unwanted beings in dominant discourses and discussions. Notwithstanding the deluge of pictures and articles in the press about foreign migrants, few people actually know the conditions under which cross-border migrant women live in Johannesburg: the rhythms of their days, who they interact with and how, and their mundane, everyday lives. Thus, one of the motivations for this study was that it would provide a mirror through which migrant women could be seen and understood. But this, as I came to discover, was a rather simplistic understanding.



During my field research, I was often confronted with the fact that women's words or images were not merely reflective mirrors into their worlds, but rather representations of what they wanted to reveal of their lives. It is not only that their gender, class and specific histories influence how they narrated their stories, or what images they took. It is also that their *intentions* shape the content of the interviews and pictures. No matter how "marginalised" or "dispossessed", women *show* agency (or, following De Certeau, they possess "tactics") in their words and images not only by selecting what to reveal and what to conceal, but also by determining *how* and when they choose to do so.

At the first workshop of the visual diaries project, I was struck by the repetition of the narrative of despair among the group. When I compared it with subsequent workshops, in which there was a mix between narratives of despair and those that are more positive and confident, I wonder why there were these differences. Months later, in a conversation with one of the women, I asked why:

Caroline: In the first meeting we had, I remember you telling us that things were difficult in Johannesburg – you were unable to get a job, didn't have papers and so on – while now you talk about those difficulties, you seem so much better able to cope. Why?

L: When we first met, we did not know what the project was or what we could get out of it. I thought that maybe you could help with getting us jobs or papers. So I was saying my situation was bad in case you guys offered us something ... It's not that it is not bad; what I said was true, you know it's true.

Caroline: So what changed later?

L: Ah ha. After a while we just took you as friends, just people who we meet and laugh and share together with ... and you know I also wanted to show people I am not stupid, and I can make my own life even with difficulties.

Perceiving that we may be in positions to offer her something, **L** told us what she wanted us to hear. (This is ironic given the power dynamics in interview situations where the interviewer is said to have more power than the interviewee.)

Her problems with getting a job or immigration documents were not untrue, but she admits to highlighting these to get our attention, in case we could intervene and help her. In subsequent workshops, she wanted to display her agency – her ability to overcome the structural barriers facing an asylum seeker in Johannesburg. If I was to rely solely on the first interview we had with the group, I could easily have misread L as lacking in agency, marginalised and weak. Yet she was conscious that while pulling at our heartstrings could get her some form of assistance, she did not want us to think of her solely as a victim. She adopts a language that she thinks can manipulate her listeners into helping her. These displays of agency: her ability to gauge the situation, manipulate it and appeal to our sympathies reveals her agency as much as her statement “I am not stupid”.

Complicating the issue of intentionality even further is that women will sometimes use stereotypes of their weakness and stupidity to manipulate situations in their favour. Women use what Utas (2005) terms “victimcy” to capture women’s self-presentation as victims as a strategy for navigating difficult social situations:

The term victimcy is proposed to describe the agency of self-staging as victim of war and explore how it is deployed as one tactic – amongst others – in one young Liberian woman’s “social navigation” of war zones. Victimcy is thus revealed as a form of self-representation by which a certain form of tactic agency effectively exercised under the trying, uncertain and disempowering circumstances that confront actors in warsapes (Utas, 2005: 403).

Indeed, if we *listen* to what women are telling us we realise that the employment of victimcy as a strategy is not uncommon. Women will use their tears (Raimundo, pers comm.) or silence (see Motsemme, 2004) to play on stereotypes of vulnerability and passivity to manipulate situations to their advantage. It is a phenomenon described elsewhere by De Kock as “subversive subservience” (1996).

In research processes, whether in formal or informal interviews or other research methods, words and embodied acts are often *intentional* – and the intentions of the narrator are not always clear to those listening or looking. This complicates what meanings we give to women’s words, images and actions.



Women's words and embodied acts are not simply transparent channels of their lives, but rather are complicated mediated articulations of their intentions – of what *they* want us to hear. Reading women's embodied acts requires more than taking at face value what they say and do; it needs an understanding of the underlying meanings of their actions.

But, as Hall points out, were meanings in language and embodied acts purely personal, we would have a babel of strange languages, each unable to “speak” to the other. Visual and oral communication is facilitated by shared codes and meanings which are socially constructed (1997). It is precisely this post-structural constructionist approach, or what is termed variously as the “linguistic turn” or “cultural turn” that has made the debates about oral and visual sources and their theorisation exciting, even if at times frustrating. Underlying this approach is a recognition that social practices – oral, visual, gestures – are imbued with meaning or value and cannot be understood in isolation of the schema/structure which underpins them. “... social practices and relations are signifying practices – practices which organise and constitute social actions and involve/assume interpretative, meaning-making persons” (Evans & Hall, 1999: 2). Meaning is mediated by “things in the world, our concepts in thought and language” (Hall, 1997: 35).

My methodological approach is interested not in descriptions of the actions or practices, but in what meanings they convey. But meanings are not fixed; different cultural contexts will have different meanings for the same signifier. For some a baobab may be just a tree, while to others it is a holy site and others still may consider the trunk a place of shelter or its bark a source of medicinal powers. The signifier “baobab” is thus a site of multiple meanings.

This point is illustrated by the following conversation at Betty's hair salon. Of the many conversations, debates and arguments we have had at Betty's, this one remains most prominent in my mind because it illustrates the ways in which multiple interpretations and meanings exist for the same social practice:

Sitting at Betty's hair salon in Yeoville market having my hair done, **JO**, the hair dresser from Tanzania, asks me:

"*Ebu Caroline niambie*, tell me, how do you know that your man really loves you ... I mean really."

"*Hai wewe!* You!" I exclaim. "What has he done now?" I knew where this was going; relationships and men were a common theme in our conversations at the salon.

"He has not touched me for two weeks."

"You think he is meandering?" I asked, misunderstanding her.

"No, not touch in that way"... she laughs. "*Wewe!* But you know ... *haja nipiga* recently ... he has not hit me recently."

"*Basi problem yako iko wapi?* So, what is your problem?" I asked, continuing to misunderstand her.

"Well ... you know what they say; if he doesn't beat you, he doesn't love you," she laughs.

At this point I begin my tirade about feminism, women's empowerment, oppression, notions of love as non-violent ... but these fall on deaf ears. **W**, a Kenyan woman who is washing a client's hair, enters the conversation and chastises me.

"We know what you are saying is nice, but that is theory my sister. Leave that stuff at Wits where you came from. We all know if he doesn't beat, he is eating somewhere else. We are not saying beat until *unaenda hospitali*, [you go to hospital], but just a little to show he cares."

"*Ndio!* [yes]," **JO** interjects, "*si kama* ... it's not like that chick who we had to take to hospital two weeks ago. Shame, that was bad! No, just a little ... no scars please!" Everyone laughs.

While **W** and **JO** are clear that there is a difference between “harmful beating” and “love beating”, I could not understand how what I consider a physical attack could be construed as a sign of love by others. The meanings of words and actions are mediated through people’s cultural and historical contexts. We cannot therefore *a priori* derive meaning of particular actions, nor can we project our own interpretation of a particular social practice on others. This does not signify my approval of physical abuse, but I recognise that people can attach varied meanings to the same act. Processes of signification and meaning-making are the same for oral languages as they are for images:

In the field of image studies, then, we cannot turn back to the pre-semiotic assumptions of reflectionism; we cannot any longer think of social experience as existing in a pre-linguistic realm, abstracted from the signifying systems which in fact structure it (Evans & Hall, 1999:2).

If we consider that people communicate through a variety of mediums, artefacts, symbols, gestures and so on, we acknowledge that images are as much a language as the spoken word. And the the process of signification of images is similar to that of oral languages.

This is therefore a political project in which I hope not only to reveal migrant women’s material realities, but also the underlying discursive and symbolic practices that resist misrepresentation. Migrant women’s words and images of their daily lives are not neutral, devoid of their values, politics or aspirations. Rather, they are overtly representational, constructing images of how they want us to see them. In doing this, they disrupt the essentialising imagery of a population group often shown as victims, poor and disempowered.

Methodologically, my data collecting methods and interactions are sites of contestation, where meaning is co-constructed and negotiated between the women who participated in the study and myself. The ways in which they interpreted their worlds is constructed by their own cultural locations and experiences, while my interpretation of their words and images is also mediated through my own lenses and ways of making sense of the world. My methodological approach thus asserts that the city is *a contested site, in which meaning is constantly constructed and negotiated, these actions contingent upon cultural and historical specificities, forms of power and women’s agency.*



Methodological limitations, questions and ethics

Fiction or reality?

These theoretical underpinnings complicate notions of what we construe as knowledge. Debates around the validity of oral sources or testimonies as accurate sources of historical and contemporary knowledge challenge research methods that seek to understand women's subjectivities. To what extent can women's words (or any oral source) be relied upon as accurate texts of the city? Is there any direct relationship between their experience of the city and their representations of it? Could their realities be so constructed that they fictionalise the city? Sangster remarks that:

... theorising has enriched our understanding of oral history, but it may also pose the danger of overstating the ultimate contingency, variability and "fictionality" of oral histories and the impossibility of using them to locate a women's past which is "real and knowable" (1998: 98).

But these debates tend to separate oral evidence from the objective realities within which they are constructed. As with written evidence, oral evidence is verifiable in variety of ways. In this research the data collection methods – conducting interviews with respondents over a period of time, using peers in the group to confirm experiences, and gauging women's narratives against their objective observable realities – validated the information I received. What women said in my interaction with them was certainly not so constructed that it could pass as fiction. It related to their historical experiences, realities and aspirations. Migrant women's ways of seeing the city, whether considered "true" or "false", have real consequences on their actions, and on how they would like their lives to be seen. As W.I. Thomas of the Chicago school stated, "when people define a situation as real, it becomes real in its consequences for them" (c.f. Hamilton, 2002: 105).



Positionality and ethics

The preface at the beginning of this thesis foregrounds my positionality. I write from a location that intersects my urban, migrant, female, race and middle class identities in ways that actively shape my research. I am not, and indeed cannot be, an objective bystander in this research as fragments of my own life and my subjectivities flow through this work. Who I am, my history and experiences interact and relate to the subject matter and those people I have interviewed in ways that have an impact on the research and the content of the interviews. As a migrant woman from Kenya, issues such as class and age differences, gender and language will affect how interviewees respond to questions.

My positionality, however, does not make my findings less scientifically valid. Feminists' research traditions stress the importance of reflexivity and foregrounding the researchers positionality in relation to the groups that s/he is working with (Oakley, 1981). This stems from both an ethical and epistemological commitment to research. On the one hand it is about unmasking the research process and revealing the underlying assumptions and social context within which it occurs – being “truthful” about the researcher-research subject dynamics. In doing this, feminists reveal that assumptions of “objectivity” in the research process are often inconsistent with the reality. Moreover, uncovering the dynamics of the research process allows for a more nuanced reading of the research results and provides an opportunity to theorise knowledge and its formation.

My positionality, the relationship and dynamics between the interviewee and researcher, influences the information that the respondent chooses to reveal or not reveal. Being a migrant woman from Kenya meant that I had relatively easy access to the community, particularly Kiswahili speaking migrant women. While my proximity to the migrant community served as an advantage in some ways, for positivists it poses a methodological danger to “objectivity”. Others argue it could raise problematic ethical issues if researchers become complicit in illegal activities (Landau and Jacobsen, 2003). Whatever the position on the researchers relationship to the subject, the key question is whether the research findings are valid and can stand up to scientific scrutiny. As discussed earlier, my data collection method provided a mechanism for me to verify, in a number of ways, women's responses in interviews and group sessions. The advantage of an engaged relationship with respondents

is that it provides a way of seeing that reveals the complexities of urban realities amongst migrant women in ways that a more objective methodology may not allow.

Other issues that arose were the personal bonds I formed with some of the women and to what extent these shaped the research process. I met one of the Ugandan women at the Yeoville market during a very traumatic period of her life. Her brother-in-law and sister had died, leaving her with two children, in addition to a little one of her own. She could not afford to support three children and had to make a difficult decision to put her sister's two children in a state shelter. She called me one day to tell me that one of the children, a five-year-old girl, had been crushed by a bus on her way to school. I found that I could not remain "distant" and provided food, books, clothes and financial support to her. Feminist traditions welcome interviewer-interviewee relationships because they lead to greater trust and therefore more in-depth content. Assistance outside of the research process is considered acceptable (Palmary, 2005:43). Moreover, I do not believe that the nature of my interactions with interviewees were a barrier to the quality, integrity and veracity of the research. Some may find this relationship problematic, not only because I am empathetic, but also because it raises the issue of unequal power dynamics in the research process. This may be true as I was able to offer her material assistance at a time when she required it and my financial ability, may seem to indicate that I have more power in the relationship. There may be elements of truth in this but, just as she needed my material assistance, I needed her participation in the project. To view the interview process as a uni-directional power relationship where the researcher has the power and the research subject has none is to simplify notions of power. As discussed earlier, power dynamics are not static; the balance shifts at different points in any relationship. To acknowledge that power dynamics are unequal does not mean that one actor possesses all the power, while the other has none.

In working with women migrants, I become increasingly self-conscious about my relationship to them. One of the reasons I embarked on this research was to give voice to women migrants, who have no platform in South Africa's current political milieu. However, as I embarked on what I thought was a "worthy" cause, I realised my own arrogance and misperception. That I thought *I* could make "invisible" women visible and give the "voiceless" a voice implied that I had power where they had none. The women that I interacted with are more complex

than the “simple folk” that I had thought them to be. I realised that stereotyping them as powerless was problematic because they are full, rich characters and are able to employ their agency to navigate the complex borders that define the city. Their tactics may not always lead to the desired outcomes, but are nevertheless attempts to overcome the barriers they encounter.

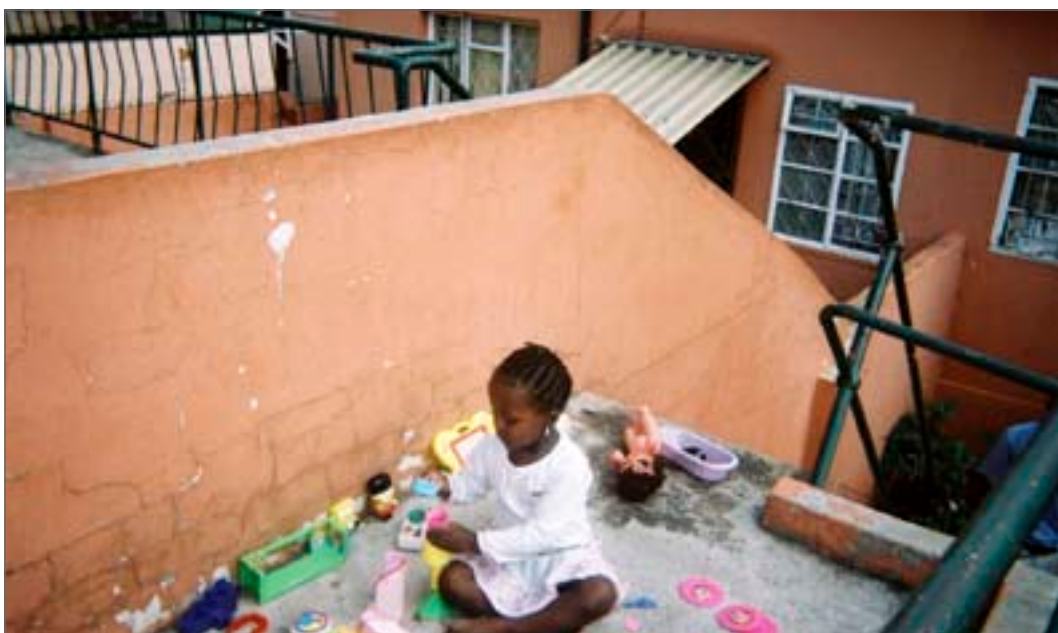
Finally, recognising the ethical questions raised by interviewing migrant women, I have worked to ensure that I preserve the anonymity of my respondents so that they are not vulnerable to arrest or deportation even though they hold valid permits.



Conclusion

This chapter has introduced and analysed the study’s methodological approach to research in the city. It presents the epistemological grounding and the research methods used for the study, locating these within the broader debate in urban sociology around macro and micro approaches to the city. The chapter argues for the need to recast approaches to urban studies. It turns the question that has dominated urban theory on its head. It asks of the city not just what socio-economic and political forces shape urban spaces, but how urban dwellers in the margins of society produce and shape urban space. In doing this it is iterative, understanding

how migrant women interact, engage with and interpret broader social, economic and institutional processes in order to survive in the city. Rather than understanding the city as a physical space shaped solely by structural forces, it reads the urban area as a product of the interaction between structural forces and the actions of populations at the margins. Thus, the focus of this thesis is on how migrant women extend (or not) the boundaries of structural forces. In other words, it looks at the urban spaces that are produced when women encounter broader economic and governance forces, and how their actions to negotiate, subvert and reinforce these boundaries, create spaces that are hidden from view in broader macro analyses. To do this it draws on qualitative methods that highlight the subjective experiences and knowledges of migrant women. This methodological approach does not refute the importance of grand theoretical approaches to the city, but in Kuhnian fashion argues that it is by exploring phenomena that remains unexplained by a dominant paradigm, that readjustments can be made to developing more appropriate and relevant explanatory tool and models. Thus, the strength of these methods is not only to provide rich descriptive data of a population group that is concealed from outsiders, or unaccounted for in dominant paradigms, but also to use migrant women's experiences to rethink dominant ways of seeing and thinking about the city. It is a research approach that reveals women's agency and also uses their voices and ways of coding urban spaces as critical vectors for developing new conceptual tools for understanding African cities in the 21st century.



Chapter 3

In their own words: Women's motives for migrating to Johannesburg



Introduction

This chapter contextualises women's cross-border journeys to Johannesburg, locating their contemporary migration within a history of women's movement to cities on the African continent. Despite their absence in mainstream economic literature which has historically tended to focus on male labour migration (see Castels and Miller, 2003; Todaro, 1969; and in the South African context, Cohen, 1986; Crush et al, 1991), the chapter shows that women's mobility has been a strategy employed by households and women for as long as modern African cities have been in existence. It examines women's mobility in current times, interrogating the structural constraints that lead women to leave their countries of birth and move to Johannesburg and, within this context, the subjective reasons they give for moving. Using their narratives, presented verbatim, this chapter sheds light on the multiple and overlapping motives for their migration – highlighting economic, political and social explanations. It locates women's material conditions, uncovers their shifting self-representations, and reveals their own interpretations and understandings of migration. Their narratives not only provide a glimpse into their own lives, but also the changing economic, social, legal and political processes that shape migrant women's urban realities and how these, in turn, have an impact on the lives of the men and the communities with whom they relate in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa. Notwithstanding the multiple constraints women face in moving to Johannesburg, they display agency in ways which counter ideas about their passivity in the migration process, particularly stereotypes that women are "left behind" as men migrate. The chapter argues that no single approach or theory fully explains why women migrate. Migration is a complex phenomenon determined by objective contextual factors, as well as subjective and personal circumstances. Women's personal experiences show how economic considerations shape their motivations to migrate. Yet these economic explanations cannot be separated from women's aspirations to transform social relationships and hierarchies, or fulfil their desires to travel. The determinants of migration are located within a complex decision-making matrix in which objective and subjective, economic, political and social, personal and collective motivations intersect to instigate mobility.

A's story

In 1997, A and her husband sat down to make a decision that would have lasting consequences for their lives. They were newly married, with two children and Tanzania's economy was not doing well. He was a barber in Arusha and she cared for the children and looked after the household. If their dreams to raise their family were to be realised, one of them would have to move to another city to try to make money to support their family. "In the end my husband advised me to go and live in Johannesburg. He had heard good things about the place." A and her husband decided that if Johannesburg worked out, he and the children could leave Tanzania and join her. In the meantime, it was important that they keep both bases; they would then have the security of keeping links in Tanzania in case Johannesburg did not turn out to be what they expected. Migrating was not new to A. Her father was killed when she was five by the Sese Seko [Mobutu Sese Seko] government in Kinshasa. "We were nine children, and my mother had to move to Tanzania and support us. It was very hard; my brothers and sisters are not doing well; no one has a steady job."

Negotiating the South African border was tricky, particularly because she and many others with her did not have entry visas. "We arrived in South Africa by bus. There were many of us who did not have visas but one of the drivers said he could help us get in if we paid." The fee was R200, which was out of reach for many on the bus. "We waited two days and then those who had paid were allowed to go in."

A soon realised that Johannesburg was not an easy place either. Her husband knew a woman from Tanzania who lived in Johannesburg, who provided A with accommodation while she settled down. "She took me in. She worked as a stripper in Hillbrow and she got me a job as a part-time waiter in that hotel. I worked there for 11 months but I left because the boss was mistreating me a lot with very poor pay. Afterwards I went to help a Tanzanian friend to sell clothes in her stall in Yeoville market. I did not get much money, and it depended on how much we could sell. I met some friends and that was when I started selling dagga and ecstasy on the streets in Yeoville, sometimes in clubs in Berea. Once in a while I did prostitution when I was desperate. About two years ago a friend taught me how to make hair and since then I have been working in salons. I am paid by commission; it's fair but there are no customers and we are many hairdressers."

Not long after **A** arrived in Johannesburg, her husband brought the children. They thought it would be better for them to be with their mother while he concentrated on working and supporting them from Arusha. But Johannesburg was not the place for children, particularly with **A** struggling to survive.

“Sometimes there is no money for food; I have only money for bread. Meat is a luxury. What will my children eat? My children are supposed to be in crèche but there is no money. My brothers and sisters cannot send me money because none of them have a steady job, but my husband supports me. Here, [in South Africa] someone to help someone else is very hard. I don’t have any close friends that I can rely on.”

It was very difficult when **A** had to work at night. A few of her friends would sometimes help with the children, but on many occasions she had to leave them on their own.

“When my husband came to visit us nine months ago, he took my children to Tanzania and I haven’t seen him since they went.” **A** cries as she says this, as the pain of being separated from her family resurfaces again as it has intermittently throughout her narration. The crying intensifies, as she reveals:

“Now I am two months pregnant and I am really scared for being with another man’s child. But I have to support myself because I am alone; he took my children to Tanzania. I am staying with my boyfriend. He helps with the rent money sometimes and food. I have to abort, but I have no money. I went to hospital, but they asked me to pay when I showed them my refugee papers. A man in the hospital said that he can make a plan for me if I give him R200. I am trying to get that money without my boyfriend knowing. I cannot tell them [husband and boyfriend] because I don’t know what they will do to me.”

In a subsequent visit, **A** said that she had “made a plan” about the abortion. Someone had referred her to a “doctor” who would be willing to carry out the abortion if she paid him R50. “I will be going next week Monday.”

Navigating multiple borders

A’s story is layered with a history of mobility that has come to characterise the African city. Her mother left Kinshasa after the death of her father in the war, and

A left Arusha for Johannesburg. It shows how mobility is shaped by socio-political and economic conditions and how these, together with subjective decisions around livelihoods and survival, combine to effect migration. A's story also reveals the complexities of survival – it sometimes comes at great personal cost and compromises familial and other relationships. Her experience reveals the realities of navigating national borders, as much as it highlights class differences in travel.

While Sassen's (1991) global elite travel without obstacles, migrants like A who are without access to passports or visas experience obstacles and are often at the mercy of border guards and agents. A's navigation of the economic system reveals the difficulty of finding work and be paid a decent wage. Not only are work practices exploitative, but the absence of work means she moves in and out of illegal activities, like selling drugs, to survive. Because she is not a South African citizen, accessing basic services is difficult. Her experience at a health facility shows how notions of inclusion and exclusion are formed around citizenship. A's narrative also reveals the complexity of personal relationships and the conflicting pressures of keeping her family together and her survival in Johannesburg. Relationships with pimps and drug lords add to the layers of experience in cities, and the tactics that women sometimes resort to in order to survive.

A and her husband's hope is that the multiple household strategy they have employed will allow them to spread the economic risk by having two bases, one in Arusha and the other in Johannesburg. What timeframes they require to establish whether Johannesburg will work is unclear. This "not knowing" and living in both Arusha and Johannesburg creates a liminal space. Where (and if) they "anchor" the family is "up in the air" and, in the meantime, they are located in multiple sites. Although there is the hope that this dislocation is temporary and families will soon find a base in Johannesburg, this liminal state often becomes permanent, a phenomenon Landau calls "permanent transit" (2006: 125). This way of being adds to the layers of what it means to be an urban dweller in African cities in the 21st century. It develops a new vocabulary of the city, a new way of understanding the order of things, new urban subjectivities and new imaginations. Liminality becomes not simply a "state", but a culture with an agglomeration of registers that guide people's subjective and inter-subjective understandings of urbanity and generate new discursive and embodied practices to negotiate intersecting social, political and economic forces.

Theories of migration and their relationship to this study

There exists a variety of theoretical models which try to explain the reasons people migrate (see Castles and Miller, 2003; Massey et al, 1993; De Haas, 2003). Each of these models posit a variety of causal processes and hypotheses from differing research vantage points. In other words, the research questions, units of study, levels of aggregation, and therefore explanations of causal mechanisms of migration differ from one model to another. Their varied explanations are less an indicator of conceptual errors in the theoretical models, than recognition of the complexity of the migration process:

Given the fact that theories conceptualise causal processes at such different levels of analysis – the individual, the household, the national, and the international – they cannot be assumed, *a priori*, to be inherently incompatible ... the various models reflect different research objectives, focuses, interests, and ways of decomposing an enormously complex subject into analytically manageable parts ... (Massey et al, 1993: 433).

Historically, two models have dominated the migration studies: the neo-classical and historical structural approaches to migration. The critiques of these models have prompted a more interdisciplinary approach, resulting in the development of theories such as the “migration systems theory” (Castles and Miller, 2003) and the “synthetic model of migration” (Gelderblom, 2006). I will return to this later. Both the neo-classical, and the historical structural models have tended to attribute mobility to conditions in the labour market and the development of capitalism respectively. While the reasons these theoretical migration models give for why people migrate are entirely valid, they stress the importance of labour markets and capitalist development in ways that overshadow other causal factors for migration. This does not mean that the models’ conclusions are invalid, or even that they possess internal logical flaws. Rather, what they explain is a partial understanding of a social phenomenon that has multiple intersecting causes. In fact, as Massey et al point out, it is entirely possible that all the varied causal explanations of migration provided by different migration models influence a migrant’s decision to move (1993).

The empirical evidence discussed in this chapter highlights this. It shows that there are often multiple and overlapping reasons why women migrate. And while there may be a primary motivating factor that compels a migrant to move, there needs to be a host of other factors in place in order for migration to be enacted. Migration decisions are a consequence of a range of factors, each located within a decision-making matrix that the migrant alone, and/or with family and community members, take into consideration before embarking on the journey. For example, while war may be the primary reason a refugee leaves her country, once in a safe location, her choice of destination may be informed by economic reasons and whether she and her family can create a viable livelihood. Similarly, while a woman may choose to leave her country because of the social stigma attached to divorce, she may be attracted to Johannesburg not only because of the anonymity and the physical distance that separates her from the prying eyes of her community, but also because of the promise of economic opportunities.

This next section discusses three major theories of migration that have influenced migration studies economic theory – the neo-classical function equilibrium framework, historical-structural theory, and migration systems theory (Castles and Miller, 2003) – and their relationship to this study.



Neo-classical approaches to migration

Economic theories of migration tend to draw from neo-classical economics which explains migration as based on individuals' decision to maximise their economic potential. "Neo-classical theory assumes that individuals maximise utility: individuals 'search' for the country of residence that maximises their well being ..." (Borjas, 1989: 460, see also Stalker, 2001). The context within which a migrant is located is modelled around the "immigration market" (Borjas, 1989: 461). Using available information, a migrant is able to weigh the costs and benefits of moving and compare these against different possible destinations. The migrant makes the choice of country based on the destination where s/he is able to "maximise utility". Neo-classical theorists believe that migration leads to an equilibrium in the market place, where eventually income disparities even out as supply of labour increases in scarce areas thus reducing the need for migration. The Todaro Migration Model, which explains urban rural mobility within "Third World" economies makes this point. The argument remains the same for cross-border mobility. Todaro:

[starts] from the assumption that migration is primarily an economic phenomenon for which for the individual migrant can be a quite rational decision ... The fundamental premise is that migrants consider the various labour market opportunities available to them, as between rural and urban sectors, and choose the one which maximises their "expected gains from migration" (Todaro, 1982: 213).

Neo-classical models of migration have been contested for various reasons including the fact that empirical studies of migration show it is often a collective, rather than individual, decision (a fact reflected in A's story). The economic model also tends to present the "migration market" as perfect – where migrants have access to information and mobility between countries is unrestricted (see Castles and Miller, 2003). The reality is that there are various legal, cost and policy restrictions to mobility. While these critiques are valid, they are not my main concern with neo-classical theorists. Indeed, the model remains relevant to my study in as far as women's narratives have shown that their decision to migrate to Johannesburg *are* linked to economic opportunities, both real and perceived, in the city. The limita-

tion of this model, *vis a vis* the empirical evidence I present in this research, is that migrant women's choices cannot be inferred from economic issues alone, but entail a range of other factors. Borjas argues that:

Income maximisation is a very strong assumption since individuals also consider other aspects of the countries in their migration decisions (e.g., weather, culture, the crime rate, etc.). It can be shown, however, that income-maximisation is a necessary condition for utility maximisation ... (1989: 462).

Borjas does not deny that other aspects of the potential host country play a part in the decision to migrate, but argues that income-maximisation is a *necessary condition* that has to be met. Indeed, if this is true, it does not explain one of the key questions raised by this study and discussed in forthcoming chapters. Why do some women remain in Johannesburg despite the fact that they are unable to maximise their incomes in the city? I posit in this study that other factors, such as social pressure to succeed, and the shame of returning home "empty handed" lead women to remain in Johannesburg despite the lack of economic opportunities and their inability to "maximise utility". By its very nature a purely economic framework is limited in its ability to reveal other social, cultural or even gendered reasons for migration. One of the contributions this thesis makes is in exposing these other social factors that come into play when women make decisions to migrate to Johannesburg.

Historical-structural approach to migration

Emerging in the 1970s, the historical-structural approach provided an alternative explanation for migration in response to some of the critiques of the labour model. Located within Marxist political economy this approach explains the causes of migration as a consequence of particular historical events in the development of capitalism. The growth of the capitalist system has created uneven economic and political power across the globe, forcing migrants to move in a manner that is beyond their individual control and is a result of political and economic forces.

In search of cheap factors of production (such as labour, raw materials and land) and consumer markets, owners of capital expand their reach into peripheral areas and, in doing so, disrupt existing processes of traditional production. By way of

illustration, typically, the production of cash crops undermines food production and, during times when cash crops do not do well in the market, farmers are unable to buy food for home consumption. Some family members are thus forced to migrate in search of an income to support the family. Land for commercial production requires mechanisation and consolidation which inevitably create a dislocated and mobile population, forced to move in search of other ways of creating livelihoods. Similarly, as in the case of South Africa, capitalist expansion in the country created a demand for cheap labour from other countries to work on the mines. This process of capitalist penetration and expansion both disrupts and dislocates populations in the periphery on the one hand, and attracts dislocated labour to the core on the other, as industrial, mining and service industries create a demand for labour. For historical structuralists, “migration is a natural outgrowth of disruptions and dislocations that inevitably occur in the process of capitalist development” (Massey et al, 1993: 445).

Thus, in the historical-structural model, migration is understood as a consequence of unequal economic and power relations which results in the establishment of the core and periphery in which the core’s dominant economic position results in the pull of surplus labour from the periphery. The unequal terms of trade, and transfer of the cost of social reproduction to the periphery, keep the periphery underdeveloped and people moving to the economic core (Massey et al, 1993). In Western Europe, for example, guest worker programmes were set up to facilitate the movement of labour from the European periphery and this was significant in creating the foundation for capitalist expansion in the core (Castles and Kosack, 1973; Castles and Miller, 2003). Migration is therefore a natural consequence of capitalist market formation and as global markets penetrate peripheral areas, uprooted peasants dislocated socially and economically have no choice but to migrate to areas where demand for their labour is high (Massey et al, 1993).



The mobility of labour is the lens through which the history of migration to southern Africa has been seen historically¹¹. In South Africa, the historical structural model of migration has been amongst the most influential explanations for mobility within the Southern African region (See Cohen, 1986; Crush et al, 1991; Crush, 2000). The labour needs in South Africa for industrialisation propelled the movement of labour from the region. As Adepoju argues, “[i]n southern Africa, the migrant labour configuration from labour reserves in peripheral countries was designed to meet South Africa’s apartheid-era requirements (Adepoju, 2006: 33).

Historical-structuralists are less concerned with the individual and his or her choices than with understanding the broader dynamics and patterns of mobility. Thus, the contribution made by this approach is to locate human mobility within broader historical political and economic forces and relationships between countries and regions. In other words, mobility is seen as intricately intertwined with global economic and political systems. And while it is *individuals* who move, where and why they moved is understood as part of a broader process of global capital development.

As Castle and Miller (2003) acknowledge, the historical-structural approach has its limitations. By drawing attention to the processes of accumulation and penetration of capital, and the way these processes generate a mobile labour force, it places little attention on individual motivations and actions in the migration process. While the scope of this approach is not to understand individual action it has been critiqued for seeing ‘the interests of capital as all-determining and paying inadequate attention to the motivations and actions of the individuals and groups involved (Castles and Miller, 2003: 26). Notwithstanding its limitations, it nevertheless provides compelling arguments for understanding the flows of migration between regions.

Migration systems theory

Because of migration’s dynamic and complex character it is difficult to envisage a theoretical model that can comprehensively explain all of its various facets.

11 New studies in South Africa show that since the 1990s migrants move for various other reasons such as escaping war, social networks, a rite of passage and so on (See Wentzel, Viljoen and Kok (2006)

Massey et al contend that understanding migratory processes “will not be achieved by relying on the tools of one discipline alone, or by focusing on a single level of analysis” (1993: 462). While acknowledging the importance of neo-classical and historical-structural approaches to migration, a variety of migration scholars now concede that fully understanding migration requires a multi-disciplinary approach (Castles and Miller, 2003; Gelderblom, 2006; Massey et al, 1993). Named variously as the migration systems theory (Castles and Miller, 2003), “a synthetic model of migration” (Gelderblom, 2006), these approaches to migration attempt to incorporate the multiple factors that underpin human mobility. They explain migration at both macro and micro level intentions and include research in economics as well as the social sciences and humanities. Amongst migration scholars, there seems to be some level of agreement that “[m]acro, meso and micro-structures are intertwined in the migratory process, and there are no clear dividing lines between them. No single cause is ever sufficient to explain why people decide to leave their country and settle in another” (Castles and Miller, 2003: 28).

Given that no single approach or theory can fully explain why women migrate, my research and empirical evidence can only be a partial rendering of the reality of migration. Nevertheless, it does add to existing research, and in particular to economic models, by revealing that migrant women’s choices cannot be inferred from economic issues alone, but entail a range of other factors. Migrant women explain that they *are* driven by economic considerations, but not these alone. Their social cultural positions, complicated by their gender, ethnicity and nationality also have an impact on their decision to migrate.

Which of these are primary reasons and which are secondary? While neo-classical theorists will claim that income maximisation is a primary cause of migration, and structuralists that the capitalist system creates migration, women’s narratives do not reveal such clear distinctions. A Zimbabwean woman argued that “I cannot say that I came more because of work than because I was divorced. Both of these reasons were very important for me. If I had not got divorced and people were not accepting me, I would not have come. If I had a good opportunity there, I would not have come [to South Africa].” Indeed, migrant women’s lives reveal that subjective reasons for migration cannot always be categorised into neat hierarchies. There may be multiple reasons – some with equal weighting – that cause women to migrate. Even where there are clear primary motivations, these require the support of other

factors in order for migration take place. The reasons for migration stand in differing relationships but they are all critical to the process of actualising it. This chapter thus makes its contribution to understanding migration dynamics in the following ways:

- It explains how a group of migrant women from different classes or nationalities move and how these differences affect their journeys and experiences of migration;
- It reveals the non-economic reasons some people move – to escape patriarchy, social stigma, or to fulfil their desire to travel;
- It illustrates the ways in which migrant women find agency within structural power relations;
- How women’s decisions are influenced by their own personal aspirations and desires as well as their responsibility to family and community; and
- How their mobility is shifting the nature of patriarchal authority and discipline.

Literature on urbanisation and migration has historically tended to focus on the mobility of men and even where women are discussed, it is often as passive participants in the process (Gugler and Ludwar-Ene, 1995; Adepoju, 1995). This has perpetuated the erasure of women’s migration experiences and the active roles they play in the process. Where women are discussed in this literature, they are often portrayed as passive in the migration process – either as the wives or daughters who get “left behind” by, or “tag along” with, a male migrant labourer. Indeed, as Boyd (2003) argues, when people’s movements to the city are largely understood in terms of their contributions to the formal economy, critical aspects of the urbanisation process are lost, and women’s experiences are among the most striking omissions from this literature. The privileging of male over female labour in urbanising societies has resulted in unequal treatments of women in urban literature, a corollary of which has been problematic readings of both migration and urbanisation. To use bell hook’s phrase, migrant women have been “written out of existence” – with their productive labour dismissed as economically inconsequential and their experiences obscured under reams of biased, blind and blinding frameworks (hooks, 1981: 7). In light of this, my study contributes to a growing literature that seeks to understand women’s processes of migration and urbanisation.

Rendering migrant women visible: The lives of women in three colonial and post-colonial African cities

Before discussing the empirical data, this section puts into perspective women's migration to African cities. Existing literature shows how, historically, women have moved and the multiple reasons they have for doing so. These works illustrate that migrant women have had to cross and straddle rural/urban lives; peasant and capitalist economies; changes in the nature of their labour becoming both productive and reproductive economic actors; and manoeuvre around and resist patriarchal authority in cities. In moving to cities they became border women, straddling between multiple social, economic and spatial worlds.

It is largely through socio-anthropological studies that women's lives and experiences in colonial and post-colonial African cities have been made visible. White's pioneering study on prostitution in colonial Nairobi proficiently overturns notions of migrant women as economically unimportant (1990). She convincingly argues that prostitutes were not only able to support themselves and rural agricultural or pastoral economies, but they also reproduced male labour by making life tolerable – providing “comforts of home” – in an otherwise hostile urban environment:

Prostitutes' work is reproductive – in fact they sell that part of themselves – of male labour power and family formations. Prostitutes perform tasks that frequently include conversation, cooked food, and bathwater that restore, flatter and revive male energies: prostitutes sell sexual intercourse in a relationship, whether abrupt or deferential. It is possible that a part of the ambivalence toward prostitutes is that they sell as transactions all that is legitimately available in marriage, and that they are paid out of male wages (White, 1990: 11).

White expertly debunks sex work, often unpacking the complex and contradictory relationships that prostitutes had with labour and capital in colonial Nairobi. In many ways, A's mobility to Johannesburg echoes the continuities of women's mobility to African cities, and the contributions of their labour to post-colonial and post-apartheid cities:

The processes by which women went from their homes to East African towns did not reveal as much about the degree of colonial involvement in rural economies as they did about the abilities of families and individual women to solve their problems through the mobilisation of their own labour (White, 1990: 225).

Her analysis makes a significant contribution in shifting the discourses associated with women's migration to cities and prostitution. She argues that women were an essential productive and reproductive resource for the development of capital in colonial Nairobi.

Where White's study focussed on the class location of prostitutes in Kenya's growing capitalist economy, other anthropological studies of women migrants, this time in early to mid 19th century Johannesburg, were concerned with understanding how modernity transformed pre-industrial African social structures (Longmore, 1959; Hellmann, 1948). Hellmann's landmark socio-anthropological study on African urban dwellers in Johannesburg, undertaken in 1933-34 in what is now New Doornfontein, shows how single or widowed women were, through trade, prostitution, and domestic work, able to support their families. But this economic independence was not restricted to single women. With men's income too low to support their families, married women entered the wage economy either as businesswomen selling beer or doing domestic work for white people (see also Bonner, 1990; Walker, 1990). And, contrary to assumptions about women's passivity and lack of economic savvy, they were important figures in determining how household budgets were spent:

A woman's beer-profits and her husband's wages are usually merged. The wife controls the joint fund and, where some degree of harmony and co-operation between husband and wife exists, consultation between them precedes any expenditure other than that on household requirements (Hellmann 1948:51).

Similarly, Obbo's study on African women in Namuwongo-Wabigalo, a suburb in Kampala, which starts some eight years after White's study ends, makes similar observations about women's active participation in and ambition to

succeed in post-colonial Kampala. Obbo vividly paints a picture of the everyday lives of women brewing beer and distilling gin, selling firewood and *sumbusa* (curried pancakes) and braiding hair and mats. When a chief confiscates gin brewed illegally by a woman she is not deterred: “[T]hese chiefs are like jealous people who bring thieves to steal your things in the hope of retarding your progress. Not me, I am going to continue being successful” (Obbo, 1981:54). Contrary to official rhetoric at a time when town women were a “liability rather than an asset because they had nothing to do” (Obbo, 1981: 7), the study shows that men felt threatened and resentful of women because they were competition and “poached” their jobs. Like White’s study on an earlier period, Obbo skilfully depicts ambitious, shrewd migrant businesswomen in Kampala in the early 1970s. Her sample shows that there are a significant number of women who travel alone or go to cities to visit their friends. These women talk about going to cities to “seek their fortune”, “improve their opportunities” or simply because they are “tired of village life” (Obbo, 1981: 75). Besides illustrating that their mobility was a decision they took, it overturns stereotypes of unambitious women who wait for male remittances or simply follow working husbands into cities. Even women who accompanied their husbands often *insisted* on doing so, or made a decision jointly with their spouse. Once in the city the women often started their own business, such as dressmaking or hair braiding.

Without undermining women’s economic roles, it is important to acknowledge that their migration is not solely a consequence of an economic rationality. Decisions to migrate are made for a plethora of reasons, with economics being just one of them. Bozzoli’s work on domestic workers in Johannesburg who left their home town of Phokeng in the 1920s and 1930s shows that:

... the story of the establishment of both male and female migration in Phokeng does not fit an economic picture of simple economic decline leading to the need for more migrancy. As elsewhere, a whole gamut of forces come into play, reflecting the complex interaction between the “tribal” and “capitalist” economies and social orders (1991: 82).

It is through the study of women’s migration that we realise that economic explanatory models are inadequate in providing comprehensive analyses

of why people migrate. Mobility not only brings about greater economic independence, it also shifts patriarchal and communal relationships as women leverage their distance from home and economic independence to transform their social position and status in their community. It is a social transformation that many women seek when they migrate (Obbo, 1981; Bozzoli, 1991). While not denying women's ambitions of gaining economic independence, Obbo's case studies reveal the multiple reasons why women migrated. Many escaped unsatisfactory marriages, sorcery accusations, or simply fled to the city to find time for enjoyment (Obbo, 1981: 77).

The studies show that, like A, women's migration to cities is a phenomenon that has been used as a household survival strategy since the appearance of the modern city on the continent. But women's movement to urban areas was problematic. It threatened patriarchal systems of control even as it provided an income for poor rural and fledgling urban households. Women's behaviour was closely watched and sanctioned in cities and, as Obbo's work reveals, ethnic associations deported those considered to be loose women and errant wives back to the rural areas (1981).

This chapter builds on and contributes to these studies which have documented women's migration experiences. In doing so it extends economic explanations, revealing mobility not simply as phenomenon that results in a state of equilibrium as neo-classical models purport – the state of liminality (being in between) is far from being a point of equilibrium. Nor is it that those involved are merely pawns in the process, as structural analyses emphasise. Indeed, even within the structural obstacles that are defined by nationality, gender and class, women find ways of crossing borders without visas or passports, escaping patriarchy, participating in decisions-making within patriarchal societies and so on.

The following sections locate contemporary African women's migration to Johannesburg. By providing a gendered treatment of a post-industrial, post-apartheid city, it reveals the continuities and disruptions of a process that has taken place for over a century on the continent. It analyses women's journeys to this metropolis and the structural conditions under which they have migrated. The purpose of this is to reveal their own understanding of migration and urbanisation, their ways of coding and encoding their experiences of migration to the city, and their shifting social positions within their communities back home and in Johannesburg.

The political and economic conditions creating conditions for migration to Johannesburg in the 1990s

Contemporary women's migration to South Africa needs to be seen within the context of significant socio-economic transformations occurring on the continent from the mid-1980s. When narrating why they made decisions to migrate, many women point to the poor economic conditions facing their families and communities in countries like Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Senegal and Nigeria. The devastating impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) on African economies and livelihoods in Africa have been well documented and will not be elaborated upon here (see Gibbon and Olukoshi, 1996; Adepoju, 1993). A combination of the liberalisation of the economy, devaluation of local currencies, the dramatic reduction of government spending, and a general failing of the economy plunged many erstwhile middle class Africans families into poverty and ensured that those who were poor remained without any means of getting out of poverty¹².

Combining with the economic crisis were political crises which emerged across Africa. The early 1990s were also witness to war in countries like Rwanda, Burundi and the former Zaire. In addition, civil unrest, related to multi-party politics in various countries, resulted in the displacement of many from homes in urban and rural areas, as well as their countries of origin. Through women's narrations of their experiences, we get a glimpse of this socio-political and economic context of the continent at the time of their migration in the mid to late 1990s¹³.

The rich and vivid everyday accounts of the shifts in their lives give us a new "human" angle from which to understand the political and economic conditions in Africa at this time. We are connected to the impact these had on daily life through their seemingly mundane observations of diet, child beggars and their repeated use of the phrase "I (we) ran away". For women escaping war, there was

12 This is not to say that African economies were not in crisis before the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes, but that the implementation of these exacerbated economic conditions, which plunged many middleclass and poor families into poverty.

13 Many had come before from nearby states, but are not the focus of this study.

a complete rupture of their lives and the disintegration of the family as the women knew it. Women became *wakimbizi* (literally, Kiswahili for those who run), and references to running away – from war or judgemental communities, – in their narratives capture the rupture in their daily routines.

What made Johannesburg a possible destination in the 1990s?

Intersecting with economic, factors were socio-political changes in South Africa and the lifting of sanctions in 1990 with the release of African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela. This made it politically possible for Africans, whose countries had participated in the boycott against apartheid South Africa, to come to the country. So, the combination of the economic crisis, political and civil unrest in other parts of the continent, and the opening of South Africa's borders make it possible for women, and men, from other African locations to consider the country as a destination. What seems interesting is the hope Johannesburg holds for women. In their minds Johannesburg is a space that offers a future. Whatever the initial reasons for their decisions to leave – whether it is war, the need to escape community sanctions or the death of the primary guardian – Johannesburg is imagined as a place which can provide not only peace and safety, but also a livelihood for the family in the city and back home.



What they say: Women's reasons for migrating to Johannesburg

Using interview material, this section unpacks the reasons women give for leaving their countries of origin and moving to Johannesburg. Although their responses are organised in distinct categories, it is clear that their narratives do not make these neat distinctions. It is evident that intertwined in women's responses are multiple overlapping reasons for migrating. While some are structural and objective, others are subjective, relating to their personal circumstances at the time their decision was made. In addition, it is not obvious that the reasons they provide can be separated. In other words, if L's parent's had not passed away, she may not have left Zimbabwe even though the country's economic situation was difficult. While for some women there are clear primary and secondary reasons for leaving their countries, for others, these hierarchies and ways of organising causal factors are less perceptible.

Economic factors

Women from various class backgrounds have similar memories of the declining economic fortunes of their families in the 1980s and 1990s. A Ghanaian woman from a middle class family remembers how the family's diet changed:

“I don't know what happened. One day we woke up and my mother was telling us we could not afford to eat meat everyday ... and sugar, ah! I remember we had rations. My father could no longer have three spoons of sugar with his morning tea ... he was not pleased about this, although it was probably good for him! This had never happened before. For the first time I noticed the poverty around; so many people begging, including children!”

This excerpt from a Cameroonian illustrates how difficult it was to get a job at home when she finished her undergraduate degree and, although she was happy at home, she realised that she had no future there:

“The problem with us [in Cameroon] is we have very few jobs. If you should get the job you need connections. The problem with here is there are jobs, but they are not ready to give it out to people who are not South African. When I was in Cameroon I was very, very okay. But then Cameroon is very low if you want to talk about development and economic development. There are a lot of prospects here (in South Africa). You can see that you have a better future while you are here. But back at home you can't see that your future will be better, you just know you are living and you are happy.”

The impact of the economic crisis exacerbated by SAPs is remembered through everyday experiences, like the scarcity of meat and sugar which the family had previously taken for granted. One senses the confusion and the poverty that seemed suddenly visible in ways that it may have not been before. Others remember the economic crisis through their attempts to get employed after completing their studies and finding that there were no jobs for them. These accounts reflect the shifts in women's daily lives and vividly reveal the closing in of the options available to them in their home countries.

Similarly, for L, the death of her parents and economic decline in Zimbabwe forced her to leave the country in order to support her daughter and siblings. This is not necessarily a decision that she wanted to make, but one that she had to take because of her personal circumstances and the crisis in Zimbabwe.



Caroline: Why did you come to South Africa?

L: I'm from Zimbabwe and I came here two years back (2005) and I came here because my parents had passed away and I had siblings to look after who are still at school. And so I just came here because like at home the money you earn is not that much so I came here and I'm working and I'm looking after siblings and that's it. But as soon as Zimbabwe goes right I'm going home. I like it here, it's nice but ...

Terry: You're looking after your siblings here?

L: No, they're at home."

RT: So you're sending money?

L: I'm sending money and school fees at home.

Terry: School fees?

L: Yes, I've got a daughter who is six. I took her [to South Africa'] because she had no one to look after her ...

Caroline: She's here?

L: Yes, she's here. She's going to school.

Caroline: And the school fees for how many siblings?

L: Two. My young brother and my sister.

Caroline: How old were you when both your parents died?

L: I was about 22.

Caroline: So that's a lot, so you became the parent?

L: Yes, actually I became a parent and instead of having a parent I was a parent, so it's been difficult for me sometimes. And last September I was diagnosed with TB and HIV. So at first it was difficult but now I'm getting used to it because I know anytime anything can happen to me. I can die.

Caroline: Are you on medication?

L: I am on TB treatment, I'm finishing, I'm supposed to finish my six months this month. Then I go have to do my CD4 count and if it's low then they give me the ARV's but if its up... then I'm on a Quatra, which is to keep me out of infection and to help with it. So I'm drinking Quatra for the rest of my life. So I'm just praying and hoping that I live longer.

L's account of why she came to South Africa begins with her personal circumstances and the fact that with the death of her parents, and as the first child, she was expected to support her siblings. She left Zimbabwe because the economic situation could not allow her to support her family. It is quite possible that, had her parents not died, she may not have been compelled to migrate to South Africa, notwithstanding Zimbabwe's ailing economy. And if she had, the way in which she articulated her reasons would have been different. As with many migrant women's accounts of why they migrated to South Africa, it is difficult to isolate objective motivating factors from subjective ones. Moreover, economic factors are embedded in familial responsibilities and an understanding of all these are essential in making sense of why women migrate.

Women's moves to Johannesburg also reveal that they have much more agency in the decision-making process, unlike depictions in the literature which show women as possessing little or no decision-making power. Unlike A, whose decision to move to Johannesburg was taken with her husband, NM, a 29-year-old single mother from Zambia who has a small business plaiting hair in a park in Yeoville, reveals how she made the decision to move to Johannesburg on her own:

“Nobody was involved into my decision to emigrate to SA. I was employed by Shoprite Zambia when I decided to emigrate to SA, given that the salary that I got was insufficient in the sense that it could not allow me to take care of my daughter. Coming in this city [Johannesburg], my purpose was to look for a job and a lot of money in order to improve my life and take care of my daughter ... Zambians who live out of Zambia used to send a lot of money to their relatives, build good houses and make a lot of contribution with regard to the improvement of the life of their relatives back home. This was also the expectation of my own family: seeing me improving the social and economical situation of all my relatives with the money I will make in Johannesburg. For these reasons, no-one in my family regretted to see me leaving Lusaka because I was considered as the one who will help my family, following the degradation of the socio-economic situation of Zambia. I can also add that all my family was convinced that I was old enough in order to take care of myself out of my country. That is why nobody was afraid about me [leaving].”

N, a single mother from Bulawayo who sells fruits and vegetables outside the Yeoville recreation centre, also made the decision to migrate to Johannesburg on her own:

“I was big enough to take care of myself, so I decided to come to Johannesburg on my own. The only main problem that I face was that I could not come to SA with my boy because I did not have relatives in this country. That is why I left him with my mother. My travel was sponsored by myself because, in Zimbabwe, I was also running a small business like what I am doing here; and the money was sufficient in the sense that it allowed me to pay my transport from Bulawayo to Johannesburg. I did everything [the travel arrangements] myself because I did not want to be helped by someone else ... I wanted to keep everything secret. I came to South Africa without a passport because I could not spend my money in order to make a passport. All what I wanted was to pay my ticket. This was what I did.”

Migration makes sense as a livelihood strategy, even when it means the separation of mothers from their children, families and social networks. Yet, the distance from familiar spaces and communal ties is made worthwhile by what women, and other household members, imagine are the large sums of money that will be made in Johannesburg.

Both family members and migrant women have high expectations of the house she will build and the goods she will send back home to improve people's lives – just as others have done by migrating. This consciousness represents a shift from traditional conceptions of the role of women as “keeping the home” while men make the money to support them. For these women, there seems to be no question that it is their responsibility to provide material support to their families. In fact, their mobility allows them to assume an important role in the family – that of a “bread-giver” – as LZ, a 26-year-old woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo, shows:

“As you know yourself, in DRC, people have a good image of SA because they consider it like a place where there are a lot of opportunities, where people can make money and send back home. It was the same for my family, where my relatives (including myself), seemed to be happy because they knew that I could become the ‘bread-giver’ to them.”

The resistance (if any) to women migrating alone to Johannesburg is allayed by expectations of their economic success and promise of support to their families. The pain of leaving children, families and sometimes husbands is made sense of by imagining the great contributions the mother, daughter, girlfriend or wife will make to the family. Amidst failing economies, a deterioration of quality of life, civil wars and the absence of viable choices, the migration of women, and their role as breadwinners in the family, is fast becoming a normalised and significant livelihood strategy on the African continent.

Escaping war and insecurity

As mentioned earlier, the economic crisis in Africa, and the later political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe, coincided with civil wars and genocide in countries like the former Zaire, Cote d'Ivoire, Rwanda and Burundi, and civil unrest in many countries around the struggle for multi-party democracy. These are some of the narratives of women who were forced to leave to escape genocide and war in their countries, and their experience of death. **RT**, a Burundi national living in Rwanda in 1994, remembers how her family fled the country:

“We ran away from Rwanda when the war started in 1994. I was with my mother and father when we ran away. I didn't finish my studies ... I was in Form Four doing my hotelier and tourism studies when I ran away. I had two years left before I finished. They told us they would send us outside to finalise our studies and then I would get a good job. But I didn't get that chance – I ran away. Now I don't even think about going to school again after that ... We ran away with my sisters and my parents. We went to Congo. When I arrived in Congo I was a young woman. We meet a friend who was a friend of my uncle ... They were looking for us, and when this man saw us he told us about my uncle and they came to fetch us in the camp where we were with other refugees. We were lucky because we managed to stay with my uncle. But my friends who I used to pray with after school – we used to make prayer when other children went to eat – I think both of them have passed away in the war because I can't see any news about them. They said they killed them in the war, but I didn't follow the story and I have not heard about them again.”

RT later left the camp in the Democratic Republic of Congo and migrated to South Africa with a Rwandese man who promised to take her to school. “My parents gave me away to my husband because they thought it was better for me.” Unsuspecting, **RT** did not know that this was to be her future husband. She recounts: “Me, I did not know that I was going to get married. I thought I was going to school and I was very happy.”

Another Rwandese woman, **JT**, narrates how she escaped war in Rwanda and arrived in Pretoria, South Africa:

“The time I ran away I didn’t go with my parents. We were so confused; I wanted to go home but I could not because they said it was not safe. I wanted to try and find my family... my mother and father and sisters. I ran away with my sister and her husband. She is a cousin in English but in the African way, we say she is a sister. We ran away during 1994 during the genocide time. Me, I went to Congo and after Congo I came to Kenya. I was staying with my sister there. I met my husband in Kenya. He is also from Rwanda and he had run away as well. We got married in Kenya and we left Kenya because they would not give us the legal documents so that we could stay and work. The government chased us away because they didn’t want refugees there, so we just left and came to South Africa in Pretoria ... Until today I have not heard about my parents. I think they were killed but I do not know.”

One woman says she remembers little of Rwanda before the war. She did not manage to bring pictures of her life there because she ran with friends from boarding school without taking anything with her. When I asked her about what she remembers about being in Rwanda she said: “Do you know the smell of death? I have smelt death and that is what I remember about Rwanda, the smell of death. That is why I can never go back to that land.” Another woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo, remembers how “the government accused us of causing trouble at the university in Kinshasa after the first elections. I had to run away because the government had marked me and my friends. My mother helped me to come here [Johannesburg]”.

In situations of conflict, there is little ambiguity about the cause of migration. It is involuntary, and the primary causal reason for it is to escape insecurity and find stability elsewhere. Having escaped conflict, other motivations for migration may emerge as in the case of the Rwandese woman whose family fled to Kenya and then moved to Pretoria. She explains that in Kenya they were “chased away” by the government which would not give them documents that allowed them to work. Their decision to come to South Africa is linked to gaining legal recognition as refugees and accessing opportunities to work in order to support their family.

Women’s discussions of war underlie the trauma and fear of forced migration. They relate how wars disrupted their education, separated their families and generally traumatised them. I show in Chapter 5 how these experiences of trauma shape the spaces they occupy in Johannesburg, and how the history of the continent becomes enmeshed with Johannesburg’s own history. For now, I argue that women’s experiences of trauma also influence their future decisions to return home – as the Rwandese woman who remembers “the smell of death” states, “I can never go back to that land”. Forced migration has elements that are unique and cannot be conflated with other forms of migration. Yet even those fleeing, once in secure locations, they seek destinations that allow them to meet personal aspirations, such as continuing with their education, starting a family and building a secure livelihood to support themselves and their families.



Escaping patriarchy and social stigma

For **S**, a 47-year-old Zimbabwean woman, moving to Johannesburg was a way to escape the cruelty of her husband and the patriarchal system that stereotypes, and sometimes ostracises, divorced women, who are often perceived as “bad” and unable to keep a husband. It is also a means of recreating a new identity and prosperous space for herself and her family

S: I was living in Zimbabwe with my kids and their father. In 1987 I decided to leave my husband because I was tired of the way he used to treat me. Staying to Zimbabwe after divorcing with him could generate a lot trouble in my life. That is why I decided to come to SA. That is why, without consulting anybody (except my kids), I decided to come to South Africa to join my uncle who was working in Rosebank as a domestic worker. My travel was sponsored by myself and I did not ask anybody to help me because some people could go and inform my former husband. I did everything as quickly as possible in order to leave Zimbabwe; I did not even think about applying for a passport ...

Caroline: What made you move to South Africa?

S: As I told you, my purpose was to abandon definitely my former husband. I wanted also to experiment life in another country, especially in South Africa because I had a very good picture of Johannesburg in my mind given that I used to receive from my uncle some good news on Johannesburg, particularly about the economic opportunities that this city offered to people at that time. I was convinced that I could make a lot of money and improve my family's standard of life.

The story of **S** is not unusual. As we shall see in the next chapter, many women leave their countries of origin to escape the surveillance and sanction of their own communities. In Johannesburg they can escape the stranglehold of patriarchy and be who they want to be without the judgement of their communities. This excerpt also illustrates some of the complexities attached to migration, and the reasons why some destinations are chosen over others. While the motivating factor for migrating was to leave her husband, the presence of a contact person in South Africa,

coupled with the promise of economic opportunities, resulted in her moving to Johannesburg. The existence of networks and the economic opportunities in Johannesburg cannot be separated from the overall rationale for migrating to the city.

More broadly, declining economic opportunities, migration to cities and the absence of men in households, have resulted in the breakdown of patriarchal control mechanisms that would have kept women anchored to a male authority figure (husband, father, priest, chief). This opens up opportunities for women to make autonomous decisions to migrate. In many instances, the breakdown of patriarchy is linked to men's inability to materially provide for their families. The withdrawal of this support without compensatory assistance in their communities also provides women with an incentive to move.

The sudden death of the father of her son, and the subsequent loss of income, meant that N had to assume responsibility for her family. Migration to Johannesburg seemed to her to be the only option:

“I got the idea to emigrate in 1998, after the death of the father of my boy who is currently 14 years old. I was living in Bulawayo with my mother when I got pregnant. I stopped my studies in order to take care of my son and myself. When the father of my boy died, we were left in a very difficult situation. Life was very hard for me and my family. That is why I decided to come to South Africa – in order to look for a job.”

Like L's account of moving to South Africa, many women reveal experiences of loss, either through genocide and war or illness. The untimely death of primary care givers, sometimes through HIV/AIDS-related diseases, puts pressure on young women to support their families. Narratives of loss and death occur frequently in women's stories of their relocation to Johannesburg. Sometimes it is the loss of their parents, guardians or husbands that instigates their migration to the city to seek a livelihood for their family. In other instances it is the stigma attached to untimely death through “sickness” (sometimes a code for HIV/AIDS) that forces women to leave their communities. After the death of her boyfriend in Bulawayo from “sickness”, N left for Johannesburg. Although one of her reasons was to find work to take care of her son, the other, which she disclosed later, was to avoid being branded a husband killer for giving her partner HIV:

“People in my community started saying that my husband died of AIDS although we did not tell anybody. Then his family started to blame me for his death, and said that before he met me he was ‘okay’. They said that I gave him that disease that caused death, and I could stay there no longer because there was no way I could get another husband in that community, and I was scared that everyone would think I was sick. How would I be able to walk in the streets with my head high after such rumours. No... I had to go.”

The key question here is whether we can separate the factors of social stigma, the need to maintain one's dignity and escaping patriarchy from the search for viable livelihoods – and, indeed, whether we can prioritise one set of factors over others. Separating causal factors and ordering them into hierarchies, or separate analytical categories, may allow ease in theoretical model building, but it undermines a true understanding of the conditions of migration. The need to live in dignity and avoid being stigmatised as a “husband killer” is critical, but does it override her need to select a destination where she can support herself and her family financially? N's need to live in dignity cannot be separated from ensuring that she can support herself and her son. It is thus apparent that reasons for migration are structured around a convergence of factors which, as these women's interviews show, are not easily pulled apart. Thus, making sense of migration requires us to understand the multiplicity of issues that bear upon a woman who is considering leaving her home. To this end, researchers cannot separate personal circumstances, social-cultural practices and responsibilities and existing economic political contexts.

My travel degree

Other interviews revealed that one of the reasons for migration was the yearning to travel and learn about new cultures and new places. This was present in the narratives of the younger generation of women in the sample. Two of these women are under 30 years of age and another is in her early thirties. Notwithstanding the challenges faced by the Cameroonian woman – who is in a foreign country without her family networks – travelling fulfils a need to learn that outweighs the obstacles she faces being away from her family:

“I move in order to learn. There are many women of my age in my country who do not know what is happening in Africa or out of my country. I would like to discover the world, interact with different people in the world. I don’t only consider my experience in this country in a wrong way because, as a migrant woman, I learnt how to become a mother without my family. During my pregnancy I am the only one who take care of myself, even after giving birth, while in my culture when a woman is pregnant she cannot work. But in South Africa I do not have someone to help me – the cultural rules cannot be observed, simply because of reality that I face here.”

A Congolese woman explained why she left Lubumbashi:

“I came to South Africa on 4 September 2000 under the request of one of my big sisters who, after losing our father in Lubumbashi, asked me to join her in South Africa because life became very hard for my mother, brothers, sisters, and myself as we did not have someone who could take care of us. ... From my side, it [the decision to migrate] was welcomed, given that it was my wish to leave Lubumbashi in order to come to SA. I was also happy to discover other African countries and the culture of other people.”

A Nigerian woman had this to say about why she migrated:

“Yes, of course I came to [to Johannesburg] look for opportunities. Why should I deny that? But I one thing I was afraid of is to live and die in Nigeria. Growing up, most of my friends wanted at least one qualification outside of Nigeria. And it is not only about books or studying. I wanted my own ‘travel’ degree, my own paper which shows I have travelled in the world.”

These set of interviews add yet another facet to contemporary mobility on the continent – one that is often attributed to a mobile global elite. The desire to travel resonates with Bauman’s (1998) discussion of the longing to travel in an era

in which mobility is constrained for the world's poor. Even when travel does not result in a significant material pay-off, their ability to transcend borders claims a status more typically ascribed to a globe trotting elite. A Kenyan woman remarks: "When I go back to the village, people treat me very differently. I have become a VIP. Imagine! Just because I have been to South Africa. Ha!" Literature on globalisation has tended to focus on the mobility of highly skilled and materially advantaged populations and, while more evidence is needed, this research shows that some young African women from relatively poor backgrounds also travel in order to experience other worlds. As Agustin's (2005: 100) research of women from developing countries in Europe shows, "... women also want to travel. Exposed to media images that depict travel as essential to education, pleasure and worldliness, people in poor as well as rich countries want to see famous places, experience a little glamour, be admired, meet new people, and marry." While there are economic motives for travelling, women's desires to travel are not confined solely to gaining material rewards. Indeed, they are taking part in a global process that many see linked only to a global elite.

As is evident from the response from the Congolese woman who left Lubumbashi for Johannesburg, personal circumstances (the death of her father), the existence of a contact in Johannesburg, and the requisite need to find economic opportunities to support her siblings and mother, cannot be separated from her desire to travel and "discover other African countries and cultures". Her adventurous spirit may not have been a sufficient causal factor for migration, but the combination of a significant life event and other factors resulted in her actualisation of her desire to travel.

Migration as a rite of passage

Notions of migration as a rite of passage recur frequently in women's explanations for why they came to Johannesburg. In this sense, the conception of migration as part of a ritual process, in which families and émigrés develop a discourse around "growing up", resonates strongly with Turner's work (1969). Women are moving in order to shift their socio-economic status in a community. Migration to Johannesburg is constructed discursively as "growing up", "becoming a woman" or "learning to be independent". Not unlike accounts of Mozambican male migrants for whom coming to Johannesburg facilitates a social shift from "boys to men"

(see Wentzel, Viljoen and Kok, 2006), Johannesburg is for migrant women a place where they become “a real woman”. This, however, may mean many things. Central among them is becoming economically successful in order to be independent and support families back home. The expectation for many women is that they will become the “breadwinner” of the family. For unmarried migrant women, becoming a “real” woman can mean finding a husband in Johannesburg and raising a family, completing one’s studies and finding a good job, or obtaining a visa to go to Europe or North America. Yet, for all the reasons that Johannesburg is deemed significant, the ultimate symbol of success is the “return” home with material and social “resources” that connote one’s success. As shown in this chapter, women’s return is often held back by the expectations and subsequent pressure – their own and those of their community – placed on them to be “successful”. Unable to go back home, women remain in limbo, where they are “no longer, but not yet” (Turner, 1969:97). Johannesburg thus can become a place of permanent transition.

Understanding migration as a rite of passage is closely linked to being successful financially. Here money is instrumental to acquiring material wealth and therefore status in one’s own home community. Despite the underlying economic rationale, motivations of migration linked to rites of passage differ significantly in the sense that women cannot go back home despite the fact that it may not be economically viable for them to remain in Johannesburg. Were it purely an economic rationale, it may make more sense to go back home where living expenses are less and where, despite the economic hardship, the lifestyle may be easier. As one respondent remarked: “Here we live like dogs, sharing a room with so many people ... strangers who can take your things. It is not like home, where you are safe and you have your own space. We can be poor there, but we live like human beings.”

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to locate women’s mobility to cities within a broader historical context, and to explore the reasons why they migrate to Johannesburg. The empirical evidence has highlighted the complexity of the causes of migration, revealing that a variety of causal mechanisms – economic and social, subjective and objective – intersect to instigate women’s migration from their country of origin to Johannesburg.

Macro analyses of migration tend to understand mobility within economic frameworks which explain the reasons people move as a factor of differential economic power relations between regions. To a large extent, this is true. With the exception of refugees fleeing war from their countries, women's narratives show that failing economies, high levels of unemployment, and the negative impacts of SAPs have led to their migration to Johannesburg which is considered wealthier than their own cities or towns.

Yet the focus on women's mobility allows analyses to move beyond these economic frameworks. Women's narratives show that reasons for their movements are also gendered, and driven by desires other than maximising their incomes. Migration presents women with the opportunity to change social relationships with their families and communities back home. This means Johannesburg is perceived as an important destination not only because it provides promise of economic success, but also because it presents the opportunity for women to shift their status in their communities – to earn respect and become a “VIP”. Here, economic success facilitates upward social mobility, it is used instrumentally, and not as an end in itself. In other contexts, migration is also a search for anonymity and for putting a physical distance between the migrant and her community, particularly where there is social stigma attached. While the choice of where a woman moves to is informed by where she is able to find opportunities to support herself financially, migration is instigated primarily as a need to escape community discipline and judgement. Migration is also considered a rite of passage, one which women undertake to “become a woman” – a code women use to signify independence from parents, guardians and communities. Women explain their desire to travel and obtain their “travel degrees” – also considered a rite – a “social” qualification that is highly regarded in communities of origin.

Indeed, underlying these social aspirations to be independent or to travel is an assumption of some form of economic ability. In this case, economic success is instrumental in facilitating upward social mobility. And the economic rationale for migration is sought as a means to do this, rather than as an end in itself.

Chapter 4

Negotiating borderlands: Women's journeys, achievements and unmet aspirations in Johannesburg



Introduction

This chapter discusses women's journeys and experiences while crossing the South African border. It outlines some of the obstacles they face on their arrival in Johannesburg and unpacks how social pressure (both perceived and real) from their communities at home result in their entrapment in the city. The chapter shows how women's "legal limbo" hampers their full participation in South Africa's political economy, in particular their ability to work. Yet despite the multiple obstacles they face, women are reluctant to go home – a phenomenon alluded to in the previous chapter, but focussed upon in greater detail here. One respondent referred to this behaviour as the "resiliency" of migrant women and their inability to admit defeat despite significant structural limitations. Anzaldúa refers to the reluctance to go home as the "fear of going home" (1987:19). It is this phenomenon that results in the liminal character of migration to South Africa. In the face of incredible social pressure, women's decisions to remain in Johannesburg are driven as much by an economic rationale as the fear of "social death", as a Nigerian woman aptly described it. Going home without any material wealth to show for their time in Johannesburg seems worse than living in dire conditions in Johannesburg. Although the social pressure could result in innovative ways of ensuring survival, it can also have negative consequences. Paradoxically, it also means that, in some cases, women are forced to live in conditions of poverty or enter into relationships of dependence which they sought to escape by coming to Johannesburg.

Jumping borders: Transactions and sub-economies

As literature on globalisation celebrates the unfettered global movement of people, money and goods (see Sassen, 2002; Urry, 2000), women in this research show that this ease in mobility is dependent on class and citizenship. The global elite who possess passports from European countries or North America do not experience the same obstacles as women who are nationals of African countries. The power dynamics between the global South and North creates a hierarchy of global citizens, with the majority of respondents in this research representing those at the lower rungs of this hierarchy.

Women's descriptions of their journeys to South Africa differ, depending on the mode of transport they used, whether they had passports, and whether they had (or required) a South African visa. Middle class women who travel by air, have relatively smoother journeys than others of lower incomes or using other means of transport. Migration often requires resources and networks that are rarely available to the very poor. **Mrs. K**'s account illustrates some of the differences class makes when travelling internationally. South Africa was a transit destination for her but, despite her networks across the African continent, she has been unable to fulfil her goal to travel to the United Kingdom. Here is her account of her journey to South Africa:

Mrs. K remembers leaving her home and family in Kaduna state and going to Lagos. Her plan was to go to the United Kingdom to study. She had tried to get a visa in Lagos many times but had failed. Her husband recommended that she go to Kenya where they had heard obtaining a visa would be easier:

“One of my big brothers is a bishop of the Revival Fire Ministry in Kisumu, a town in Kenya. He said he could help me get a visa there. I expected to get the UK visa in Kenya quickly, and to go to London to start my PhD. But this did not happen. I queued for a long time, but the embassy there said I should go back home and apply for a visa from there. After discussions with my brother and my husband, we decided to come to South Africa where my brother-in-law living in Johannesburg said I could easily get the UK visa. My brother, who is the bishop, wrote me a letter of recommendation in the name of the church and this helped me get a visitor visa to South Africa. My journey was okay and when I arrived in South Africa I was welcomed by my brother-in-law who lives in Melville [a middle class suburb north-west from the city centre]. My family back home also expected to see me getting a visa after a short time so that I can go back one day to Nigeria in order to take care of my children. Unfortunately, nothing happened as I thought. I have spent a lot of money and time since I left my country.”

Mrs. K's account of how she came to Johannesburg reveals the global networks at play in the migration process which facilitates movement in the continent and beyond. For women with less money or contacts than **Mrs. K**, and

who travel without passports or visas, negotiating the South African border is not as easy. Migration to Johannesburg is not for the faint-hearted, as a Ugandan woman explained: “You have to have strength and courage to come and even to *reach* here. South Africa is not for everyone.”

The majority of the women interviewed in this research used road transport from their countries and travel without documentation. They describe the obstacles and fear they experience when crossing borders, revealing the transactions, practices and sub-economies that characterise their passage across the border.

ES was 19 when she made the journey from Lubumbashi to Johannesburg in September 2000:

“I travelled with a cousin who was going to Lusaka from Lubumbashi. Everything was easy and I enjoyed my travel. I was alone when I left Lusaka to go to Namibia. The cost of the travel was high, compared to the amount of money that I had. I spent three days in Windhoek, in a hotel waiting for the money that my sister from Johannesburg would send to me. In Windhoek, I met a Congolese businessman who advised me to hide my passport before getting into South Africa and declare myself asylum seeker at the border, as I did not have enough money. According to him, South African immigration officers do not allow foreigners who lack money to get into their country.

I was scared because of what that businessman told me. When I got to the South African borders, I hid my passport as that man suggested and told the immigration officers that I lost it. Unfortunately, things did not work as I was thinking because nobody trusted me until I decided to show it to them, after telling them that I found it in my stuff. I managed to talk to him [the border guard] to let me go in with R200. It was almost everything I had. I did not have money for the bus and had to convince the driver that my sister would pay him when I got to Johannesburg. Normally they do not agree – here in South Africa they do not trust anybody – but he kept my bags until my sister paid. My brother-in-law and my sister were waiting for me at the Johannesburg Park Station, so everything was fine. But I could not recognise my sister first, as I took so long to see her; I was very young when she left Lubumbashi.”

HA was 23 when she left Kampala to come to Johannesburg to live with her sister. She arrived in Johannesburg in 2002. This is how she remembers her journey:

“Concerning my travel arrangements, it was very hard for me. I was planning to obtain a South African visa before coming to South Africa because I filled all the requirements. Unfortunately, the South African embassy refused to give it to me. So, I decided to come without visa as did many other people. I came by road, and the journey was very long (six days). I crossed Kenya (Nairobi), Tanzania (Dar-es-salaam), Zambia (Lusaka), and Zimbabwe (Harare). I spent a lot of money. Fortunately, my journey was sponsored by my sister and myself also I made some contribution. From Uganda to Tanzania, everything was fine because I did not need visa to cross these countries. But from Zambia to South Africa, I spent a lot of money in order to corrupt the immigration officers. Before getting into South Africa, I paid R300. When I arrived in Pretoria, I phoned my sister in order to ask her to pick me up at Park Station. Thanks to God, I did not fall sick during my journey, and I was welcomed by my sister and her family.”

This Zimbabwean woman’s self-portrayal as a mad, dumb and mute woman in order to cross the South African border illustrates some of the tactics used to manipulate common stereotypes of women to steer through difficult border situations:

“Yes, it was not easy to come to South Africa at that time. I tried twice to get into South Africa. For the first time, I was arrested in Mafikeng by the police and I was even sent back to my country. For the second time, I was helped by one of my sisters-in-laws, my cousin’s wife, who is a South African citizen living in Zimbabwe at that time with her husband. She was coming to South Africa for a visit. I took the advantage in order to ask her to help me to get into South Africa. When we arrived at the South African border she presented me as her sister and told the immigration officers that I was a dumb and I never spoke to people. I was just quiet and looked at people like a mad woman because if I did not react like that my sister-in-law and I could be arrested.”

Crossing borders, often several, requires courage and an ability to manoeuvre and manipulate difficult situations. It calls on the resources of the community to help pave the way to Johannesburg. Where women take the journey alone, they seek the assistance or advice of strangers about the best way to cross – but sometimes this advice does not necessarily allow them passage. Whatever their circumstances, women employ multiple tactics to ensure they get to South Africa. Although they face significant constraints, their narratives illustrate that many do manage to cross.

Borders are shaped by contradictions. They are meant to keep “illegals” and those without the requisite documents out, while allowing in those who conform to the law and its requirements. However, as migrant women’s accounts of border crossing illustrate, it is not necessarily the statutes that govern who comes into the country and who does not. In practice, borders are porous for those people able to negotiate their way through by paying border guards money, or having transactional sex^{14,15}. Their very existence creates an opportunity for the development of a sub-economy whose actors include migrants, border guards, drivers and smugglers. Using this intricate network of actors, women without passports and/or visas can negotiate their way through border guards to gain entry into the country, often at great personal and financial cost to themselves. These alternative economies create spaces that resist official border restrictions and develop new “rules of the game” that at once subvert sovereign codes and laws, and reinforce the significance of the physical border. This theme is discussed in more detail in the last chapter.

14 None of the women I interviewed admitted to having sex with border guards in order to cross. However, reports by Human Rights Watch (2008) show that women are sexually assaulted by, amongst others, the South African Police and South African National Defence Force while crossing the border.

15 It is also true that many without any money cross borders under treacherous conditions, through crocodile infested rivers and at the mercy of wild animals.

Coming to Johannesburg

In Johannesburg, you never do what you are supposed to do, but you can always manage to start a small business when you are facing a financial problem.

– **Mrs. K** from Nigeria, January 2005.

This section explores whether women's economic locations are transformed when they move. It reveals through women's stories, the economic activities they participate in. It also shows how restrictions in South Africa have an impact on their work and skills. After arrival in Johannesburg it is clear that women enter yet another border zone, where they face many legal and economic obstacles when trying to a creating a livelihood. Their statuses as non-nationals, the distance from the support of their community and their vulnerability on the streets to criminals, frustrate their efforts to fully participate in South Africa's economy.

N from Bulawayo remembers how she imagined Johannesburg, and how different the city's reality was when she arrived:

“My picture of Johannesburg was ... I was expecting a very beautiful country with a lot more opportunities than in Zimbabwe; a place where I could make a lot of money and call my son. Unfortunately, the reality is different in the sense that life is very difficult and for that reason I cannot ask my son to join me here. I prefer to take care of him in Zimbabwe and every month I send some money to my mother for food and other things. But I am telling you this is a very huge responsibility for me, given that I am very limited financially.”

Women's economic success in Johannesburg is mixed. Although all of the women interviewed were involved in small businesses, mostly selling vegetables, hair products or other small items at council markets or on the street, their perceptions of whether they were successful varied. Many just manage to make ends meet in the precarious informal economy. However, over the three years that I have been visiting and talking to these women, I have seen remarkable growth in some of the businesses. **B**, a 30-year-old Kenyan woman who owns a hair dressing salon in the



Yeoville market, began as a single woman operation, unable at first to hire anyone else. As her clientele grew, she hired two other women, one Tanzanian and her sister whom she “sent for” from Kenya. She had also saved enough money to buy hair drying equipment. Two years later, **B**’s salon is now run by her sister, who manages the day-to-day business and employs two other women, while **B** travels between Zambia, Kenya and Tanzania running a successful import-export business.



While there are success stories like **B**'s, many of the women that I have interviewed say that Johannesburg has not turned out as they imagined. **V**, a Tanzanian woman with two children, explains:

“I had a very good picture of the city [Johannesburg] before I arrived. I thought about the beautiful buildings and infrastructures, and the nice and friendly people ... and a lot of job opportunities. But, when I came things were very different. Fifty percent of the things that I was thinking about were not true: many people are jobless, lack of money ... a lot of crimes, to survive men and women have to work very hard in order to get money. According to my culture a woman is the one who is supposed to stay in the house taking care of the children. But in Jo'burg this is not the case; every month I must bring a contribution to my family.

Since 2003, I started a small business in Hillbrow (Small market/ High Point) where I live. I sell clothes, ladies bags, and some other small stuff. But the money I make is not enough ... I have to send my first born (two years old) to the creche and every month I pay R250 for her. My husband and I have to pay R1600 every month for the rent. My last born doesn't have someone who can look after her and I cannot send her to the crèche because of the lack of money.”

Legal limbo – statuslessness as a barrier to entry in the economy

Legally, the majority of the women in this study are in a precarious state of limbo. Their legal status structures, and limits, the choices many have to participate fully in South African society. Most women are asylum seekers, with Section 22 permits that *de jure* allow them to work and study while their refugee status is determined. Although it is meant to take six months, in reality it takes “years” waiting to get an interview to determine whether an application for refugee status is successful or not (IRIN, 2008, CORMSA, 2008). While asylum seekers wait for status determination, they are expected to have their asylum seeker permits renewed every one or two months at a Department of Home Affairs (DHA) office.

Although asylum seeker permits allow the holder to work and study in South Africa, few service providers, such as banks and state hospitals, as well as landlords, recognise these documents as valid forms of identity. As such, at an everyday level, asylum seekers are unable to open bank accounts, sign a lease, get free health care or walk the streets without the fear that they will be detained by police, have to pay a bribe or be denied access to essential services (CORMSA, 2008). These institutional “barriers to entry” imply that migrant women literally live suspended in South African society. And, because status determination can take a long time, being in this legal limbo can last years. Even those with refugee permits, while legally entitled to all the rights of a South African (except the right to vote), are not immune from exploitative and corrupt policemen or service providers who claim to not recognise their “papers”.

The ‘invisibility’ of migrants

One of the characteristics of liminality is the structural invisibility of the liminal being. Turner observed that the liminal state is one in which “the subject of passage ritual is ... structurally, if not physically, ‘invisible’” (Turner: 1967: 95). While migrants are not physically invisible, they are a population group that are highly likely to be administratively “illegible”. Part of the problem of determining how many foreign migrants are in the country, particularly “undocumented” ones, is the fact that the state cannot “see” them. The “invisibility” of undocumented migrants – those that have overstayed their visa, and have made no attempt to regularise their stay – is straightforward. Once they are in the country the state has no way of tracking them, unless they are detained by the police.

In theory, asylum seekers should be administratively legible (to borrow Scott’s terminology) (1998). Asylum seeker temporary permits are issued by the refugee reception offices of the Department of Home Affairs. They have a bar code and reference number with which the office can access the applicant’s file. The permits also contain the applicant’s name, photograph, thumb-print, residential address, country of origin and other relevant information. Theoretically, Home Affairs should know how many asylum seekers there are where to find them. In other words, asylum seekers should not be “invisible” to the state. Yet they are. Firstly, many of the permits have old, incomplete or false addresses

and, as a result, are not administratively legible. Secondly, there is no centralised database of asylum seekers. Each refugee office has its own files and these are not linked to a national database (DHA, 2004). Moreover, the asylum system is not linked to population registers (DHA, 2004). Efforts by the Department of Home Affairs to develop a centralised database that links the population register to the refugee and visa systems, and the database on “illegals”, are underway but are not yet running (DHA, 2008). Census data is unable to adequately capture migrant populations because there are no “refugee”, “asylum seeker” or “undocumented” categories. Even if these categories were presented, whether documented or not, migrants are unwilling to give their true details for fear of deportation or police harassment. The police have no access to the asylum system and have to request DHA for information. Asylum seekers are therefore partially below the administrative radar.

For refugees, the situation is slightly different. Recognised refugees are entitled to a “maroon” identity document (ID) which operates on a similar system to the green ID issued to South Africans. To obtain the document, a refugee has to have a photograph, their fingerprints taken, and details of their physical and postal address. With these the refugee is issued with an identity number. Through this process, refugees are made “administratively legible” and, in theory, have all the rights and responsibilities of a South African except the right to vote. Few refugees, however, have the maroon ID books and, in 2007, only 29% of those seeking asylum were granted refugee status (CORMSA, 2008). None of the women interviewed in this study had a refugee identity book; the majority held asylum seeker permits, while a few had student and partner visas.

The dynamics of economic life in Johannesburg

The consequences of being in legal limbo crystallise daily when women seek work, health care and accommodation in the city. Despite having the *de jure* right to work, refugees and asylum seekers are *de facto* not recognised by many employers or the state agents as having this right. **RT** from Rwanda discusses the barriers to participating in the economy, or renting a flat:

RT: For me [getting work] is difficult because I'm still having this asylum seeker permit so I can't get a little job. I just sell my bananas. So I was trying to ask to the Home Affairs if they can give me a permit for more than one month. They just say decision, decision until now they just give me one month ... So every month I have to go now to renew my permit.

Terry: So you have a refugee permit?

RT: No, I have an asylum seeker permit. I've been trying to get refugee status for many years because you can get one for two years and work if you get a refugee status. This asylum seeker permit can't allow you to get a job; can't allow you to open an account. Asylum seeker permits can't allow you to even to rent your own house because you have to have all these things ... addresses. They ask for a little paper to show that you pay rent [in order] to get your own flat. Even the flat which we are living is on another person's name because us they don't allow us to rent the house.

When describing what she would change about being in South Africa, **F** from the Democratic Republic of Congo echoed **RT's** frustrations.

Caroline: If there was something you could change about your life, what would that be?

F: Something which I can change, maybe to work hard, to be more productive, to assist society and to my family also.

Caroline: What do you feel is the barrier in the way of that?

F: Many, many barrier is here in South Africa. First I'm not a South African; second, I don't have a document like South Africans. That's what is ... is not allowing me to go far. Yes.

JU from Cameroon shares a similar story about not having access to a job despite completing her degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her experiences at a provincial hospital also show the forms of exclusion experienced by migrant women in the health sector:

“When I was pregnant, the first time I went for antenatal at a provincial hospital, all the South Africans were let in. Then if you are a foreigner, if you are a refugee, they have to check to see if your paper is valid. Then if you are not a refugee they give you some conditions. You find it very difficult to register for antenatal classes and even after you registered, they don’t treat you the same way they treat the South Africans. So those are the kind of things that make me to feel that it is not home here. Even on the streets, although I have never been like harassed by the police, but I see others, I see my friends who are being harassed and even if they like ... because my husband is a businessman. Even if they come to your shop and they find out you are a foreigner, they don’t treat you the same way they would treat a South African. They will ask for a business permit, they will ask for some kind of papers. [They will ask,] Are you registered, or whatsoever? Ja. So those are the kind of things that make you feel like an outsider here.”

A report by the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CORMSA) shows that these women’s experiences are not unique, but are shared by many migrants in Johannesburg. On accommodation, the report states:

The vast majority of non-nationals seek housing through the private sector. However, non-nationals renting privately are regularly discriminated against by landlords who do not distinguish between documented and undocumented foreigners. In many instances, landlords refuse to rent to non-nationals regardless of their legal status. Others take advantage of non-nationals’ vulnerability and charge them higher rental rates than South Africans (CORMSA, 2008: 8)

Exclusions from services, such as health, banking and job opportunities, and the differences in the way in which nationals and non-nationals are treated by service providers and state officials creates a threshold which keep women as permanent “outsiders”. This inability to participate – to be fully present in South Africa – is evident in women’s narratives. They remain liminal, unable to break-through the discriminatory thresholds that allow them full participation in the economy and access to services. These attitudes towards non-South Africans also make social integration in South African society difficult.

Informality, life on the streets

With few opportunities in the formal economic sector, many women turn to informal trading to support themselves and their families. According to a Wits-Tufts survey of migrant populations, conducted in Johannesburg, without access to formal job opportunities, migrants, both men and women, are equally likely to be involved in petty trading and hawking when they first arrive in South Africa¹⁶. This study counters beliefs that men are more likely to be involved in activities that “matter” while women participate in domestic activities. A study conducted by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) and the Wits-Tufts survey confirm that women are just as likely to be as entrepreneurial as their male counterparts (Wits-Tufts, 2004; Dodson, 1998). Moreover, their economic activities move beyond the commodification of domestic work typical of the women that Bozzoli (1991) and White (1990) write about in their research. Rather, the informal and small business sector provides women a range of retail options that they can engage in. In addition to selling vegetables and other household and beauty products, they have hair and beauty salons, restaurants and Internet cafés. Those with enough capital enter the import-export business, trading curios and second-hand clothing, or household goods. But access to capital is important and women often have to rely on their family networks to raise funds, as M, a 21-year-old Zambian woman, explains:

“Currently, I do small personal business to my sister’s place, such as plaiting hair and other jobs related to the women’s beauty. Apart from that, I do also import and export business; I go sometimes to Zambia in order to sell clothes with the money I receive from my brother who lives in US. I have also a boyfriend from the Democratic Republic of Congo; he is among those who used to give me money. He is also a refugee in SA.”

16 This survey questioned 737 respondents in central Johannesburg, including 345 foreigners and 392 South Africans. The survey was conducted in the Johannesburg suburbs of Berea, Bertrams, Bezuidenhout Valley, Fordburg, Mayfair, Rosettenville and Yeoville among migrant communities from Angola, Burundi, Congo (Brazzaville), the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia and South Africa. I am grateful to the programme for giving me permission to use their data. For more information on the survey, see Jacobsen and Landau 2004.

Cross-border trading seems to be a niche that migrant women occupy, and other studies corroborate this. Research by SAMP in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Mozambique in 1997 showed that women dominate cross-border trading (Dodson, 1998). Donatien Dibwe (2007) discusses how Congolese women traders dominate the import trade market between the Middle-East and Congo, revealing how this has shifted family dynamics especially with the loss of male work on the mines in Eastern Congo. These businesses vary in the levels of capital required and their scale. Some are more successful than others, and cannot be compared to very small survivalist businesses. **M**'s various business initiatives – a hair and beauty salon, the import and export of clothes – show the resourceful ways in which women attempt to create a livelihood. But the success or failure of these initiatives is in some way linked to external support and access to goods and capital. **M**'s brother and boyfriend provide much needed finances that allow her to support her export business. While they may have the ideas, not all women have access to networks and funds to invest in their businesses.

Where, on the one hand, we see an opening up of women's work in a range of economic activities, on the other hand there is the phenomenon of "brain waste". This occurs where skilled migrants are unable to practice their professional skills because of the numerous obstacles around work permits and the laborious, and sometimes expensive, process of obtaining recognition of their qualifications in South Africa. **C**'s account illustrates this:



Before coming to Johannesburg, **C**, a 31-year-old Cameroonian woman, worked as a nurse at a public hospital in her country. She came to South Africa because she saw how many of her friends in the health profession, working outside Cameroon, were able to build nice houses and buy cars for their families back home. Without legal documents and South African qualifications she was unable to work as a nurse in the country. Her only option was to start a business of her own. She relates her experiences:

C: I am running my husband's business since 2004; I sell the everyday stuff and this business works well, especially when we approach the end of the month because during that period people got money and can spend it. Before starting this business (before my marriage) I was also running my own business in town, selling stuff on the street for almost between four and five months. I assure you that this kind of business is very stressful. I do it because I do not have choice; this is not what I need. Let me tell you something: if you are running a business that you do not like, even if you are making money, you cannot be happy. This is what I always feel in this country. Because this is not a kind of business that I am supposed to do; my place is in hospitals, helping people. Sometimes I cry in the market simply because I don't believe in what I became. In my country, I couldn't do such business.

Caroline: Do you never think about changing your business?

C: No, because there is nothing better than what I am currently doing ... As a nurse, I was supposed to register to the South African Nursing Council in order to get the permission to work as a nurse in this country. Unfortunately, when I came to SA foreigners were excluded from this council. Since I could not get a job. All I can do now is to go back to school in order to get another certificate from one of the South African schools and look for a job because I would like to develop my career in nursing. As a mother, everything becomes very difficult for me. I have to take care of my husband, look after my kid and managing my small business. I am telling you it is very hard for me, especially because I do not have some one who can help me.

Apart from this small business, I work also part-time in different public hospitals, not as a nurse but as interpreter for HIV/AIDS patients. There is a French organisation dealing with HIV/AIDS patients. As a member of this organisation I used to interpret to doctors for patients, especially from the rest of the continent, because I can speak English and understand French. Usually, I deal with patients from Francophone countries. I receive small money just for the transport. The most important thing in this job is it allows me to keep contact with my profession. I learn so many things about patients; it is very helpful.

If the lack of entry into formal employment in South Africa, and pressure from families back home to provide material support, has led women into *creating* their own work, they seem discontented with their levels of success and professional fulfilment. Indeed, it is only a handful of them who seem to have stabilised and expanded their businesses. As some of the excerpts above show, the precarious nature of the informal sector makes it difficult to support themselves and their families.

E's business, a makeshift stall located on the corner of Plein and Claim streets in downtown Johannesburg illustrates, in greater detail, the nature of informal street trading. **E** hires a Malawian migrant woman, who was introduced to her through her friend, **R's**, networks. In this excerpt from a group conversation, **E** discusses her business in some detail:

E: She [the Malawian woman] doesn't even speak English. We talk in sign language.

Terry: You talk in signs with her?

E: Ja, she doesn't understand English.

Caroline: How did you meet her then?

R: Through my neighbours [in the informal market]. There were some people who were selling from Malawi ...

E: But they are cheap to hire, I mean they are not expensive; they charge about R150 per week ...

Terry: To hire somebody?

E: Ja, to get somebody. But the problem with them is that they are not very protective over your things the way you would be, or even aggressive with the selling because it's not their money.

Caroline: What about paying them a commission, maybe that way she can be more aggressive when selling.

E: Ja, that's what we were thinking. So that was me that day, I stayed there the whole day selling.

Terry: Do you sell well when you sell?

E: Well, ja, oh no, not really but that day it was picking up.

Caroline: So how much are you able to make in a day for yourself? Like on this day that you were here the whole day, how much did you make?

E: Maybe about fifty or seventy [Rand].

Caroline: That's profit?

E: No, that's the gross, ja. The profit margins are very small. But my business is just picking up, in fact the day started I this business, I brought things nobody else had ... because no-one around there was selling cutlery, spoons, and the like. But immediately I put my things there like in two days, another lady came with similar stuff. There's a lot of competition. Because it was very original, ja, because no-one else had thought of the things that I had brought – and it's right next to the taxi rank, so people were buying.

Terry: Where do you buy the stuff from?

E: The plastics, we bought them from Jumbo wholesalers. I buy them in bulk. When I sell I just remove them from the packaging and display one or two on top. The rest I hide somewhere. So, and then the cutlery I buy them from Somalis or Ethiopians in town and the rest in the wholesalers, Jumbo.


Terry: Is it all in town, the wholesalers.

E: Jumbo is in Main Reef.

Terry: Oh, Main Reef Road, yes, yes ,yes.

E: Yes. And then the wallets ... the wallets as well. I also bought some other place in town they sell in bulk. Some of the things I left out; sometimes I used to put a lot, sometimes a little, depending on how busy – or how scared I am of the police otherwise, I mean, you know the more you put, the more you have to carry when they [the police] come.

Skryflike kennisgewing OM IN DIE HOF TE VERSKYN (uitgereik ingevolge artikel 56 van die Strafproeswet, 1977)

H LATITUDE: 29° 56' CITY OF JOHANNESBURG SQUARE: 54/ 88190 / 200 A MAP TO: [REDACTED]		54/ 88190 / 200 
HANNAH 1956 09 23 25 NALANTAN FLAT 103 FATHI MANEION JEPPE CORNER HARRISON STREET JOHANNESBURG 2000 NO. KLEIN, BETWEEN DE VILLIERS AND PLEIN STREET JOHANNESBURG 2000 TRADER		21-8 SER 6 (W) of GARTENS 31 MARCH 2008 TRADING IN A RESTRICTED AREA
B I and hereby declare the foregoing to be true and correct, 1977 (Act 51 of 1977), signed on and in the presence of the undersigned, and in full compliance with the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977 (Act 51 of 1977), to appear before the court on the date of this writ, both of which are mentioned herein below, unless you have been notified by the court otherwise or in writing up to 48 hours before the date of this writ, and to remain in attendance there to answer a charge(s) of contempt.		
C Datum waarop en plek waar u persoonlik in die hof moet verskyn / Date and place you are personally to appear in court 08 MAY 08 JOHANNESBURG 25		
D Gedeelte van die hof waar u persoonlik in die hof moet verskyn / Part of the court where appearance is required JOHANNESBURG 24 APRIL 2008 Five Hundred Rand		
E HOF CENTRAAL JOHANNESBURG 3006 1806 31 MARCH 2008 JOHANNESBURG Zandé Ndolomne C/		
F Substansie kode / Official number: 11360Z 54/ 88190 / 200 176634		
G APLANDANGWA BALENGWA WA OSE BONGWA / INFORMATION TO THE ACCUSED 1. Waarskuwing / Warning 2. Voorwaardes vir betaling van skuldverrekeningskoste / Conditions for payment of admission of guilt fees 3. Betaling van die hof / Payment of the court 4. Verskyn in die hof op die spesifiek gemaakte datum / Appear in court on the specified date 5. Indien u nie verskyn op die spesifiek gemaakte datum / If you do not appear on the specified date		

Written notice TO APPEAR IN COURT (issued in terms of Section 56 of the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977)

A "Written notice to appear in court" with a fine of R500 for trading in a restricted area.

E's interview provides some insight into the nature of informal business, delving into some of its practicalities and limitations. She gives an account of the factors she has to consider as a businesswoman on the streets of inner city Johannesburg. E's discussion of her business, who she hires,¹⁷ how much she pays them, her daily takings, the small profit margins, the competition from neighbouring stalls and her supply networks, give us a sense of the factors women consider in their everyday business lives. These issues are no different from those affecting large businesses elsewhere. E's understanding of the market and business – from details around who to hire, what goods to sell and the networks of wholesalers to an understanding of profit margins – reveals a sophistication which is rarely attributed to street traders. Interviews with other informal traders show that E's understanding of business is not atypical. Many of the women interviewed display a good grasp of business principles.

This section has shown that, notwithstanding the limitations presented by their “legal limbo”, women do try to create economic opportunities in South Africa through which they build their lives and, in the process, the lives of others. However, their legal status and dynamics of competitive informal business are not the only factors making women's businesses vulnerable. As E mentions towards the end of the excerpt, she has to confront the police, who frequently raid their stalls to enforce municipal by-laws. This theme is picked up in greater detail in the next chapter.

Going back? ‘I have my pride. I am not going home empty handed!’

There is a certain, what do you say? ... in-deflatibility (is that a word?) of the spirit. You can beat a woman down and down, but there is always one eye that is roaming like a periscope even when she is down, looking for the next opportunity. That one eye you can never destroy.

– Nigerian migrant, 2008.

17 This is important as migrants are often charged with taking South African jobs. E's account illustrates that migrants, however small their businesses, do create jobs.

One of the questions that women's migration to Johannesburg raises is why, despite their difficult experiences, do they continue to stay in Johannesburg? As the previous section shows, women's movement occurs in the face of significant legal obstacles. Such movements may also entail considerable material, emotional and sometimes physical costs. Further, the material rewards in Johannesburg are not guaranteed and many struggle to make a decent livelihood. The question as to why women move to, and stay, in Johannesburg is, therefore, not easily answered by an economic rationale. We can also not explain their presence in Johannesburg solely as a means of maximising their economic gains from migration as neo-classical migration theorists suggest:

“We African women are very resilient. We do not take the first no for an answer ... Why, you ask? Because I have my dignity. There is no way I am going home and tell my parents I came empty handed. Do you want me to shame my family?” (Nigerian woman, 2006).

Part of the resilience displayed by many migrant women in Johannesburg is a result of incredible pressure on them – real and perceived – from family members and communities to provide material support.

As discussed in the previous chapter, women give a variety of reasons for why they have migrated to South Africa. While economic reasons often seem to underpin their mobility, migration cannot be fully understood without considering women's social contexts and subjective motivations. Making money is often instrumental – a means to greater dignity, independence, and status amongst the community. In this context, rational choice schemas cannot explain why women continue to remain in situations which do not result in “optimal” economic returns. Harris and Todaro's model postulates that people continue to move (or stay in cities) because of *perceived*, rather than *actual*, earnings (Todaro, 1982: 213). While this may be true for migrant women, there are other subjective reasons: the fear of losing one's dignity or bringing shame to the family prevents many from going back home.

This social pressure to improve one's class status and to be seen to “have arrived” can be both positive and negative. On one hand it results in the resilience and creativity that many migrant women share: not only to survive, but to do

better than survive – to create wealth even when facing incredible structural odds. But making “going home” conditional on economic success makes women even more vulnerable to exploitative practices. This is how one Nigerian woman, O explains it:

O: Going home is like being between Pharaoh’s army and the Red Sea. You hope to God that there is a rescue ship. If God does not answer your prayers, you have only one choice – to negotiate with the army. Jumping in the Red Sea is sure death.

Caroline: What is the Red Sea, Johannesburg or Lagos?

O: No, no. The Red Sea is going back home with nothing in your hands; that is social death.”

Making comments on how material wealth has become *the* marker of success, another student from Cameroon remarks:

“I remember when my father came back from being a student in France in the seventies; he brought back only his certificate degree. Everyone celebrated! Now if I went home with my degree, people would say, ‘I don’t want to see your leg here. What is this paper you are bringing to us? You think we can eat paper?’”

The materiality of urban culture – the importance placed on accumulation – erases the option of going home, even when things do not work out in Johannesburg. The “crudeness” of this level of materiality, as this Nigerian woman referred to it, is so prevalent that:

“No-one cares how you make the money. Every time I go to Nigeria everyone is like this [she reclines in her chair with arms raised and her mouth open]. Even if you live in a gutter, they don’t care. But, hmmm of course if you go home, you do not say you live in a gutter now. Ha ha! What are people going to say? ‘Just bring the goods, and shut up about your circumstances’.”

Perhaps the significance placed on material accumulation in African cities is as a result of the economic insecurity and poverty created in large part by Structural Adjustment Programmes but also by economic weakness in general. Perhaps it is the consequence of the growing inequality between a small elite group and the masses and fuelled by media celebrations of wealth and accumulation. Whatever the reasons, the *social* pressure to be financially successful plays a significant role in women's migration patterns, and when and how they go back home.

This is true even for women who leave their homes to escape patriarchal discipline. Financial success buys them significant autonomy and respect in their communities. Having made it in Johannesburg, they are able to return, bring back goods from Johannesburg for all to enjoy, support their family, and build a home. With this financial autonomy they gain a new found respect amongst members of their community, as this Zimbabwean woman shows:

“I returned home after many years of sending money to my mother's village. I dictated that I wanted the money spent on building a house. I went back home a hero because of the house I built. These were the same people who accused me of being a bad woman because of divorcing my husband. Yes ... to move was the best decision I made; it earned me respect.”

There is no doubt that women's role and importance in the family increases with mobility as imaginings that their future earnings, enabled by their migration, will improve family life styles. But what is most striking is the reversal of gender roles. Regardless of age, migrant women will talk about their brothers and male relatives waiting for money from them once they make it big in Johannesburg. **LZ** is often irritated by this expectation, but relishes her powerful social position:

“I avoid to speak to my brothers because they used to ask me for money and to come here. Usually, I tell them that life is very hard in this country and I cannot help someone to come here, especially if he does not have enough money... But even if they disturb me I am happy that they look up to me now as someone who can give. When in Congo they never used to treat me like this ... like I am somebody.”

H, a 28-year-old Ugandan woman who has her own stall at Yeoville market, has similar experiences with her brothers (both older and younger):

“Sometimes, I send money back home for my mother. My father understands my situation because he knows how I survive in this country since my sister passed away, but my brothers do not do so. When I phone them, they used to ask me for money and other things. If I tell them that I do not have money, they do not trust me. That is why I don’t like to phone them, except my father and mother who understand me very well. But since when did my brothers ask me for something? I am the one who used to ask them! Things change when you move.”

The new social status afforded women who are able to show their independence and success in Johannesburg provides an incentive for them to stay in the city and be successful. They relish the respect their families and communities give them when they return with goods from Johannesburg. They also notice the shift in social status, where their male relatives are beginning to treat them with respect because of their potential and actual earning capacities.



Conclusion

The chapter reveals women's agency in the migration process, despite the various obstacles they encounter. Entry restrictions at borders have created sub-economies with agents, border guards and migrants as key actors. In theory, borders are only accessible to those who have the requisite documents, but in practice borders are made porous by the establishment of new economies and spaces that resist official restrictions. The emergence of these new spaces and alternative cultures, which resist formal legal boundaries, highlights the ways in which individuals and communities withstand official borderlands and, in doing so, establish their own rules of the game. This theme is discussed in greater detail in the final chapter.

Entering South Africa does not necessarily mean leaving behind the border zone – the physical boundary between South African and the rest of the continent. Johannesburg continues to be a border zone/threshold as women encounter legal obstacles which restrict their access to bank accounts, housing, health services and economic opportunities. As this chapter has shown, and expanded on in the next, the streets then become zones of negotiation between legal, economic, national, social, patriarchal and sexual borders and between tsotsis, police, traders, agents and other players in the urban landscape.

Lastly, the final section of this chapter has highlighted the liminal character of Johannesburg. This liminal space is reinforced by a number of processes. The first is the real exclusion of migrant women from participating in the South African economy. The second is the perceived social attitudes towards migrants that construct women as the "other", the outsiders in South Africa's cultural and social milieu. Lastly, caught between family expectations and their own pressure to survive, women remain trapped in Johannesburg despite the numerous obstacles they face. It is here that significant tensions emerge between women's obligations to themselves and to their families. Even where women can afford to send money home, they do so in ways that limit their ultimate "success" in Johannesburg. They are unable to save and accumulate as they would if they had no pressure from extended families and communities. This double whammy – damned if you do, damned if you don't – creates a sense of being trapped in Johannesburg. Women live behind a real, yet invisible, threshold and remain as if suspended in society, caught between expectations back home and their own dreams and desires.

Chapter 5

Straddling Home and home: Migrant women's everyday life in Johannesburg



There is Home with a big, capital 'H' which is where I come from. And there is home ... small 'h' ... where I am living here in Johannesburg. The two are different; they are both my homes, but one is more of my 'Home' than the other ... Does that make sense?

– Migrant woman from Uganda

I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry "home" on my back'
(Anzaldúa, 1987: 21)

Introduction

The question, where do you come from/where is your home? is one that is loaded with multiple meanings, complex social hierarchies and historical encumbrances, particularly in African cities. Whether it is posed to second or third generation urbanites, rural migrants, immigrants or the Diaspora living outside of the continent, the answer to that question depends on the context within which it is asked. And each context could elicit different responses.

The previous chapter discussed women's journeys and experiences while crossing the South African border, life on the street, and their feelings of entrapment after their arrival in Johannesburg. This chapter delves into the details of their daily lives through the lens of "home". As stated in Chapter 1, this section borrows and develops Anzaldúa's notion of borderlands as:

... the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands. ... Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (1987: i).

This section shows how women straddle multiple geographic, cultural and psychological homes. More importantly, it highlights the tensions and complexities that straddling these physical and imagined locations creates in their economic and social lives. Through the metaphor of the border, relationships between

migrant women and the state, patriarchy, places of origin, their communities, the past and future, and Johannesburg are seen. By honing in on these various points of contact we understand how women negotiate, resist and create these multiple borders. Anzaldúa characterises the borderlands as a place of ambiguity and contradictions, resistance and conformity, fear and safety, in ways that resonate with migrant women’s own experiences. This chapter unpacks the borderlands which characterise migrant women’s lives. In these interstices, migrant women negotiate, shape and recreate their lives in ways that challenge hegemonic ideas about space and gender – and have a profound impact on cities in contemporary Africa.

I argue that the construction of “home” does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, migrant women’s gender, class, race, nationality and sexuality have an impact on the meanings and aspirations they attribute to the notion of home. But the reality of home often reveals the complex ways in which women create and produce urban spaces in their everyday lives. While women place great value on domesticity, and its location as a site of safety, we see how patriarchy and community discipline, as well as their mistrust of the police, undermine women’s safety in the home and, of course, outside. Although cultural practices can strengthen family bonds in the home, ethnic tensions and conflicts between families can also cause the disintegration and insecurity in domestic spaces.



How women conceive of, or represent, the idea of home has consequences for cities and space. This chapter illustrates how socially marginalised groups, through daily practices, create urban spaces that mitigate the effects of marginalisation and domination. Through their discursive practices, embodied cultural practices, extended networks of support in churches or amongst their ethnic and national communities, and the creation of sanctuaries in the domestic realm, migrant women develop important sites of resistance to various forms of oppression and exclusion. These spaces, albeit fragile, become the redemptive sites of the city, spaces of belonging, safety and “home”.

To quote a Ugandan woman’s own way of categorising and making sense of belonging, I use Home with a capital “H” and home with a lower case “h” as a heuristic for interrogating migrant women’s sense of rootedness and dislocation: revealing their subjectivities, and the impact of this on the communities and cities in which they live in¹⁸. Interviews and group discussions with migrant women show that Home is a proxy for “belonging somewhere”. It is one’s place of origin – “where the family is”, where one’s ancestors are buried, where women share a common culture and values and where she feels part of a broader community. Home is also steeped in the historical contexts of filial bonds, ethnic relationships and social hierarchies which both mould and stifle women’s own identities. Home is demarcated both by its spatial location and its cultural and moral boundaries. In the context of Johannesburg, Home with an upper case “H”, their country of origin as viewed from Johannesburg, is both an imagined and real space.

The home in South Africa has different connotations. It is a physical dwelling, the house where daily activities of nurturing, eating, production and reproduction take place. It is a space that anchors the everyday – from which members of the household leave and to which they return. home is also a space in Johannesburg where women feel safe and where they have supportive networks. These could be places of work, in the market or in church. Although their physical co-ordinates separate them, Home and home are enmeshed in women’s daily activities. Moral and cultural codes of Home are enacted in the home in Johannesburg to delineate

18 For the purposes of this chapter, I reproduce migrant women’s ways of understanding Home and home. This is done for textual clarity and is not meant to be a simplistic reproduction of binaries between Home and home. The term home is complex, and both are collapsed in women’s everyday embodied activities.

the inside from the outside, migrants from “South Africans”, “us” from “them”. At home, migrant women invoke the values of Home to assert their identities and moral authority over “South Africans” – particularly around family and bringing up children. Embodied practices of feeding, caring and other domestic tasks take on great significance in the context of Johannesburg. These are the mark of a “good woman” who knows how to take care of a family “better than South African women” and teaches children *heshima* (respect in Kiswahili). “Does my child look like a South African child?” asked a woman from Uganda when I visited her at her market stall. “Of course not,” she went on to say, “She has manners and respect. Look at how she greets. That is not like a South African child!” Domesticity and mothering are transformed into subversive practices, where women can assert their agency. Yet even in this space there is an embracing of some aspects of South African life – ideas about, for example, “modern living” and a cosmopolitan culture are adopted.

But just as home in South Africa can be a liberating space, where women are able to escape patriarchal discipline and community sanctions, it can also be a lonely space, where the lack of family and communal support is felt acutely in times of crisis. And, while women may escape the patriarchal regulation at Home, they continue to experience it in South Africa in different ways. In this context, home becomes a contested site where migrant women struggle to assert and affirm their own identities. Amid the isolation, hostility and insecurity they feel living in a foreign land, home becomes a place where the “foreigner” can overturn derogatory discourses of the *kwerekwere*¹⁹, and assert themselves as “better” than South Africans. Notions of Home and home are complex and interlinked and shape migrant women’s identities and subjectivities in fluid and unpredictable ways. As Khattak’s work on Afghan women shows, home is not simply a physical dwelling, but “contains ideas of identity, culture, creativity, happiness and sadness, the past and the future, and security and insecurity ...” (Khattak, 2006: 117). These notions of home shape women’s actions and imaginations in complex and contradictory ways. H(h)ome is at once a socio-psychological space and a place with geographical co-ordinates. This chapter is about the ways in which these multiple spaces manifest in migrant women’s lives and their consequences in the host city of Johannesburg.

19 A derogatory term used to refer to foreigners, particularly Africans from the rest of the continent.

In the borderlands, home represents multiple locations, both geographic and physical, real and imagined. Through discussions of home, women unpack the meanings of belonging and dislocation, bringing insight into how their gender, nationality, sexuality, class and race affect their inclusion and exclusion in Johannesburg. For them, home is a fragile space, at once a site of empowerment and disempowerment, a place of safety and violence. Amid the structural frameworks that prevent their full participation in South African society, women create sites of inclusion in the city which affirm their sense of belonging. Indeed, “the greater the barriers to structural assimilation in the economy and polity, the more likely elements of a culture of opposition and resistance develop and persist” (Mitchell and Feagin c.f. Martinez, 2005: 544).

Meanings of home in literature

Rapid urbanisation and industrialisation in 18th century Europe and early 19th century America facilitated a normative, idealised, gendered understanding of home based on Victorian middle class values that continue to have lasting effects on contemporary understandings of these concepts (Hareven, 1971; Pleck, 1976; Modell and Hareven, 1973). Changing economic and social processes resulted in the shifting role of the family as an economic unit and a consequent transformation in the way in which it was structured (see Parsons, 1955; Sennet, 1964; Hareven, 1971). Within this context, home came to be represented as the locus of the nuclear, conjugal family, and a clear separation emerged between spaces of production and reproduction. Notions of home thus became equated with the sanctuary of the nuclear family.

The gendered implications of this understanding of home are obvious. Indeed, home became an inward-looking retreat, to which working husbands could return and lock the door on the outside world. The male role of provider and disciplinarian was endorsed, as women’s roles as mother and nurturer were idealised (Hood, 2000). Infused with Victorian values of family and gendered roles, home became a feminine space in which distinct roles of reproduction were assigned. In effect this gendered distinction of the roles between the home and outside served to delineate private from the public spheres. These middle class 18th century constructs of home remain the normative frames through which we

define and understand the concept, despite changing socio-economic contexts. Extending the neo-Marxist core-periphery explanatory model, the core equates to the public, the realm of production and male labour, and the periphery to the private, the feminine space of social reproduction.

Scholars have questioned fixed dichotomous ways of understanding the public/private, home/work spheres (Davidoff, 1998). As early as the 19th century, it was clear that these dominant ideas of home were class specific. Modell and Hareven concede that even as the concept became universalised and embraced by other classes, its *practice* amongst the working class differed significantly from its idyllic middle class roots (Modell and Hareven 1973). Working class practices revealed a different attitude to home and domesticity than middle class ideals. Home was a “malleable” space which working class families used as an economic resource – to supplement incomes and to ensure security and autonomy in old age (Modell and Hareven, 1973). More than privacy and the maintenance of a nuclear household, working class families were concerned with ensuring that domestic space was able to provide financial security for the family. More recently, post-Fordist modes of production have led to the “home centredness” of production (Castells, 2002:332), as more and more work is managed and conducted in the home. This has collapsed the public/production, private/reproduction boundaries, even in advanced capitalist economies.

Modern feminists, and Gilman before that (1898), considered women’s domesticity an albatross and the home as a prison that symbolised patriarchal oppression (Friedan, 1963). Home for these middle class feminists represented entrapment and boredom. But the contradictions in this discourse were evident even at the time. Middle class feminists ignored the fact that working class women *were* working, albeit often in exploitative conditions. Moreover, bell hooks points out that as middle class women called for women’s active participation in the public sphere, they failed to consider the lives of working class women who would have to move in to clean their homes and nurture their children (hooks, 1984). As middle class women were encouraged to stay at home, working class women were being recruited as cheap industrial labour, unable to dedicate their days to domestic work (Hareven, 1973). The nature and meaning of “home” varies according to class, history and context, as we shall see from African urban literature and the migrant women who are the focus of this study.

Where the public and private spheres are discussed in urban studies, they tend to be located within contemporary debates around the privatisation of public spaces and gated communities (Benit-Gbaffou et al, 2008). Elsewhere, scholars have written about the privatisation of the state (Hibou, 2004) to refer to the process of privatising state economic and regulatory functions in ways that blur the line between private and public. These debates provide texture to the shifting meanings of private and public in cities, but their point of analysis is not the domestic space or the home. Neither is it the subjective understandings of urban dwellers. In South African urban scholarship, housing delivery issues come closest to discussions about the private sphere (see Huchzermeyer, 2003; Hills, 2001; Charlton et al, 2003). The debates are shaped around conceptual frames that analyse state delivery of housing, its impact on poverty alleviation and the consequences of the housing programme on the fragmentation of the urban form (Todes, 2003). Similarly, the scourge of HIV/AIDS has brought into focus the issue of child-headed households, the changing nature of the household structure and the increasing burden it places on children (Tomlinson, 2003). These analyses have tended to read the issues of housing and household structure from the top down, seeking state and policy reform to improve the urban form and the lives of marginalised communities. This chapter complements such studies by exploring the meanings migrant women attach to notions of home, and the ways in which these produce particular forms of urbanity that have consequences for state service delivery initiatives and urban renewal.

Meanings of home in African cities

In the discussion of “home”, this chapter shows that its meanings are dependent on a variety of factors such as gender, class and historical processes. Home is tied closely to notions of belonging and rootedness to place – an aspect that Africa’s history of colonialism and segregation complicates because of the ways in which these processes tended to exclude black populations from belonging to the city. Historically, black people were considered temporary sojourners in cities and thus could never really have a home in it. Where white populations were considered citizens of colonial cities, black people were mere labourers, useful only for the

duration of their economically active years. Those allowed temporary domicile in the city could not live with their families because of restrictions on movement (Swilling et al, 1991; Bonner et al, 2001). In South Africa, townships were created for black populations and separated from white suburbs by large tracts of land and other buffers. In these spaces, many families hosted extended families and friends, and used backyard spaces to raise family incomes by sub-letting rooms. But segregation in African cities is not unique to South Africa. Colonial cities like Nairobi, Lagos, and Lusaka were racially separated and had African “locations” and white areas (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2005). Many black African urban dwellers had to carry passes to be legal in colonial cities (Freund, 2007). Coquery-Vidrovitch notes “... the white settlers were, all in all, happy enough with their urban management. As for the black people, they expected very little from city management and made relatively little demand for what they knew was not made for them” (2005: xxv).

But what H(h)ome means in these urban contexts differs significantly from early 19th century middle class notions of home (see Hareven, 1971; Pleck, 1976; Modell and Hareven, 1973). The underlying normative theorisations of home make assumptions that do not resonate with the realities of majority of urban dwellers in African cities. For example, ideas of home as a sanctuary, protected from the world outside, may be alien to urban slum dwellers whose shelters cannot protect them from the elements, police or criminals. Moreover, the pernicious nature of exclusion that continues even in the post-colonial city, where the majority of urban dwellers live in slum areas without security of tenure, has meant that few can call the city “Home” as it does not ensure security. Many people consider the marker of Home the place where there is some form of security of tenure, land, a house and a burial ground. These are registers of rootedness that colonial and post-colonial cities have been unable to provide for majority of urban citizens. Thus, the city for many is a site of extraction, the benefits of which are invested elsewhere. Making it in the city means investing for one’s retirement “back home”. Although new generations of urban dwellers are beginning to claim the city as home, dominant African discourses on “home” – where one comes from – always almost conclude that this can never be the city. It is always elsewhere.

In addition, ideas about the privacy of home are a luxury in dwellings which do not have bathrooms or toilets, and where biological functions occur in

bushes or rivers. Privacy is not possible in a one-roomed shack shared by a family of three children and their parents. Similarly, the idea that the home is primarily a dwelling for blood and kin relations is mythical amongst many African urban families who frequently host and support new urban migrants and extended families (see Adepoju, 1997; Findley, 1997).

Home as a sanctuary, a place of peace, is inconsistent in domestic spaces that are violent. When the walls of domestic spaces can no longer protect families from violence, either from those they live with or from criminals, the sanctuary turns into a violent space. Additionally, informality and de-industrialisation has meant that the strict demarcation of domestic spaces as sites of reproduction and public spaces as sites of production can no longer hold. Indeed, urban anthropological and sociological studies show that even historically, many urban homes were established as sites of reproduction and production (see Longmore, 1959; Hellmann, 1949; Obbo, 1981; White, 1990; Bonner, 1990; Walker, 1990). Domestic spaces have been used as arenas for brewing, cooking, sewing and prostitution in order to raise household incomes.

Just as working class practices of home represented a disjuncture of middle class notions of home and domesticity in late 18th century Europe (Modell and Hareven, 1973), so too do African contemporary urban practices and material conditions. The practice of home in the African urban context differs from conventional middle class ideas of home. Nevertheless, this idealised normative idea of home remains an aspiration for migrant women, even as its realities differ significantly in the context of urban living in Johannesburg, and indeed other African cities.

These nuances call for complexity in our analytical frames in order to develop conceptions of home and belonging that are appropriate to the lived realities of marginalised communities in African urban societies. This disjuncture between actual practices, meanings and lived realities on one hand, and Western definitions on the other points to the paradigmatic weakness of Western social science which *universalise* meanings regardless of social contexts and existing data. This theme is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. For now, it is important to note the discrepancy between Western notions of home and its meaning in varying historical and class contexts.



Life between H(h)omes: the complexities of living in between

Is “home” where they [migrant women] now are, or where they have spent much of their lives? Is it the nation where they have now set up camp or it is the country whose passports they continue to hold? For many migrants, while they may be located in a new state, home remains elsewhere, the land they left behind (Behera, 2006: 37).

It is perhaps this history of the exclusion of black populations from modern cities that has reinforced views that home for the majority is located elsewhere. This perception continues to be true today in parts of the city, as outlined in the introductory chapter of this thesis. It is to migrant women’s subjective understandings of their location in the world, straddling as they do Johannesburg and their countries of origins that this chapter now turns.

Home’s multiple geographies

The question of belonging is a deeply troubled one and one that most migrants confront all their lives – do they belong to the land they left behind, or the one in which they find themselves, or somewhere else altogether? (Bhutalia, 2006: 145).

Where is home and what does it mean in the context of migration? Questions on home in conversations with migrant women always produced complex and sometimes confusing stories, as women grapple with meanings of H(h)ome while living in Johannesburg. Importantly, what is Johannesburg, if Home is elsewhere? How should women relate to Home, their place of belonging, if violence and material insecurity have influenced their decision to leave? Interviews and group discussions reveal the varied associations with the idea of home both as a geographic location and as a symbolic place. Encapsulated in the notion of home is the social and psychological space, as well as the geographic location and structure (Khat-tak, 2006:117). Migrant narratives uncover H(h)ome’s multiple sites being at once the homeland and the house/domestic space in Johannesburg. This notion of home

as a multi-site is at odds with everyday sociologists for whom home is the anchor of daily activities, the point of origination and return from routine activities. For Felski, “home should not be confused with a fantasy of origin ...” (Felski, 2000: 49). This understanding of home limits its meanings in ways that obscure how mobile populations conceive of their multiple and shifting identities. Wherever migrants go, they carry their history and all its complexities. In other words, they carry Home with them. This history is inscribed in their lives as they remould their past experiences with new ones in powerful ways. For the migrant women in this study, many recent émigrés to Johannesburg, it is difficult to delineate ‘Home’ from home, and narratives of both these spaces are intertwined with each other. As Said illustrates: “For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally” (Said, 1999: 186).

G: “Home for me is definitely Cameroon – when I was in Cameroon I was very, very okay. But then Cameroon is very low if you want to talk about development and economics ... it’s very low. There are a lot of prospects here [in Johannesburg]. You can see that you have a better future while you are here. But back at home you can’t see that your future will be better, you just know you are living and you are happy ...”

G’s discussion of home brings to bear the different ways in which migrant women infuse multiple meanings to it. The boundary that demarcates Home and nation is collapsed when she says, “Home for me is definitely Cameroon”. This is similar to the ways in which many women migrants refer to Home in interviews and group discussions. Home is used interchangeably with *country* of origin. Although the coterminous use of home and nation may seem an insignificant discursive way in which émigrés refer to where they come from, it points to two significant characteristics of the notion of home. The first is its shifting boundaries. To a woman on the moon, home would be the Earth – the world that she looks at from the vantage point of the moon. For a country among a polity of states, domestic policy would refer to its internal matters, so that within the context of international relations, home is coterminous with state (Khattak, 2006). A migrant woman in Johannesburg calls

Cameroon (the country) home while, if asked the same question in Cameroon, she would name the village or city that she comes from home. Secondly, the collapse of home and nation has implications for how we conceptualise these boundaries, particularly in times of conflict (Khattak, 2006). As we shall see later, this has a real impact on ethnic relationships even outside the country of origin. War and an economic crisis in a country have significant impacts on people's homes and domestic spaces.

G's discussions below reveal how home has multiple *physical* locations. She discusses home as both Cameroon, her country of origin, and her cottage in Rosettenville, south of Johannesburg, where she seeks sanctuary from daily life. As she discusses a photograph she has taken of her place in Rosettenville she says:

“This is my home. I took the photo in my house because this is where I have my comfort, this is the only place I spend most of my time in. I just wanted to show that this is where I feel at home most in South Africa. I spend, I don't know, maybe more than half the day in my house. This is what I usually call home here. But now the owner of the house wants to sell it. I came back home and saw this for 'sale sign' and thought I must take a picture. I just hope that they don't tell us to get out of the cottage because this is what I consider home. This is the place I call home. When I get in here, I close my door and feel good.”



The excerpt of a conversation in one of the group discussions between **LD**, a 21-year-old woman from the Congo, **L**, the 34-year-old from Zimbabwe, Terry Kurgan and me illustrates home's multiple geographies as well as the confusion that surrounds discussions about where home is.

Caroline: Where is home?

LD: Home is always home. I like my home. But South Africa is also good its nice, but I prefer my home.

Caroline: Where is your home?

LD: In the DRC in Bandundu, where I grew up there.

L: Is that where all that fighting is?

LD: No, there is not fighting. There was fighting but there is no more fighting.

Terry: Could you go back home if you wanted?

LD: Ja, I could go back, because I like my home. South Africa also, I study here. I finished my matric but I don't have a job. When I go to find a job, they tell me 'No. Here there is no job for foreigner here, what, what...?' But South Africa also is better here, but not as good as home.

Terry: I just want to make sure; did you say when you look for jobs that they say they won't hire foreigners?

LD: Maybe I give them my phone number. They say they will call me but they do not call. I also like SA, but to stay here ... no, I don't like to stay here.

Caroline: What do you like about South Africa if you say people reject you because you are foreigner?

LD: I don't know. I just like to stay here but I am going to go back to my country. My mother is at home, but my father has passed away. My mother and uncle they are there. I miss them. I came here to study, to do my high school ... Also my brother is here, he is in Grade 10.

L: Who is paying for your school fees?

LD: My uncle. He sends money from home. So until now I am still looking for my job. But if they say I must go back home, I am gonna go back.

L: Ja home is always best ... If like Zim, the next elections are in March, and if the economy is okay, did you see the inflation? 26,000 percent? I was telling Caro if home is okay, I will go back home. We are just waiting for elections.

Terry: Do you have refugee status here?

L: I have those .. you know, the refugee papers. I go to Pretoria every three months to get it stamped. It expires. Sometimes there's cops. They tell you this doesn't work. I don't know why. But you got it from the government office, but they still say it doesn't work. And you get arrested and, like, you go to the police station Lindela. They take you back home but you struggle again to get back here.

LD makes a clear distinction between home and South Africa. For her, home is where she grew up and where her mother and family are. Despite having been in Johannesburg for two years, gone to school and completed her schooling, she does not consider Johannesburg “home” in the way she calls Bandundu home. But she remains ambiguous about Johannesburg which she says she likes and that it ‘is better here’. Yet she also feels excluded because she is a foreigner. Later on in the conversation it becomes clear that what is “better” about Johannesburg is its economic possibilities. But her exclusion from the labour market means that **LD** remains un-rooted in Johannesburg, unable to participate in and take advantage of the city's opportunities. In effect, Johannesburg's attraction as a better place is an imagination, an unfulfilled dream. **LD** often repeats that she is going to “go back home” and this is a phrase that is present in many women's narratives. **L**, the Zimbabwean who works at a restaurant in one of the suburbs in Johannesburg and who came to Johannesburg two years ago to “feed her children”, also says that she would go back home if the economy in her homeland improves after the elections.

JU from Cameroon shares similar feelings of exclusion which make it difficult for her to claim South Africa as her home:

“I was at Wits. I just finished my honours. So it was good getting into school but what makes me feel that this place is not my home is because I can’t get a job. Everywhere you go they ask for a work permit. I am not from South Africa and even if you have a work permit they will need to prove that the job has been advertised to South Africans first. That’s a problem so up to now I don’t know if I wasted my time because maybe I won’t be able to work and it is not just at school ... So those are the kind of things that make you feel like an outsider here ... if can be okay at home, I will go back.”

But for many women, the notion of “going back home” is more imagined than real. They remain in a permanent state of transition. Either they perceive that they have not achieved enough to go Home, or the bleak stories about Home – the lack of economic opportunities, unemployment, war – discourages them and they remain trapped in Johannesburg. The words of a Nigerian migrant mentioned in the previous chapter echo this sense of feeling trapped when she says “[g]oing home is like being between Pharaoh’s army and the Red Sea”. Once women have migrated to Johannesburg, the decision to go back home becomes complicated by, among other things, social expectations and obligations. But staying in Johannesburg does not necessarily offer the economic opportunities that women expect.



L, the Zimbabwean woman, illustrates just how fluid the boundaries of home are when she says she feels most at home at work, where she has the support of the manager. At our first group meeting, she told us she was HIV positive and had found out only six months earlier.

Caroline: Where is home for you?

L: At work, people will come there they make you feel at home even if you are not at home. I am feeling I am at home even if I am away from home. This [work] is my second home.

Caroline: Why do you say that work is the place you feel at home?

L: On the streets, some people are okay. Some people feel that foreigners, especially Zimbabweans, especially, should I say? ... black people make you feel you are not at home or welcome here. White people are different. I don't know why they sympathise with us. They [black people] feel threatened because we take their jobs and husbands. They feel like we are owning the place, but it is not like that we want to be with them like one big family ... from my own point of view I feel like I don't know why black people have to be like that ... some. But some are okay, especially Zulus. They sympathise with us Ndebeles you know... they see as if we are originally from here because we are like one of them. Zulus are okay; we speak the same language; they like feel we are brothers and sisters. But some other cultures, Sotho's, Pedis, you know... I am sorry to say this, I don't mean to get people into trouble but I feel I have to say it; I have to let people know that certain cultures don't like foreigners. But some don't mind.

When I am at work, I don't know why I feel at home. My manager supports me and the clients, mostly white, that come to the restaurant are very nice. They do not look at me as a Zimbabwean; they make me feel at home. My manager knows my status and he makes sure that I have boosters so that my immune system does not go down. This support makes me feel at home at work. But in my flat [Hillbrow], I am in a shell. When I look at my kid I think maybe in a year's time I will not be here because of my positive status. When

I look at them I am so quiet, not like cheerful when I am not here. Maybe in a year's time I will just get sick and die. When I am around them and thinking all these things I am sad. But when I am not around them and at work, I feel at home. At home, I am at home, but like I am always, I am distracted at work not to think about my status and not these things.

For **R**, the woman from Kenya, home transcends the physical space she occupies and attaches the meaning of home to her daughter: “I am at home whenever I am with her.” **R**'s Home moves beyond the physical confines of space and is embodied and symbolised in her daughter:

“Home is where I can be with my daughter. She makes me very happy, she is the reason I am living today. You can see from my pictures she is very important to me. At the end I am at home whenever I am with her.”



These discussions with migrant women around home bring to light the multiple symbols and registers associated with home, which disrupt the concept's conventional meanings. Indeed, as Khattak argues:

The leaving of home is not only about acquiring security, it is also symbolic of leaving behind a sense of identity, a culture, a personal and collective history. Indeed, the word 'home' has several connotations for women, hence, its leaving, its abandonment and its making are important' (Khattak, 2006: 123).

Women's narratives reveal that home is really about the nature of belonging. They illustrate the importance of: employment and/or inclusion in the economy, community support, family, safety, and the significance these factors have on their sense of inclusion and belonging to the city. L's experience is particularly illuminating. Her support seems to come from her manager and colleagues. In the absence of real support from her own family or community, home becomes her place of work. Home is where women can participate fully in the economy, support their families, engage with and find support from a broader community and ensure their own safety as well as that of their families. Ironically, neither their home countries nor South Africa seem able to fulfil all these needs. In reality, the practice of home involves negotiating between what women aspire to and the realities of their existence. These tensions produce particular socio-spatial dynamics which have consequences on urban space.

Contradictions, ambiguities and tensions in the borderlands

This section unpacks the tensions contradictions and ambiguities that migrant women confront in their everyday lives in Johannesburg. It shows that making sense of women's migration and liminality in Johannesburg cannot be explained by simple "objective" push pull models which assume that the conditions of sending countries "push" migrants away and those in receiving countries "pull" migrants towards more attractive opportunities. Women's struggles to make sense of their own decisions to migrate are too complex to be reconciled by a simple balance sheet that measures how the positives outweigh the negatives as these are not always clear-cut. The women exist in Anzaldúa's borderlands, constantly negotiating the contradictions of their daily existence. As the borders between South Africa and country of origin, the past and imagined future, grate against each other they produce new physical and symbolic spaces. It is to the complexities of these borderland spaces that I now turn.

Domestic spaces: borders of safety or violence?

Domestic life

While running workshops and interviews with women, it was surprising how often the domestic realm came up in conversations and images. Given my interest in women's engagement with the "city", these conversations seemed at first, mundane and uninteresting. Yet they featured prominently in the women's lives, not as a source of anguish, but as a space of pride. Numerous photographs and discussions revolved around routine domestic tasks and scenes.

In the home, food, its preparation, nurturing and cleaning all play an important role in defining women's identities. In the images below, **JT**, a participant from Rwanda, is pictured conducting household tasks – cleaning, getting her daughter ready for school and preparing food in the kitchen. Talking about her images, **JT** says: "I like to see my family because I don't have other family here ... only my husband and children. I'm very much happy because when I see my family I just feel I'm whole."



Hope in my life

As **F**, from the Congo explained her activities in the city, she told the group that she lit a candle in her room (see below) and prayed as an important part of her daily routine. This space she created every day represented hope:

"Here it is a time which have a big meaning in my life, this time, this picture symbolise when I'm praying, after doing my work I take time to read my Bible and here I usually pray; it symbolises hope in my life."



This is an image of a father and three children sharing a couch in their living room. F took the photograph while the family was watching television. One is struck by the intimacy between father and children. From the narrative accompanying this frame, it is clear that the snapshot is intended to portray contentment and happiness. F explains this picture thus: “Here is my family, a happy family!”

The performance of household tasks seems a significant reference point in the women’s daily lives. Yet their images and accompanying narratives do not fit within dominant feminist discourses that frame domestic work and roles as patriarchal oppression. Contrary to the rule, their ability to take care of their families is considered integral to their identity as women, and is a source of pride. Consider this snapshot of the breakfast tray.



Like other images, the breakfast table raises the question: Was the tray prepared for the camera? Was it posed to send a message about the preparer and her family? The choice of the frame, the way in which the food is displayed, the attention to detail (notice the tic tacs placed on the serviette), portray a creativity and an energy which is discordant with ideas of food preparation signifying sexist oppression. It is an assertion of selfhood as a woman and overturns commonplace prejudices of marginalised communities as lacking creativity and aesthetics. The tray depicts a bounty that may or may not exist. Given the harsh economic conditions that refugee women and their families live in, the tray could have been prepared for the camera. Or there may be times when the family can afford a hearty breakfast. Whether this is an everyday picture of their lives is less important than what it symbolises. This image seems to say, “Look at me, I am no different from you. I can take care of my family.” At stake here is the very identity of the preparer of the breakfast tray and her need to show her ability, as a mother and a wife, to nurture and care for her family. In other words, it seems important to project the image of being a “good woman” and to challenge prevailing Western-derived feminist norms. So, the most mundane domestic task of preparing breakfast takes on new meaning and qualities. Domestic spaces and tasks represent complex intersection of notions of identity (womanhood/selfhood), control (empowerment), creativity and independence. And, while they may at times be spaces of vulnerability and disempowerment, they are also symbols of strength, control and a connection with the very core of womanhood. Thus, daily domestic activities cannot simply be written off as patriarchal oppression – they seem much more complex.

In order to understand the significance of these domestic scenes, it is important to delve into the contexts within which they occur and dismantle some of the prejudices around domesticity evident in dominant feminist discourse. To some, the apparent “celebration” of domesticity in the images illustrates a social conservatism which, after all, is not unusual amongst a group of women from Africa of a certain class and educational background. Mohanty shows that scholarly writings on Women in the “Third World” unwittingly construct the “Third World Woman” as “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimised, etc”. (Mohanty, 2003:22). In other words, the descriptive category “Third World Women” presupposes certain sociological

characteristics. As such, images of domesticity produced by the migrant women in this study are *necessarily* socially conservative – illustrative of women who continue to be bound by oppressive patriarchal traditions. They are *a priori* sociologically constructed as domestic and tradition bound.

Others explain domestic images as the lack of life-choices – if migrant women had the choice, surely they would not choose to celebrate their roles as nurturer or their domesticity? In a debate around this issue a white middle class woman working at a university said to me: “I don’t buy that these women actually like doing domestic work. I don’t know about you ... I like cooking once in a while, but I hate domestic work.” While it may well be true that if they were given a choice the women would have different perceptions of house work, the argument is a logical fallacy – one which emanates from constituting all women as having identical desires and aspirations regardless of their race, ethnicity, class or cultural locations (Mohanty, 2003: 21).

Within the context of high levels of crime, the insecurity of being a foreigner, and a lack of control of what happens outside the home, domestic space becomes a place where migrant women can exercise control and create a level of security. Moreover, having left their country of origin, for political or economic reasons, and entered South African society which is often hostile and difficult to integrate, they are dislocated. From the location of dislocation, having a home, or a kitchen, and performing such mundane tasks as cooking and cleaning takes on a significant meaning. For refugees or people seeking asylum, being able to do the ordinary tasks of feeding, cleaning and nurturing is a significant feat – one that women in stable political and economic contexts take for granted. Given this context, the women’s snapshots elicit a sense of power and assert their self-worth: “I cook for my kid and husband. I feed them.” Given their circumstances, it is hard to see how it can be concluded that their celebration of domesticity is conservative. They have overcome obstacles to create a space of relative tranquillity at home.

Migration is suffused with ambiguity. It can result in levels of security within insecurity; it provides women levels of independence within dependency; it provides women a strong sense of self-hood – but can also be disempowering. Indeed, migration is emblematic of contradictory experiences and expectations. As such, its outcomes cannot be determined *a priori*; they are always dependent on contexts and are therefore constantly shifting and revealing contradictory dynamics.

Domestic Violence

Ironically, while the home provides a sanctuary and source of power for women, it is sometimes also a space of violence and abuse. In particular, women's status as refugees or undocumented migrants turns the home into a significant point of vulnerability precisely because of their lack of status and fear of the police.



The images taken by **L**, the Zimbabwean woman, illustrate the fragility of the safety of home. These photographs show how domestic violence disrupts family life, and the difficulty women face addressing domestic abuse because of their status as asylum seekers or refugees.

The image above shows **L**'s daughter and niece taking a bath in their flat in Hill-brow. Below, the bath is splattered with blood stains. This image was taken a few weeks later, when **L** got home to find that her sister had been in a fight with her boyfriend. This is how she tells the story:



L: ... My young sis had a fight with her boyfriend and she ran away to my room. ... He hit her with a hammer and he is the one who did this and destroyed my property.

Terry: Is he from Zimbabwe or SA?

L: Zimbabwe ... He ran away and went back to Zim. He was hitting my sister against the bath, you can see the blood here...

Terry: Gosh, is she alright?

L: She is much better now; they couldn't, you know, stitch her head because it couldn't come together. He was hitting her against the tap. He used a hammer ... I was at work! I came back from work at about 3 in the morning I just saw blood and like I said to the security "who were you fighting with?" He said to me "Are you saying that? It's your sister who has been hurt they took her to the hospital". ... She is out now and she is okay.

Caroline: Did you report the matter to the police?

L: Yes actually. You know what happened, he [the boyfriend] paid the police R600 he is out now. 600 Rands only! He bribed the police. We fear for our lives but he was banned from the flat. The security guards are not allowed to let him in any more coz he is already out. But you know, sometimes the system can let you down. But, like, at home it's different ... like, at home it's different. When you do crime... in Zim the crime there is very low ... when you do something wrong you have to pay, like go to court, get arrested. They don't even allow bribes; if you bribe a cop you will be in big trouble. Or, like, if you pay to get out you will be in big trouble. So I have got these pictures and I am just thinking to go to the police again and show them and ask them, where is the person who did this to us? He never even went to court; he never even slept in the cell the whole night.

JT (the woman from Rwanda): You know what they [the police] do? They just keep you coming; you come and you come until your money is finished you get tired you leave them.

This account of domestic violence by **F**, the woman from Congo, illustrates how migrant women negotiate complex social codes within their communities. Being part of a community often means securing some form of protection in times of crisis. Church and other forms of association provide food and money in difficult times. They are also important networks for accessing asylum seeker permits, space in markets and business opportunities. Ironically, it is membership in their communities that also makes women vulnerable to domestic and other forms of abuse within the community. Women are sometimes bound by certain codes which force them to protect perpetrators in their own community for fear of being labelled a traitor and excommunicated:



F: Now this picture there symbolises domestic violence. I usually go to give advice to couples, persons who are in need. That day I went to help this couple. They had quarrelled; they broke everything; the husband chase away the wife and kids; he throw everything outside ... Ja, that is why I took those pictures.



Terry: Were you able to calm them down?

F: Yes. Yes.

Terry: What caused the problem?

F: The husband said the wife was impolite. He said she answered bad in front of people, and that day he said he can't support it anymore. At least I took time to give them advice; we prayed and the wife got into the house and everything become normal again.

Caroline: Did you or anyone else call the police?

F: You must understand how we live in our community. The police are not safe ... we have complications if that woman went to the police she could have been rejected by the community because she went to report one of us. Also, she does not have "real" papers, only this refugee papers and the police can tear them up and send her to jail because she is an illegal alien. Before she go to the police she has to find a way of sorting it out among the community. That is why they called me. I am known and from their church.

F shows the dilemmas facing women in situations of domestic violence. Women have fear of going to the police because of their lack of legal status in South Africa. Even when women have legal asylum seeker or refugee documents which allow them access to services and legal protection in the country, these are often not recognised by the police or other service providers. Moreover, going to the police means exposing a member of the community which can lead to being exiled by your own community.

F's account of domestic violence also illustrates how migrant women walk a tightrope between protecting themselves and protecting "the community". Women often use their communities, churches, and extended family members to mediate and resolve domestic or other forms of conflict. But, just as membership in their communities offers them protection at times, it can make them vulnerable to its violence. **F** shows how women protect domestic spaces from penetration by the state. Going to the police for a domestic violence case is seen as being disloyal to the community; women therefore become buffers, protecting crime

and criminals within their own communities. And while they do not necessarily condone the acts of violence, their fear of losing the “protection” of their own communities is often much greater than that of facing violence at home.

The border between physical and material security

Previous chapters have discussed the importance of material security in women’s decisions to migrate to Johannesburg. But coming to Johannesburg, which many have heard is, and experience as, a dangerous place, means making concessions between physical and economic security. In the conversations presented below, women’s experiences as traders on the street reveal their frequent encounters with criminals and an often exploitative Johannesburg Metro Police force. While Johannesburg is perceived as promising economic security, this is constantly undermined by physical insecurity. Daily, women have to find a balance between making a living on the streets in the informal sector and negotiating their own safety and the safety of their goods.

The women interviewed felt very vulnerable on the streets and at market stalls. Although this is a problem faced by all women, it is likely to be more pronounced in the case of migrants because many have no access to bank accounts, cannot speak a South African language and are targeted by criminals because they know that foreigners are unlikely to report them to the police. A 20-year-old Zimbabwean woman who arrived in South Africa in 2005, said her stall had been broken into twice in two months.

Caroline: Do you think that your stall was targeted?

M: Yes, because I am a Zimbabwean, and many South African’s are jealous because we are here.

Caroline: But did the *tsotsis*²⁰ not take things from your (South African) neighbour’s stall also?

M: Yes they did, but not as much as what they took from me.

20 A slang word meaning gangster

Caroline: Why do you think so?

M: Because I am from Zimbabwe

Caroline: So you think it is because you are a foreigner?

M: Yes, you see they know we carry our money because we do not have bank accounts.

Mrs. U, a Tanzanian woman with a stall in Hillbrow, feels the same way:

Mrs. U: I am not free to move when I want and I must take care of my stuff and money because there are *tsotsis* around here. The place is very dangerous; I just stay there for bread. I am telling you that you can never know when those people can come and rob your money and other stuffs.

I was coming back from my business one day with my two children when some *tsotsis* attacked me. They took everything that I carried, as well as all my money. I couldn't intervene and nobody could come to my rescue. This is a very dangerous place, my sister.

Caroline: Why do you think they attacked you? Had they known you had money?

Mrs. U: People here call me *makwerekwere*, they are not happy to see me making money.

Caroline: So you think they stole from you because you are a *makwerekwere*?

Mrs. U: I think that is the main reason.

Although in these cases it is difficult to prove that migrant women are targeted because they are foreign, they certainly feel a vulnerability because of their foreignness. Given the attacks and murders of Somali shop owners in the Eastern Cape (CORMSA, 2008) and the xenophobic attacks which took place in May 2008, three years after some of these interviews were conducted, the women's feelings of vulnerability because they were foreigners were, in all probability, justified.

It is not only the *tsosis* that women have to fend off; many talk about experiences with the Metro Police whose enforcement of trading on the streets often result in women having their goods confiscated. **RT**, who is from Burundi and married to a Rwandese man, said she moved her business from the streets in Johannesburg's central business district (CBD) because of the frequent police raids conducted there. She talked about how she and her friends sold cooked bananas on the corner of Prichard and Von Wielligh streets. She left the streets eight years ago because of Metro Police raids:

“... I remember when I was selling there and I was getting money, but the Metro Police just chased us all the time. But this one [she points to two friends in the photographs], they are still selling there ... But me, the time I was selling there, when Metro came, Metro Police came, I just run away and I never went back; that's why I left this place. But them, they are just sitting selling ... both of them; they from Rwanda.”

Both **E** and **R**, from Kenya, sell on the corner of Claim and Plein streets in inner city Johannesburg. This location is considered illegal by the municipality as it has not been designated an official trading area and is therefore prone to police raids. Because of this, the street traders have to organise themselves, often paying a fee to a “spokesperson” who negotiates with the police. On this street where most sellers are foreign migrants, the appointed spokesperson is a South African woman. Everyone pays her R50 a month. It is unclear how the fee charged is allocated between the spokesperson and the police. Sometimes she is unable to fend off the policemen, which means the traders have to rely on each other to warn of the police raids and to remove their wares from the street. **R** narrates her encounters with the law in this conversation at a workshop.





R: I make earrings. I just make earrings and necklace and I sell them in town.

Terry: Like the ones you wearing or different?

R: Ja. These ones and other different big ones. Let me show you a sample.

Caroline: Is this something that you learnt here?

R: Ja. I learnt it here. I was staying with someone who was working in Hillbrow, so they used to make the earrings, living with her I just learnt.

Terry: And how is the business doing?

R: It's not bad. It's quite ok. But the Metro, they don't allow it and most of the time they come and take the stuff.

E: This was on Special Assignment [an investigative journalism television programme], how the police confiscate street traders' stuff.

Caroline: Like J's experience as well with the cops?

R: Ja.

G: Did they give you back your stuff or do they just take them?

R: Normally they give you a ticket for about a R1000.

G: And you can't pay it. So that is a way to take your stuff.

R: But anyway, basically, even if you can pay it, I think it's better to get other stuff than to go back.

G: That's what I'm saying. That fine, it's just too much. And maybe your stuff is not even up to R1000, you just leave it with them.

To survive police raids, **R** explains the importance of forming multiple networks on the street.

R: My neighbour [on the street] is a Tanzanian guy called Rasta. He sells just next to me. This one, she is also selling somewhere next to me; she is from Mozambique. This one is from Malawi, both of them are selling next to me also. My things are somewhere here. So I think in town, and you have to keep together, with the person who is selling next door. You need each other for change, and also your neighbours can help you sell for each other. I've got to know the people next door. I even sell for him [the Tanzanian]. He leaves me here and goes. He tells me, "I'm coming just now" and I stand in for him.

Caroline: Is this important?

R: Yes, very, very important because if you do not stand together your business will go down. People will not warn you when police are coming and maybe you have gone to the toilet or to get lunch or something.

Caroline: Is it only foreigners selling in this market. Are there no South Africans?

R: No. Very few.

E's conversation reveals the constant fear of having one's goods confiscated by the police. As discussed in the previous chapter, the fact that businesses did not always succeed is due less to the lack of business acumen than other environmental factors, such as the enforcement of by-laws, and no access to capital due to the lack of legal status or citizenship.

E: This is my business, the one that the police took. I didn't used to put all the things on display, I put only a few, most of the stuff are in a sack, which we normally hide somewhere else so that when the cops come they cannot take all your things. Unfortunately that day I had everything there on the street ... I normally only put a few things on top. On different days I have different things. This one is the plastics and cutlery. Sometimes I put more things like wallets, dozens of

spoons and sometimes singles, the spoon holders ... But they (Metro Police) took them so I have to buy others.

Terry: How did it happen?

E: This was the lady who was selling for me on that day when the police came; she's the lady that **R** and I have employed.

Terry: She had all your stuff.

E: Ja, she's the one who was supposed to handle my stuff and run with it but she didn't; she's pregnant, she's very, very pregnant – eight months.

Caroline: Where is she from?

E: Malawi ... I lost everything, everything on that day, despite saving for months to be able to buy new stock. Now I am back to square one.

Women's survival strategies on the streets illustrate the vulnerability of their businesses given the general insecurity of the locations of their businesses which are considered illegal by the police. Their narratives reveal their reliance on other traders for protection against the police and to watch their goods when they are away from their stalls. By reflecting on women's stories we understand the ways in which they negotiate everyday business and survival activities in the city, the dynamics of trade, the ways in which they subvert official by-laws by forging links with other traders and mobilising against police.

It is clear that the money **R** and **E** pay for protection on Plein and Claim streets does not guarantee them protection from the police. Not paying the money may, however, mean that they lose their space on the street. Everyday life on the street therefore means negotiating multiple relationships, each with its advantages and disadvantages but no less significant in its implications for their survival. The spatial practices that shape women's daily existence on the streets, their implications on state sovereignty and notions of power, are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. The point I wish to make now is the constant tension between material and physical security, as the conversation with **G** below illustrates. Where Johannesburg provides the promise of economic security, **G** relates her experiences with crime and the risks one takes living in the city. Conversely, Cameroon may provide the physical security, but not financial security:

“For a while I thought South Africa was home; there are many times, a length of period maybe a year, I knew that I had found a very better place because I had a business to do and I was making money. But then I ... the first time saw a gun was in here in SA. I have never seen a weapon before, never in my life, so its very risky staying here than back at home; back at home it’s very peaceful. If you lose your phone maybe its because you are careless or you carry it in the market place and it is showing. But here, I have lost my phone on several occasions. It’s been gone... like someone shows me a gun and a knife and takes it. Like even not up to a month ago, I was carrying a phone worth around R2500 or so and it was taken from me with a gun and knife just like that. It is very risky here, that’s the only reason I can say this is not like home – because your life is not safe.”

It was crime and police corruption in Johannesburg which eventually meant that **G** had to close her Internet store in Hillbrow. She, however, argues that were it not for the criminals and policemen, South Africa would be “okay” as it provides economic opportunities that Cameroon does not:

“But after everything though I can say Cameroon is peaceful, SA is okay if you take aside the criminals and the cops (laughter) because, just in December, I lost my shop in Hillbrow. The reason was because of cops. They came inside scattered everything and stole. You can’t even ... when something happens and someone robs you, you can’t even go to the cops. I can tell you there was one time they took my phone just 10 minutes the cops were passing. This cop told me that he was on duty and looking for criminals. He didn’t care about my issue and I wasn’t even so sure he was really on duty. So you don’t have anybody to report to. If not, I will say this is home, but your life is so much at risk ... but its okay.”

Women’s narratives reveal that they are constantly negotiating between their own safety and the promise of material security in Johannesburg. They experience Johannesburg as dangerous and weigh their decision to stay against their physical vulnerability. Like **G**, **L**’s account of domestic violence discussed earlier shows police complicity in crimes which **L** suggests would not happen in Zimbabwe.

Both **G** and **L**'s accounts depict the boundary of security and insecurity along which women have to walk. How do they negotiate these borders? Should they choose their physical security or their livelihoods? Have they made the right decision to come to South Africa? **L** argues that police are different in Zimbabwe; there is justice and those that commit crimes pay for them. Whether her account of Zimbabwe is right or wrong is not the issue, it is how she remembers, or chooses to remember, Zimbabwe. What is important is she defines clear borders demarcating Johannesburg from country of origin. The homeland is constructed as safer, free of corruption and a more caring and humane society while Johannesburg is perceived as a place of crime, corruption and physical insecurity. But where Johannesburg is seen as able to provide a livelihood for migrant women and their families, the homeland represents poverty and a bleak future. This is the border between physical security and material security that women tread daily.

The border between freedom and surveillance

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the reasons women give for coming to South Africa is to escape patriarchal bonds and the constant surveillance of the community. Yet, while Johannesburg can provide this sense of freedom, it is also a place that represents another form of surveillance – that of the state and a host population that constructs foreigners as “the other”. **G**, the Cameroonian woman, illustrates this tension:

“I am so happy to be away from my family and to talk to them from very far. Okay ... mmm, there are times that I miss my mother and father, but you know sometimes you want to get away from people who are always watching you. And asking many, many questions, especially my father... he would ask my mother to ask me things like ‘when are you getting married’, ‘who is that man you were with’, ‘what are you doing with your life’. Ahh! I simply got tired of being somewhere so close that they could watch me. Even when I used to go to my grandparents’ house the questions would not stop. It was **G** this and **G** that. Here I am away from the roving eyes ... (laughs).

... but you have to be very careful not to be too conspicuous here in Johannesburg. To keep low on the streets, especially if you are in a public place where there are cops. Sometimes they just come up to you and ask you to say this (points to the head) in Zulu, and if you can't you are in jail."

A Nigerian migrant, who found freedom in South Africa to express herself as a woman, even though she was born in a man's body, explains:

"The problem with being in Nigeria is people would never accept me for who I am. They would not understand that I am a woman in a man's body and that is why I came to South Africa. Here I am accepted and protected by a Constitution, but there ... I cannot be myself ... who I really am. My mother ... maybe she could understand if I explained to her, maybe, maybe ... but my father, I don't know ... perhaps if she talked to him."

Although she finds she is free to express her sexuality in Johannesburg she does go on to say:

"But the Constitution does not help you on the street, my sister ... The other day I was walking in town and they told me to say this (points to the elbow) in Zulu. I told them that the constitution has 11 languages and I could say elbow in English, but they didn't want to know. I had to give them a bribe otherwise I would have found myself back in Nigeria!"

For women escaping war or political instability in their countries of origin, South Africa's democratic polity represents freedom and the opportunity to live peacefully. **FL** from the Democratic Republic of Congo relates how she fled with the help of her mother, because she had been involved in a student movement at university in Kinshasa. "The government said we caused trouble at the university after the first elections, and my mother helped me to come here, because it was not safe." Yet there is a range of ways that freedom is not a meaningful reality in Johannesburg. In a later workshop **FL** relates how she feels constantly under threat and is careful to lock herself up in her house in Bertrams. "If I'm in myself there [in the house], I lock everything. I lock myself in the bedroom also ... when I am myself to the bedroom, I lock it. When somebody gets in, I lock it again. It's very frustrating, ja."

F remarks ironically that she left the Democratic Republic of Congo because of the political insecurity and her involvement in the student movement in the university where she was a medical student. The images of her daily life are punctuated with security guards, security gates, technologies that identify fingerprints and special pin codes that allow her into and out of her building:

“This image is of a gate. Each time when I’m going out, I use this gate. It’s like now automatic; I have to put my fingerprint and it opens. Each time if I want to enter the building, I have to put a number there so the gates can be open.”



F notes how she now finds herself behind a security gate. “Maybe I am safe behind my security gate, but it symbolises the insecurity of South Africa if we have to live like this.”

Both **F** and **FL** left the Democratic Republic of Congo because they felt “marked” by the state for their involvement in university student politics. Coming to Johannesburg was a means of escaping state surveillance and insecurity. But even in South Africa’s young democracy, which enshrines individual freedoms and rights, they feel “marked” as potential

victims of crime and, as ironically, by the security systems which are instituted to protect them from criminals. **FL**’s narration of the bio-data she provides in order to enter and exit her block of flats in Hillbrow highlight the everyday surveillance women negotiate. Although the surveillance is meant to protect her and her family, it nevertheless brings home the levels of insecurity, real and perceived, on Johannesburg’s streets which necessitate such action. While the nature of insecurity in the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa may be different, the irony that she escaped one form of insecurity to enter another is not lost on her.

It is not just the nature of crime, which has an impact on all who live in the city that curtails women's freedom. Being a foreigner, unable to speak a South African language, or simply having a darker skin tone or an inoculation mark in the wrong place, means that you are branded as a *kwerekwere*. Ironically, while women talk of Home as one of the harshest spaces of judgement, freedom in Johannesburg is curtailed by fear of being attacked or deported if branded a foreigner **R** from Kenya illustrates:

“At home you won't mind if you are in a *matatu* [taxi] and you are speaking Kikuyu there. Here, [in Johannesburg] when I get a phone call in a taxi, I make sure I do not answer the phone because I will either speak English, Kiswahili or Kikuyu, not Zulu or one of the South African languages. At home, you are accepted for what you are. You feel comfortable and as if you belong and have a right to belong there. Home ... you can never have a place like where you come from.”

Although sometimes Home is represented as stifling and limiting women's ability to express themselves and their identities, it is also remembered as a space of belonging. The contours of freedom and surveillance show the levels of discipline and control families and communities of origin have on women's behaviour. Coming to Johannesburg means escaping that discipline. It also allows women to escape state surveillance. Yet Johannesburg's freedoms are also limited. Here, too, they encounter community discipline and state surveillance of a different nature. While many women, despite having asylum seeker or refugee papers, remain “invisible” to the state, they are highly visible on the streets. Police harassment and the “othering” of foreigners often makes women extremely vulnerable in public spaces, particularly if they do not look South African or are unable to speak other South African languages, particularly Zulu, which is most commonly spoken in Johannesburg.

Moral and cultural borders

Notions of home are not simply about material and physical realities, but also about the straddling of cultural borders. Migrant women's narratives show how they resist and negotiate cultural boundaries. South Africans are constructed as being “too

modern” and in having lost the respect that children should have towards their elders, men towards women and women towards men.

H: Here you see young men proposing to women even if they do not know you. How can you propose love to a stranger? In Uganda you will not find that ... first a man will ask to date you for a while before proposing marriage.

JU: Yes, it is as if here men do not respect women. Look, here I am a woman with a child and yet you will find a man on the street proposing love to me. They do not respect me or my husband ... the problem is when you have so much development you forget how to respect. At home there is respect.

Conversations with women of different ages and social circumstances reveal this moral code that is associated with the home, and how this is “spatialised” in Johannesburg. A single woman from Cameroon remarked, “I can never bring a man to my home, we date outside.” Another, who had fought with her husband because of his infidelity, said: “I told my husband never to cross that door with another woman.” Yet another unmarried woman from Kenya said that “my house is the shrine of God”. These moral codes are not only demarcated by a physicality, they also shape how women behave outside the domestic space. “I do not date just anyone because many men think a single woman is raw meat for them; use them and never marry them,” said the Kenyan. She continued: “My body is the temple of the Lord, and I will keep it safe for my husband ... whoever the guy may be.” Domestic spaces are important for the reaffirming of the self and one’s history and culture, as a woman from Uganda asserts:



“It is important to make your home here in Johannesburg to be nice. To remember where you have come from and what you are doing here. I like my home because when we have ceremonies; we come together and we do rituals that remind us about ourselves. Here we are free to talk in our language ... we remember home, we pray, we laugh and we can forget how difficult it can be here. In my home I am not a *kwerekwere*, I know where I have come from and I know that I can be whatever I want.”

JT, the Rwandese woman, talked about bringing up her children the way she was taught back home:

“In our home we used to eat sitting down together and eat not having tables. So I was so happy to get this mat, putting down and then I teach my children how we used to eat at home. We eat from one plate, at home we eat like this, but we enjoy it sometimes; we do it to just remind them. It is good because we teach them sharing, like the way we were taught at home. I want them to grow up remembering where they have come from.”



One of the issues frequently brought up in conversations was raising children in Johannesburg. Many of the women decried the way in which South African children are brought up and argued the importance of instilling “good values” and “respect” in children so as to distinguish themselves from South Africans. As **JT**’s quote above indicates, cultural practices are used to ensure that children growing up in Johannesburg do not forget their “roots”. In this context, mothering takes on significant meaning that at once resists hegemonic cultures and maintains links with the homeland.

But just as cultures of the homeland can be empowering, they can also be debilitating. As discussed in Chapter 3, **RT**, the woman from Burundi married to a Rwandese man, met her future husband in a camp in the Congo. Her parents, seeing no future for her in the camp “gave her away” to the man who promised to give her an education. They now have three children:

“I did not know that I was going to get married, I thought I was going to school and I was very happy. But I never went to school. I got pregnant, one time, two times and now I have three children. He never did what he promised ... my husband is from Rwanda and me from Burundi and every time he tells my children ‘look the bad food your mother is making from Burundi. Don’t eat that cockroach food’ ... We speak the same language but he is hating me for being from Burundi. Me, I ask him, why did you marry me if you hate me so much?”

RT’s story shows how historical political and cultural conflicts are carried into Johannesburg and played out in the city. Both her husband and his family refuse to provide support to the children. **RT** often has to seek help from her church, yet even her networks at church are not always willing or able to assist her as her church community is also divided along ethnic lines. As a result, **RT** often struggles to feed her children and pay the rent. Just as embodied cultural practices and traditions are used as empowering practices to resist the dominant cultures and discourses, they are also disempowering and used to justify historical prejudices.

Similarly, **F**’s discussion of domestic violence earlier in the chapter raises important issues around community discipline and sanction in Johannesburg. Although migrant women may, to some degree, escape the discipline of commu-

nities and families back home, they remain caught within a web of community sanction in Johannesburg. Having community networks has its advantages and disadvantages. Ethnic communities or church groups may protect and support an individual in trouble. Yet these networks of loyalty also protect criminality and perpetrators of violence in the community. But the mistrust of the police by migrant communities means that the burden of mediation and conflict resolution in migrant communities lies on intra-community mediators who act as buffers between the community and the police.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the complexities of living in the physical, cultural and imagined borderlands of H(h)ome. It has shown the ways in which women continuously negotiate between these various borders. The decisions they make are not simple. Their struggles collapse the push-pull binaries used to conceptualise migration and urban realities. Analyses which explain migration as “income maximisation” are unable to adequately explain why women remain in Johannesburg despite its difficulties. Moreover, objective macro level analyses also fail to see women’s complicated relationships with their homelands, which offer them a sense of belonging but has also erased or violated their sense of self. Home is represented as having multiple meanings, contingent upon a variety of factors such as gender, class and nationality. Although notions of home as a sanctuary, happiness, and the nuclear family, remain part of migrant women’s aspirations, its realities often reveal the complex dynamics of everyday life and the tactics women have to employ to navigate a range of kinds of patriarchy, violence, community discipline and loyalties.

Being “in between” – not South African, nor at Home – has its advantages and disadvantages. There is a certain freedom in liminality, in being in “Nowhereville” to borrow from Landau, (2006). Being un-rooted allows a critical distance and consciousness that resists being “placed” somewhere, but allows migrant women to choose their place, depending on the circumstances. This, as a Congolese migrant woman reveals, is a critical survival tactic: “Here, I am nobody. I hide from the police, I hide from the South African government, I hide from my government at home. Sometimes I even hide from my own

countrymen... you see this is how I survive.” Indeed, Johannesburg is a site where layers of history, and contestations, are played out. And these are not merely the city’s colonial conquest, apartheid’s past, racial prejudice or social engineering, but also the site where Africa’s history is played out, through its African migrants – where the dynamics of ethnic conflicts, civil wars, SAPs, elitist and military rule in other parts of the continent and the world interface with Johannesburg’s history and is reproduced in everyday life.

But just as urban spaces can be empowering, they can also disempower and erase identities when dominant discourses “other” marginal populations on account of their perceived differences. It is this constant struggle to find H(h)ome and assert and affirm one’s own identities, in the context of contested and tenuous historical relationships on the one hand and marginalisation, xenophobia and the erasure of self on the other, that this chapter has sought to throw light on. The borderlands are thus contested sites – spaces where women navigate state violence, ethnic hatred and patriarchy yet, at the same time, find freedom, a sense of self and safety.

The complexities of these dynamics reveal how women create spaces of resistance, but also how communal bonds of loyalty reinforce patriarchal and criminal practices. Yet in the absence of trust in the state system, migrants devise ways of mediating conflict within communities. These practices are sometimes successful but, at other times, may protect criminals. Both Johannesburg and home are idealised and it is the point of contact between women’s aspirations and their lived realities that alternative urban spaces are produced. These are spaces that are at once liberating and disempowering – places of safety yet spaces where violence can be protected; places where women define new identities but where others are crushed (for example ethnic or national). What does this mean for a city like Johannesburg? Migrant women’s practices have an impact on the social, economic, spatial character and governance character of the city. Both structural forces and women’s agency in the creation of urban space reveal the urban practices of marginal groups that have consequences for urbanity. It is to how these spaces affect the city that the final chapter turns.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Reconsidering the boundaries of power in Johannesburg



Introduction

This thesis begins by asking: What do the experiences and subjective interpretations of migrant women's lives in Johannesburg tell us about the nature of the city? And how does this shift the ways in which we theorise Johannesburg and, more generally, African urban spaces? Answering these questions requires more than just describing the experiences of women, their victimisation, or their stories of strength and resistance. Going beyond these discourses of victims and victors – beyond simply reviewing women's narratives and experiences – we start to see how their daily practices overturn the analytical locus of governance and power. Where Marxists, particularly the work of Harvey (1973, 2002), locate power in the domination of labour by the capitalist class, women's social relationships illustrate multiple nodes of domination and resistance. Harvey (1973, 2002) argues that urban space is produced by the twin themes of capital accumulation and class struggle and therefore relationships between urban dwellers are primarily class oriented. However, women's experiences in the city highlight not only the importance of class identities, but also nationality, ethnicity and gender, in shaping and producing urban space. Without denying women's productive and reproductive potential, their stories illustrate that the productive form of Johannesburg is shaped not only by a quest for efficiency and material production and accumulation, but also by social relationships and values that emanate from alternative systems of meaning which may work against Marxist predictions. What we see instead, is women participating in capitalist production sometimes to reproduce it, at other times for individual consumption and survival, and in other instances to manipulate it for their own non-material interests²¹.

21 Some may argue that critiquing macro theoretical analyses, such as Harvey's capitalist framework, with evidence drawn from micro level analyses aimed at understanding individual experiences and subjective interpretations is illogical and methodologically unsound. My point is not to deny the importance of macro analyses, but to argue that for as long as Marxist urban theoretical frameworks presume that the nature of *individual* behaviour is driven by class motives, then there is a logical point of comparison with migrant women's actual experiences in Johannesburg. Insofar as Marxist's urban literature clearly articulates that *individual* relationships are dominated by class struggle between capitalists and labour, then there is common ground to compare and contrast women's relationships in urban areas to this literature, in ways that are methodologically sound.

This form of manipulation also raises broader questions about the nature of governance and the boundaries of power in the city. Despite conceiving of governance as a term that moves beyond the state-centric notion of “government” (McCarney et al, 1995; 1996), the concept has struggled to move beyond “state-centrism” both conceptually and in practice (see World Bank Institute, 2006; UNESCO, 2000, UNCHS, 1999). Further, governance literature continues to presume the existence of a homogenous state, one where all its actors work coherently to enforce state rules and regulations, and to encourage *accountability, responsiveness* and *citizen participation* (see Mehta, 1998). Moreover, there is a tendency for urban interventions to presume that people’s primary locus of identity and mobilisation is organised around the “state” and “civil society”. In other words, given the opportunity, urban dwellers will *want* to participate in decision-making and service delivery processes (see Ministry of Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development, 1998) through their civil associations and, in doing so, build a relationship of trust and mutual benefit between the state and its subjects.

Here, too, migrant women’s narratives show that there is not one system of rule and governance, but rather multiple interacting spheres of values and subjectivities. In fact, migrant women’s experiences of the city reveal the presence of *their own regimes* of accountability, responsiveness and participation in the city, based on forms of identity and solidarity that are not necessarily mediated by the “state” or configured as “civil society”. Relationships around gender, national and ethnic identities are important, albeit fragile, forms of solidarity in the city. Moreover, they highlight the fragmented nature of the state, where its own actors clearly pursue varied purposes and objectives that differ from those articulated in statute books. Local government statutes in South Africa aim to strengthen “democratic citizenship” (Pieterse, 2002: 3). For actors that live in “legal limbo”, and whose “outsider” status results in real and sometimes violent exclusions from the South African polity, the notion of creating a “democratic citizenship”, even one which expands the notion of citizenship to include “all those who live in South Africa”, is questionable. Women’s practices in Johannesburg highlight that migrant women will use the state to get what they want in the city, but they do not necessarily wish to forge a lasting relationship with it. Their investments and futures seem set elsewhere, either “back home”, or outside the continent. True, there are structural restrictions limiting their engagement with the state, such

as their ambiguous legal status. Nevertheless, their experiences reveal practices that actively seek to disengage, remain invisible and, as much as possible, avoid encounters with state agents. Women's narratives illustrate that they select forms of engagement that least disadvantage them, or that are advantageous to them. These are often defined by the contexts in which they find themselves. It is important to note that while migrant women may be unique because of their ambiguous legal status, the nature and character of their relationship with the state is not necessarily confined to foreign nationals. Indeed, other authors also show how nationals employ similar tactics, choosing when to engage with the state and when to become invisible to it (see Simone, 2004, Marcis, 2004).

Even where migrant women display agency, their actions are limited as much by structural economic, legal and political forces as by other non-material systems of regulation. Their experiences show that categories of "victim" or "heroine" do not adequately capture their everyday experiences. Urban realities reveal more complex contexts. The ways in which women navigate the borders of power often result in ambiguous, and sometimes contradictory, outcomes. This is discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter.

Although migrant women's experiences are specific, they share much with marginal populations. The dynamics of their class, gender and nationality may produce particular experiences, but there are things they have in common with other marginalised urban populations. Migrant women's experiences are thus instructive of a broader experience of living in the margins of the city. Indeed, they share certain class, gendered and "outsider" characteristics with others, including categories of women of South African origin. For example, many of the issues around safety, domestic violence and the insensitivity of the police to domestic abuse, resonate with South African women's own experiences of the city (see Vetten, 2005). Similarly, South African migrants to the city from rural areas also experience processes of social (ethnic) discrimination and exclusion from the city (Vearey, forthcoming). The reasons for their exclusion may differ, but the effects are the same.

On methods: Ways of reading the city

In order to surface the theoretical challenges that women's daily lives reveal about dominant economic and governance frameworks, this study has used a methodological approach that bridges multiple forms of analysis. Its starting point is that the city is a space that is the outcome of a dynamic interrelationship between structural forces and urban dwellers' everyday activities. It uses migrant women's routine spatial practices – their words and images – as an entry point into understanding the various subjective and objective factors that constitute what we know as the city.

My data collection techniques included interviews, group discussions and images of the city produced by the research participants. The visual techniques provide a novel way of seeing the city from a view-point that is rarely acknowledged or seen by scholars and policy-makers. The use of women's own snapshots of Johannesburg was critical in adding another layer to our reading of the city. The photos provided the women who participated in the research a focal point to discuss their lives with others. But much more than this, women's pictures break through the barrier of words. Each image is a narrative of the city, telling a story that words alone are unable to articulate.

Using subjective techniques to approach the city is not new. Urban sociology has a long tradition of reading the city through people's own understanding of their experiences as they move through the built environment (Simmel, 2002 [1903], de Certeau, 1984). Simmel's (2002:124) study was "[a]n enquiry into the inner meaning of specifically modern life and its products, into the soul of the cultural body ... Such an inquiry must answer the question of how the personality accommodates itself in the adjustments to external forces". These approaches shed light on urban dwellers' encounters with the built environment – analysing how these encounters change the nature of social relations and, in turn, shape the character of urban spaces. Understanding the urban condition at the point at which the individual encounters the city reveals a range of social, economic and political processes that are not easily discernible when reading the built environment from broad macro perspectives. As discussed in chapter 1, reading the city through the subjective experiences of urban dwellers is not without its critics (See Soja, 1997).

By focussing on women's subjective interpretations of the city I do not discount the importance of broader socio-economic and political forces that condition urban spaces. As Short argues, "[n]o single method or approach is able to capture the complexity of the new urban forms" (2006: 226). My approach is informed by an understanding of the city as more than its physical form and the broad structural forces that produce it. The city is also configured by urban dwellers' ways of interpreting and understanding their experiences within it. As Tonkiss states:

Alongside a conception of the city as defined by built forms or demographic facts, might be posed an alternative version that understands it in terms of modes of consciousness or experience. People's experience of the city is not only or always determined by larger social or economic structures, but also fashioned by their individual perceptions, mental maps and spatial practices (Tonkiss, 2005: 113)

While building on the approaches that read the city from below, I stress the iterative nature of the theory/practice, subjective/objective, micro/macro dualities. In other words, varied approaches are in constant dialogue, being constituted and reconstituted by each other. Urban experiences cannot ignore the ongoing interactions between the self and built environment, official versus individual maps of the city, structure and agency. Processes of self-worlding are intertwined with broader structural processes, both of which intersect to produce particular realities. Keith argues these processes are iterative (2005). Looking at the city "from below" therefore does not involve ignoring broad structural processes that have shaped it. Neither does it require abandoning theory-making for empirical descriptive research. Rather, it means using migrant women as a lens through which to understand broader socio-economic urban processes, and vice versa. So it is not only the rich detailed narratives of migrant women's experiences that are important. It is also the ways in which these experiences readjust our lenses to provide new explanatory devices for understanding the contemporary urban condition in Johannesburg, and its implications for other cities. Migrant women's experiences and interpretations provide alternative ways of explaining analytical concepts like power, space and belonging in a contemporary African city. What we know as the "city" is thus inter-constituted by a variety of macro and micro processes in

dynamic relationship to each other. This is the foundational premise that informs the arguments, methods and epistemological location of this thesis.

The next section outlines the various ways that migrant women's experiences in Johannesburg confound the logic of governance, subvert state regulation and question analyses that human behaviour is driven primarily by material gain. In doing this, I illustrate how the power of human agency and contingency intersect with political, social and economic structures to shape contemporary configurations of urban space. The remainder of the chapter reflects upon some of the insights that this research has brought to bear on epistemological questions – on how we “know” the city. I locate this within broader discussions of knowledge and power, arguing for the need to shift the paradigmatic lenses through which we see, interpret and theorise cities on the African continent.



The nature of boundaries of power in the city

Shifting sovereignties – fragmenting state power

As mentioned previously, since the 1990s the notion of “urban governance” has captivated scholars, policy-makers, international aid organisations NGOs. The puzzle that governance frameworks seek to solve is what kinds of relationships are

needed between the state, market and civil society to address the socio-political and economic challenges that confront African cities? These analyses have significantly influenced discourses on urban management, highlighting among other things, the importance of democratic participation and accountability in meeting urban challenges. While making critical contributions, these frameworks make certain assumptions about the nature of state power, the unified objectives of the state system, and how urban dwellers relate to it. The experiences of migrant women in this study directly challenge these assumptions.

Migrant women's narratives reveal how the actions of state agents, migrants and others reconfigure borders of authority which result in irregular, if corrupt, practices that echo those elsewhere on the continent (Bayart et al, 1999). The narratives of border crossing challenge the idea of the state as a homogenous actor with coherent rules that are universally applied across space. Using networks consisting of a whole host of actors, including bus and taxi drivers, agents of various kinds, smugglers (such as the violent *Maguma guma*²² who assist Zimbabwean nationals to cross the South African border) (Human Rights Watch, 2008) and border guards, foreign nationals enter South African territory without the passports or entry visas. As shown in Chapter 4, migrants will pay agents and border guards to allow them to cross the South African border. Other studies show that not only money is transacted, but that sexual transactions between the migrants and the smugglers, drivers, agents and border guards occur in order to facilitate migrant passage into the country (Human Rights Watch, 2008). This intricate system involving the various actors reconfigures the sovereignty of South African territory. By doing this, they subvert sovereign codes and laws that determine right to entry and reshape the boundaries of power between the state and migrants. No longer is the juridical power of the state supreme. Rather, power is vested in the relationships between migrants wanting to get into the country and the actors that facilitate this entry. Thus, new systems of legitimacy that are not state-authorized are generated. As Foucault's work on the modern state shows, these practices shift conceptions of power from its embodiment solely in a state,

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22 *Maguma guma* is a Shona word meaning "to get something the easy way". The *Maguma guma* are a group of young Zimbabwean men who facilitate the movement of people and goods between South African and Zimbabwe (Irish, 2005).

which is able to exercise legitimate force over subjects, to a subtle and diffuse form of power located in relationships between subjects, and between subjects and the state (Foucault, 1977; 1991; Cronin, 1996). To reiterate in Foucault's words:

... power is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogenous domination over others, or that of one group or class over others. .. Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application (Foucault, 1980: 98)

Border practices are thus located within a web of relational power dynamics that circulate between migrant women, smugglers, agents and the state. These practices serve to "fragment and destabilise" state power (Landau & Monson, 2008: 319) by undermining the control and enforcement of border regulations, which are a significant area of state jurisdiction. Yet while they may undermine the state's *juridical* power – its legislative authority to determine who is allowed entry into its territory – they do not weaken the symbolic and empirical significance of the border. The networks and sub-economies unwittingly reinforce the presence of the *physical* border. It is through their recognition of the existence of South Africa's political border and territory that border jumpers, agents, smugglers and border guards *generate* productive and alternative systems of authority. These practices, as we shall see below, are similar to what happens in the city.

What we witness at border areas is the development of a system of relational power between would-be migrants, border guards, smugglers, drivers and agents. This is, of course, not unique to South Africa (see for example the dynamics at the Mexican/US border in Anzaldúa, 1987). How women negotiate with

these varied power points is dependent on whether they have the money or other negotiating tactics. Whether it is by pretending to be mute, crying, or paying R200 for entry, these actions subvert state sovereignty as new power relationships are forged with state guards and agents. State border guards act as “double agents”. When they accept bribes they do so outside state sanctioned processes. However, their location as state agents, and the authority over borders their relationship which the state invests in them, is essential for their recognition as critical actors in the border-crossing network.

The practices at border posts illustrate how state power and sovereignty is both undermined and reinforced in various seemingly contradictory ways. The juridical significance of the border – that state-held power determines who can come in and who remains outside – is reconfigured by a variety of actors and becomes one of many forms of power and relationships operating at the border. Multiple systems of rule and authority exist alongside state codes and legislation, at once impairing the official codes and, paradoxically, reinforcing these through illegal means. The state is not displaced or replaced, nor is the importance of the border as a physical and political frontier erased. Rather, the state interacts in a manner that does not conform to its Weberian role as a “compulsory association which organises domination” and “monopolises the legitimate use of physical force as a means of domination within a territory” (Weber, 1991:82-3). Migrant women’s manipulations and evasions allow them to traverse border spaces in ways that circumvent the state’s juridical power. But, to do so, the border as a frontier demarcating South Africa’s political territory, *has to be recognised and reinforced*.

Once in Johannesburg, attempts to “regularise” a migrant’s stay reveal practices similar to those at border posts. An immigration agent, often a foreign national, is contacted to provide the options available to a newly-arrived migrant woman. Networks within the migrant’s community are essential in establishing the reliability of a particular agent. Most migrant women in this study had asylum seeker papers and a few had refugee status. Some had “partner permits” which means that, by virtue of their relationship with a South African national, they had legal right to stay in the country, although this permit does not necessarily allow them to work legally. All of them had used an “agent” to get their “papers”. Agents establish contacts with Home Affairs officials who, for a fee, provide the appropriate documentation.

What women's narratives reveal is the *coexistence* of multiple spheres of authority which are applied differentially, depending on the context. Women entering South Africa with the requisite documents usually do not need to navigate the complex network of smugglers, agents or border guards. State power thus has to be understood as relational and coexisting with alternative centres of power and authority. This conception of power shifts how we understand governance, particularly presumptions that government can codify and regulate its territory in ways that result in predictable outcomes²³. Political space should be understood as configured by the inter-relationship of competing authorities operating with different moral codes and subjectivities.

Reconfiguring urban space

Migrant women's encounters with the state in Johannesburg reveal practices similar to those at the South African border. No understanding of Johannesburg is complete without an understanding of the ways in which the South African state, through the Constitution and other legislation, has invested power and autonomy in local authorities as a means of overturning the inimical consequences of apartheid. After the post-apartheid establishment of a new legitimate local government in 1995, the focus at local government level turned to restructuring the city in ways that erased the racial and economic inequalities. To do this, newly-formed local authorities were vested with the power to oversee a more egalitarian, non-racial future for South African cities. Legislation was created to transform local government from a "tier to a sphere" (Ministry for Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development, 1998). This status indicated local government's equal status to national and provincial governments – it was seen not merely as an administrative arm of higher levels but as a "driver" of development in its own right (Chipkin, 2002).

23 Numerous state service delivery interventions, like the South African housing programme, often assume that urban dwellers will participate or respond in particular ways. As many authors have shown, there is often a disjuncture between state intentions and actual outcomes (see *inter alia* Huchzermeyer 2001; Charlton, 2000; Zack and Charlton, 2003). Policy-makers' efforts to control urban spaces are often confounded by the actions of urban dwellers (see Murray, 2008; Simone, 2004).

Scholarly and policy debates during the establishment of a post-apartheid local government privilege readings of the city through governance and management lenses. During this time, debates on “decentralisation” and “developmental local government” called for increased power for local authorities. The establishment of local government as a “sphere” with constitutional authority and functions set up urban municipalities with authority over development decisions in cities in their areas of jurisdiction²⁴. In other words, urban governments have power to restructure urban spatial form and work “... with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic, and material needs and improve the quality of their lives” (Ministry of Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development, 1998: 17). This assumption is founded upon the state’s sovereign power – its juridical legitimacy to exercise power over its subjects, and urban space through planning, legislation and administrative regulations. The restructuring of Johannesburg is seen as a role that is led by the state, just as a failure to restructure is considered the consequence of a weak, poorly configured (Parnell, 2005) or ideologically misdirected (Bond, 2000) local state.

With aspirations of Johannesburg becoming a strong local state, capable of managing and directing urban investments, overturning inner city decay and getting rid of crime and grime in the city, has developed numerous plans for controlling urban space. One of Johannesburg’s interventions aimed at doing just this is the Inner City Regeneration Strategy. The strategy involves, amongst other things, “intensive urban management including the ‘provision of high quality services; strict enforcement of by-laws; managing taxis and informal trading in the city ... addressing ‘sinkholes’ and encouraging ‘ripple pond’ investments. Sinkholes are properties that are ‘slummed’, abandoned, overcrowded, or poorly maintained” (Makda, 2004:180/1). In reading the city in this way, urban governments see certain urban spaces as problematic because of their poverty, overcrowding, crime and decay. Urban space is organised around specific spatial functions that determine where people can trade, locate their businesses, live and play. The official urban map therefore has to be “legible and administratively

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24 These decisions are taken within an inter-governmental framework, but this does not detract from the fact that local governments in South Africa have *de jure* significant powers and functions when compared to their counterparts elsewhere on the continent.

convenient” (Scott, 1998: 3). It is marked by legislative codes, by-laws and planning rules that order urban space according to what activities can take place where and who possess the rights to conduct them.

Migrant women’s activities and practices in the inner city confound these spatial logics and complicate the city’s legibility. In the dynamics of street trading relationships between Metro officers, “mediators” and street traders generate alternative and coexisting systems of organising space on the city streets. **R** and **E**’s narratives of trading at the corner of Plein and Claim streets in the inner city reveal how official urban cartographies legible in legislative codes and by-laws are subverted by actual spatial practices. Knowing that municipal trading laws prohibit any trading on the street, **E** and **R**, and other traders, pay R50 a month to a South African trader to mediate between traders and municipal police. The payment of this fee, to some extent, protects traders from the Metro Police confiscating their goods.

But, as state agents, the police have to be seen by their superiors to be cracking down on illegal trading. Despite the arrangement between traders and themselves, the Metro Police are obliged to disrupt trade and clean up the street. This, however, does not prevent the traders from returning after a few hours. Traders thus have to be prepared for occasional raids on their wares. This demands developing close networks with other traders who warn of police raids and assist neighbours to carry their goods and run from police. This tactic cannot always be relied on and women learn to hide most of their stock so that if the police confiscate what they have on the display table, they still have goods to trade after the raid.

The dilemma for the police agents, working as “double agents” is how to keep up the facade that they are acting in the interest of the state, while ensuring that the street traders do not disappear completely. The traders’ presence is necessary for supplementing police incomes. Paradoxically, traders also need the police to have some state-backed authority to protect and legitimise their “deal” with them.

What these stories of street trading highlight is the interrelationship between official regulation and enforcement, and unofficial “extralegal” urban processes. When state-centred models of urban governance read urban space through contours of power that define the state as *the* actor that shapes, controls and determines spatial hierarchies, they fail to see how everyday spatial practices diffuse and fragment state power in ways that create alternative and enduring,

albeit fragile, power regimes. Moreover, condemning unofficial practices as a result of the lack of effective enforcement, or a weak local state, fails to see the dynamic inter-relationship between official and unofficial spaces.

Regimes of urban practice cannot assume the supremacy of the state or the location of power in “one individual or group exercising power over another” (Cronin, 1996: 56). Nor can it presume the dominance of extra-legal or unofficial spatial practices. As the city’s formal “representations of space” (to use Lefebvre’s categorisations) come into contact with “representational spaces” the ways in which ordinary urban dwellers infuse everyday meaning into space (Lefebvre, 1991) generates complex, often contradictory, spaces. Both the “official” and “unofficial” cartographies of the city intersect to generate a complex spatial system. Official codes do not simply displace unofficial or illegal activities, nor do illegal activities override state regulation. What we see is the juxtaposition of both official and unofficial codes, which result in the *production* of an alternative spatial logic that subverts, reconfigures and, in part, reinforces state power in an uneven and unpredictable way. Here again we see the coexistence of multiple, *interrelated* regimes of power that feed off each other to generate a spatiality that moves beyond the binaries of official versus unofficial, formal versus informal, and legal versus extra-legal.



The politics of invisibility

Here I am nobody. I hide from the police, I hide from the South African government, I hide from my government at home. Sometimes I even hide from my own country men ... you see this is how I survive.

– Congolese migrant woman.

James Scott (1998) convincingly shows that the *raison d'être* of the modern state has been to make space legible both physically and administratively. These remain the guiding principles underlying governance frameworks which aim to codify, rationalise and make transparent urban institutions and spaces to develop clear and predictable urban futures. Indeed, cities *do* need to understand the socio-economic and political dynamics within their territories. These remain essential for developing appropriate urban strategies. Yet there is a problem when the nature of the state's engagement with its population encourages a politics of invisibility. This not only has consequences for the ability of the state to "see" populations, but also, more broadly, for its ability to strengthen a "democratic citizenship".

In Johannesburg, we see how state interventions like crime prevention unwittingly create "black holes" in the city, undermining its own ability to "see" or make legible its territory. A Congolese woman said:

"I do not like going down that street, Joe Slovo ... you know it? ... because under the bridge there are always police there. If I have to go to Bertrams, I rather take another route through Yeoville. It is very long, but it's better than meeting the police."

Notwithstanding migrant women's ability to negotiate and shift the boundaries of state power, the fear that the state and its agents represent, and its impact on how women "walk the city", cannot be ignored. Indeed, unlike Benjamin's *flaneur* or De Certeau's walking in the city, women's navigation through urban space is shaped by "fear and risk" (Short, 2006). With regard to the state, the routes that women take often attempt to avoid roadblocks, police stations and, as much as they can, Home Affairs departments. Those unable to avoid Home Affairs, approach the building with dread, as women's conversation in the previous chapters illustrate. L's story on police roadblocks highlights the fear:

“Many times when we are going home from the restaurant in the evening in a taxi, we find a lot of police roadblocks. We all know these police are just there to target Zimbabweans because they know we have just finished working and we have money from tips. I would really like to take a photograph of a policeman taking money from us, but I don’t know what they will do if they catch me.”

Migrant women’s tracks in the city are formed by their knowledge of police roadblocks or presence. Despite having legitimate immigration papers, police often target foreigners on the street, and the extortion of bribes is a common occurrence. In a sense, the presence of foreigners creates a momentum in powerful actors to prey on migrants, legal or illegal, in ways that undermine the juridical power of the state. An Eritrean student living in Johannesburg rationalises it this way: “As foreign students we are not required to pay taxes to the government. But when we walk down these streets, we pay” (Landau and Monson, 2008: 330-1). Women’s routes through the city show attempts to circumnavigate the state and avoid being captured by it. Their tactics of avoiding spaces occupied by the police display not only their resistance to state power, but also their vulnerability to it. Paradoxically, police interventions, intended to “see” urban populations, unwittingly create urban “black holes”.

What does this mean for strengthening relationships between the state and urban dwellers, particularly non-citizens? These sub-economies create instability and fear that impacts negatively on women’s willingness to see the city as part of their future. Migrant women’s legal status prevents their inclusion and full participation in Johannesburg. Experiences of xenophobic violence and other forms of exclusion, such as the lack of access to bank accounts and economic opportunities, result in the emergence of a transient and ephemeral existence in the city. Women’s business activities are often structured to allow them to make a quick getaway when under threat. Fear and insecurity often mean that women are unwilling to see Johannesburg as a place where they can raise their children. Within the context of social and economic insecurity, Johannesburg is not perceived as a place where women make long-term social or economic commitments. All these practices raise broader questions around the legitimacy and authority of the state and the feasibility of an accountable and democratic relationship between

the state and urban dwellers. Real and perceived exclusions from the polity, as well as migrant women's reluctance and fear of engaging with the state, investing in the city, or seeing their long-term future in it, imply that we cannot presume beyond a very minimum form of engagement. Governance frameworks aim at building democratic participation, increasing urban dwellers' decision-making powers in planning, legislation and development. While laudable, these objectives presume a context in which people *want* to engage the state, and that what is missing are the opportunities to do so. Migrant women challenge this assumption, showing that there are often contexts in which they *actively* seek illegibility and disengagement from the state.

Shifting economic power

Harvey's reading of the city as a site of capitalist production, has provided a powerful lens from which to understand urban processes of growth and accumulation. His connection of the emergence of the built environment to patterns of capitalist accumulation remains one of the most compelling arguments about how the built environment came to be (Harvey, 1982; 2002, 2008). In line with Harvey's argument, Bond (2000) shows how cities like Johannesburg (its built form) emerged as a consequence of the "overaccumulation" of capital, and the city continues to be an important element in mediating and expressing capitalist patterns of accumulation.



Harvey's key approach to reading the city is through what he terms the "twin themes of accumulation and class struggle" (2002: 116). Cities are spaces where surplus value is reinvested to expand production and generate greater surplus value; that is they are spaces "... founded on the principle of accumulation for accumulation's sake, production for production's sake" (Harvey, 2002: 116). In explaining the social relationships that characterise urban spaces he describes how the actions of *individuals* are influenced by their location within the capitalist system:

Put more concretely, a class of capitalists is in command of the work process and organizes that process for the purpose of producing profit. The labourer, on the other hand, has command only over his or her labour power which must be sold as a commodity on the market. The domination arises because the labourer must yield the capitalist a profit (surplus value) in return for a living wage (2002: 116).

In order to fight capitalists' domination over labourers, Harvey posits that workers organise around working conditions and wages. In fact, he argues that social solidarity is enforced through the operation of the market system (Harvey, 1973: 133). In other words, social relationships in the city are, first and foremost, economic ones – those related to class solidarity and struggle. By arguing this, Harvey does not deny the existence or importance of other identities or forms of solidarity – his study of Baltimore shows how race and xenophobia are a part of the reality of urban ghettos (See Harvey, 1973). What he does say is that race and xenophobia are produced by the market; that class – your location within the capitalist system of production – mediates these other forms of social struggle and identity.

Understanding the city from this perspective, Harvey's Marxist frameworks are unable to see other powerful systems of meaning and logic that shape people's behaviour. The dominance of economic frameworks in understanding human relationships and behaviour in cities does not give adequate weight to the power that other social relationships hold in individual decision-making. It is not that accumulating wealth is unimportant to women, rather that they use material success as a means of fulfilling other social objectives that are not necessarily driven by a capitalist logic or material gain. In other words, other systems of meaning and value mediate the economic decisions they take in their migration to Johannesburg.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide details of the dynamics of life on the streets, the encounters with Metro Police and modes of street traders organisation. Few women admit to achieving their economic goals in Johannesburg. Despite this, they remain in the city, in a “liminal space” in which they are “no longer, but not yet” there (Turner, 1969: 97). One of the paradoxes that this research has highlighted is that women feel compelled, for various reasons, to staying in Johannesburg despite their lack of economic success. To be sure, women may stay in Johannesburg because they lack the economic means to leave the city and establish a new life elsewhere. But, as some of the interviews revealed, being in Johannesburg is often more expensive than buying a bus ticket to go back home. Moreover, many live in conditions of squalor, often far below the quality of life they would lead at home.

What women’s narratives reveal is that economic motives are, in themselves, not sufficient to explain why they remain in Johannesburg. Migrant women’s liminality can only be explained if we understand their behaviour as shaped by a social system which invests other meanings and values to being in the city. Women narrate the shame and indignity of going back home “empty handed” and this forces many to stay even when their economic status has not discernibly improved. Those that send money home are motivated by its social consequences – their improved social status and the upward social mobility it provides them in their community of origin. Women migrants will often impoverish themselves to send money home to build a house or provide other material goods, not because it makes economic sense, but because of their sense of obligation to their families, as well as their aspiration for social recognition as important members of their community. These forms of “social investment” do not make sense when we view the city solely as an entity founded upon the productive and reproductive logic of capital. What migrant women’s behaviour has allowed us to see is that while material success is important, non-material social and familial “transactions” impact upon women’s economic decisions and behaviour.

Modes of belonging in the city: Moving beyond relationships linked to the state or the economy

As previous sections have shown, urban existence is not just about governance frameworks that control crime or develop service delivery initiatives with “civil

society”; neither is it shaped solely by economic relationships of exchange. The inner city is also a site where, through a milieu of social networks, urban dwellers navigate forms of belonging and dislocation, inclusion and exclusion.

Women’s “social investments” reveal the multiplicity of social relationships that constitute urban life. Relationships in the city are not only structured by struggles between two polarised classes. Without denying its importance, class alone cannot explain all urban phenomena. By setting up class as a master identity, some Marxist readings of the city tend to give inadequate weight to other forms of power that derive from non-economic relationships and ties. What we see in the research is the hold that social ties – familial, ethnic, patriarchal, national – have over migrant women. Notwithstanding the distance that migration puts between migrant women and their families back home, their ties to family and their community remain very influential in their everyday lives. Women’s behaviour in the city as shaped by a matrix of economic, ancestral and community disciplinary power which structures their behaviour. This power is transmitted across space, so that even when women have put a distance between themselves and their communities of origin, they remain within the folds of its influence.

Through networks of national and ethnic relationships, we see how other modes of belonging impact upon migrant women’s experiences in Johannesburg. Women’s relationships with members of their own national community remain essential in Johannesburg as a source of support during times of crisis. In the event of death of a member of the family, these community networks are often called upon to contribute money for the funeral or for transporting the body back home. The family and community are also involved in weddings, births, naming ceremonies, baptisms and rituals and events. These networks are activated when women have no money to buy food, or need start-up capital to buy goods to trade. But membership in the group is not always liberating. Ties to community networks can exact responsibilities or loyalties that compromise migrant women’s financial and physical security in the city. Being part of a community in Johannesburg is important, but it also requires that women undertake responsibilities that they do not want, or are unable, to fulfil. It may mean contributing financial resources to community needs, which deplete much needed individual resources. It could also mean entering into relationships, sexual or otherwise, that are not ideal as a means of “paying back” for security in the market or at home.

As the previous chapter has shown, being part of a community may mean exposing oneself to a violent husband or partner. Community discipline conditions how migrant women respond to domestic violence, particularly if the perpetrator belongs to the woman's own national or ethnic community. This research has illustrated how women, facing abuse from their husbands, first seek mediation through their own community rather than going to the police. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, women perceive that they cannot go to the police because they fear deportation and do not trust the police. Secondly, they are bound by certain behavioural codes within their community. Reporting the perpetrator (husband or partner) to the police means being branded as disloyal – which can result in being excommunicated by the community and the consequent loss of support in times of crisis. This has implications for governance, and particularly for issues around crime prevention. The point made here is there are other forms of belonging and sociality that shape urban relations and move beyond the state and civil society. These forms of community power relations crystallise in the formation of urban spaces that are impenetrable by the state and governed by fragile, yet powerful, social relations that are linked to ethnicity, nationality, churches and other forms of identity and organisation.

Women may want the support from the community, but not the responsibility that it exacts. They may need community ties, but do not necessarily want to be tied down to them. This dilemma echoes the endless tensions and uneasy relationships that urban sociologists elsewhere have described:

The contacts of the city may indeed be face to face, but they are nevertheless impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental. The reserve, the indifference, and the blasé outlook which urbanites manifest in their relationships may thus be regarded as devices for immunizing themselves against the personal claims and expectations of others. (Wirth, 1938: 12)

To remain “immunised” from social liabilities to others, associational life is approached tentatively and with calculable measure. Ties with others are tactical, and weighed up against the costs and gains that they are likely to bring. Gotz and Simone (2003) highlight the mobile and ephemeral social associations in the inner city, tactical practices of survival and self-interest. However, the anonymity

of inner city life is at once freeing and disconcerting as people seek more enduring relationships and forms of recognition from others. While being blasé can protect individual interests, women also seek out meaningful and enduring relationships with others as a means of social support and connection. My experience with running the women's group highlighted the need for spaces where women could meet and connect. This was demonstrated by the women's wish to continue to meet as a group after the end of the project. There have been subsequent meetings between some of the women where they exchanged business contacts and ideas, and at one of the women's funeral service. But these have not been regular, and have occurred for a specific purpose. In the absence of such groups, the church plays a significant role in keeping women plugged in to a community.

Life in cities is therefore characterised by a tension between building social relationships and remaining autonomous. Migrant women actively avoid capture by the state on the one hand, but nevertheless seek to engage with it when they perceive they can draw benefits from it. Their relationships with other groups and associations are similar. In our understanding of cities, we cannot presume that women want to establish long-term relationships with other urban actors. Urban relations produce a spatial economy that, on the one hand, organises cities as ethnic, national, religious networks but, at the same time, is a site where individuals seek to assert their autonomy and freedom from these associations.

Migrant women's experiences in Johannesburg bring to the fore a more complicated reality than the economic simplifications and normative urban governance models reveal. This thesis has shown that women's urban experiences are shaped by their multiple identities and social ties. Class, for example, is an important identity, but it is mediated by other identities and relationships. As women's narratives have shown, ethnicity, nationality, gender and sexuality also shape their experiences in the city. In certain situations, one or more identities overlap in ways that determine how they address a situation. For example, women's relationships with men, ties to their own national or ethnic communities, and relationships with the police determine how violence in the home is addressed. Class determines where a migrant woman can live in the city, but so does race, sexuality and nationality. In other situations membership in a church, or other associational affiliations, become more significant than class or ethnicity. At any point in time, one or more of women's identities as, "Africans from north of the

Limpopo”, *Amakwerekwere*, street traders or prostitutes, determine how they interact with the city and, in turn, how the city and its dwellers engage with them. The advantage of locating the research from the vantage point of migrant women’s subjective experiences in the city is not simply the “textured” or “nuanced” analysis it produces but, importantly, draws attention to the multiple boundaries of power and difference that exist in the city. These intersecting boundaries produce new spatial forms that at times subvert institutional, legislative and class cartographies, while at other times reinforce these. As I have shown, their motivations are not fuelled purely by material gain, nor are they caught between “modern” and “traditional” worlds. Migrant women’s practices consciously and unconsciously remake urban identities in ways that are shaped by, and shape the city around them.

Of victims and heroines?

The simple dichotomy between resistances and subordination, the official strategies and the everyday tactics, soon breaks down when we consider real people and everyday events (Short, 2006: 40).

Literature on gender and migration problematically presents migrant women as either victims or heroines. Women’s everyday lives depicted in this research reveals these categories as unhelpful in understanding their lived experiences. Women’s daily lives are too complex to fit neatly into binary constructed categories of “victims” or “victors”. This thesis has revealed that women have agency in the migration process; they actively participate in making decisions to move and forge relationships that have strategic benefit. But it also illustrates that they continue to live under oppressive patriarchal conditions of various kinds. Being foreign, they are constructed as the “other”, excluding them from participating in South Africa’s formal economy and marking them as targets for exploitative practices by police, smugglers and others. Yet at times, they also strategically use victimhood and their position as the “other” to get what they want. Scholarly analyses of migrant women need to unpack these complexities of everyday life and break down the conceptual frameworks that provide only either/or options. Migrant women’s own voices illustrate that they cannot be placed in static categories. Doing this not only misrepresents who they are, but it also limits our understanding of the nature of migration and urbanisation on the continent.

Having discussed the multiple contours of power that shape urban behaviour and their manifestation on urban space, I now turn to the broader theme of knowledge and power in the urban African context.

Shifting the discourses: searching for appropriate paradigms

In seeking to interrogate what women's experiences of their migration to Johannesburg *contributes* to contemporary theories of migration and urbanisation on the continent, this thesis moves migrant women beyond being mere objects of inquiry. As bell hooks observes in another context, "as objects [women] remain unequals, inferiors" (hooks, 2000: 13). Migrant women in this thesis are rather conceived as *agents* that both *mediate* and *express* contemporary processes of urbanisation on the continent. In other words, they are the prism through which I have interrogated the broad structural processes that shape urban spaces, with the assumption that they also play an active role in shaping and expressing these processes.

This epistemological location is the cornerstone for understanding this research. Implicit in its assumption is that migrant women's unique gendered, national, ethnic and class locations in the world provide knowledge-insights that other world-views are unable to reveal. Migrant women's systems of knowing and interpreting the city, their embodied practices and experiences, produce knowledge which contributes to our overall understanding of contemporary processes of urbanisation in Africa. Collins makes a point that applies to migrant women in this study:

Like other subordinate groups, African-American women not only have developed a distinctive Black women's standpoint, but have done so by using *alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge* (Collins, 2000: 252 emphasis added).

This point may seem banal to some or obvious to progressive scholars, but it raises critical issues around knowledge production and its power dynamics. By asserting women as "knowers" and knowledge producers, Collins questions the processes that determine what counts as knowledge – "... the standards used

to assess knowledge or *why* we believe what we believe to be true” (2000: 252 emphasis in original). She draws attention to the unequal power relations embedded in knowledge production practices. Arguing that knowledge production is controlled by a powerful Western (white male) elite who determine the questions which merit investigation, the methodologies [deemed appropriate], the interpretive frameworks used to analyse findings, and the use to which ensuing knowledge will be put (Collins, 2000: 252). This no doubt applies to other marginalised groups whose visibility by dominant paradigms is restricted, yet whose insights, by virtue of their location, can develop significant theoretical contributions.

Problems arise when existing paradigms do not fit the prevailing realities of what Chatterjee categorises as “most of the world” (Chatterjee, 2004: 1). African scholars have long argued that the methodological standards and theoretical paradigms used to interpret and understand the African condition have been drawn from elsewhere (Zeleza, 2003: 35; Mamdani, 1994). Zeleza correctly states that “African social scientists have been reduced to followers, or at best critics, of each new intellectual fad emerging from Africanist centres of the west” (Zeleza, 2003: 35). What this has implied is that African studies remains located in a conceptual groove in which we remain unable to think about African realities outside of the vocabularies and concepts used in the West. Mamdani (1994) argues that these Eurocentric teleological frames through which the global South is understood to result in normative, ahistorical analyses that conceptualise developing societies as what they are not, or as what they ought to be, rather than what they are. In other words, these are societies without original analytical or theoretical content and are, at best, mere understudies of North American and European historical models (1994: 9). It is this Hegelian²⁵ discourse that leads Mamdani to ask, “but can a student, for example, be understood as not yet a teacher?” (1994:9). Other Africanists show how African studies has contributed to shaping and developing disciplines in the academy. They contend that:

.....
25 Hegel, (1956: 99) wrote “It [Africa] is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it – that is in its northern part – belong to the Asiatic or European World.”

... knowledge from Africa is equally as significant and persuasive as knowledge from Europe, no less – and no more. And knowledge produced by an African is equally as significant as that produced by a European, no less and no more, if it has been generated, analyzed, and assessed in ways capable of withstanding the analytic and methodological rigors of the author's discipline (Bates, Mudimbe and O'Barr, (1993: xii).

This contestation over what is considered knowledge, and who defines it, is one which contemporary urban studies in Africa also grapples with. Robinson makes the point that non-Western cities “are seldom turned to for theoretical insight or to reframe what it is that cities or cityness are considered to be” (2003: 260). Swilling et al make a similar argument that:

... our remarkably persistent attachment to forms of modernity that originated in European and American contexts which cannot be compared to the cultural, political and economic contexts shaping African cities today... make ambiguous any clear reading of what is going on [in Johannesburg] (2002: 305).

Current dominant models of seeing and analysing cities in Africa reinforce the notion that they are mere “understudies” (to borrow Mamdani's term), possessing no original history or authentic futures (1994). This is often evident in the way debates on urbanisation are framed around binary oppositions: developed versus developing cities; formal versus informal urbanisation; global versus local cities. The latter terms not only have a lesser social status, they are also theoretically inferior to their more “advanced” counterparts. Indeed, lesser forms of urbanisation can only be given analytical content by their lead twin (Mamdani, 1994).

The centring of the Western urban experience has meant that it provides the theoretical foundations for understanding the urban condition everywhere. It is the *universalising* of the Western urban experience that lead some policy-makers, planners and urban scholars to see African cities as somehow “lesser than” and inferior. These linear modes of writing history not only lead to conclusions of Africa's deviancy, but more inimically, rid the continent of its own analytical content or value. This, as Mamdani has shown, has far reaching *theoretical* implications:

When western cities are constructed as possessing the analytical and theoretical content that informs the discourses on urbanisation everywhere, our understanding of urbanisation processes in the South remains limited, if weak. Where the majority of the world's population is located in cities like Lagos, Johannesburg, Mumbai or Sao Paolo, our understanding of the *world* and critical processes in the 21st century is also impaired.

Policy-makers, urban planners and urban managers in African cities are complicit in reproducing this discourse. Johannesburg's 2030 vision exemplifies the tendency towards looking to the West as the model of urban development:

In 2030, Johannesburg will be a World Class City with services deliverables and efficiencies which meet world best practice. Its economy and labour force will specialise in the service sectoral and will be strongly outward-oriented, such that the city economy operates on a global scale. . . . (City of Johannesburg, 2003: 115)

In fact, what "Jo'burg 2030" envisions, is a Johannesburg in countries like North America, Britain or Japan:

In 2030, the quality of life of a citizen in Johannesburg will have more in common with the quality of life of a citizen in San Francisco, London or Tokyo than that of a citizen in a developing country's capital city. The quality of life in Johannesburg will be such that it will be a positive factor in locational decisions made by international firms and individuals. The HDI [human development index] of Johannesburg will be equivalent to first world capital city HDI measures. . . (City of Johannesburg, 2003:112)

Urban visions to become "world class cities" results in forced removals, the eradication of informal settlements and regeneration of inner cities betraying an aesthetic modelled along the image of Western cities, rather than the realities of African urban life. While aimed at addressing important issues of health, service delivery and urban inequality issues, most of these interventions tend to ignore the ways in which ordinary urban dwellers live and survive in the city. The language of regeneration, reform and rebuilding the city to world class prosperity for all, uses imagery and sym-

bols that are mismatched to contemporary realities, the city's own history, and urban dwellers' everyday lives. Murray shows how the circulation of narratives of regeneration lends legitimacy to clean-up interventions in the proverbial "black box" in the city:

Narratives of decline and regeneration are always entangled with wider aesthetic and cultural understandings of the orderly city of the middle-class imagination. By forming a kind of mental landscape or imaginary map of the urban uncanny (or the spaces of the city that are unseen and unknown and hence beyond the scope of control), these storied constructions readily become powerful tools in the hands of city boosters, lending legitimacy to drastic actions that might appear at face value unduly cruel and harsh (Murray, 2008: 210).

Underpinning these city visions and plans are normative governance frameworks that define how the city ought to work: how citizens ought to relate to the state; how an organised civil society should contribute to urban development; or how a strong administrative state must control and develop urban space. The problem with this approach to urban governance is that it is normative. The starting point is what the city *ought* to be, rather than what it is. It is not that the models drawn upon bear little resemblance to what exists, nor that they are Western per se, but that they are *ahistorical* and *counter-historical*. They overtly deny and overturn the history of the people who currently comprise the city. In other words, they fail to consider the unique social, political and economic histories that have shaped the character of African cities, and are therefore inappropriate for the contexts within which they are applied.

Some urban scholars argue for the need to understand African urbanity *in its own terms* rather than in relation to how cities elsewhere have evolved (Demissie, 2007; Bakare-Yusuf & Weates, 2005; Robinson, 2003). The focus on migrant women's experiences and subjective interpretations of urbanity in this thesis affords us the opportunity to understand urban practices as they actually exist, and the nature of the interrelationships between social actors in the city. By understanding how a group of urban dwellers live and engage with the city, state and other urban players we can begin to develop a grounded theory for developing more appropriate theoretical and policy models. Moreover, as women's knowledges

expand what we know of cities, they can begin to contribute to “reconceptualising” some of the frameworks and theoretical models through which urbanisation processes and relations are understood.



Conclusion

By using migrant women’s words and images, this thesis aims to rethink some of the ways we conceptualise and know the city. Using a methodology that lets us experience the city through their eyes and words, allows us to reconsider the nature and character of the numerous borders they negotiate. These borders are not just physical, represented by the political borders they cross to enter South Africa. They are also the contours that shape their relationships with the state, their host community, their ethnic or national communities, men and patriarchy. The boundaries they encounter are also psychological, those internalised and habitual they ways respond to the city. How they negotiate these borders – manoeuvring around, manipulating and, at times, surrendering to them – configures the city and its spaces. At times, their inability to cross the thresholds mean that they live in a liminal state, neither here nor there. Looking through the prism of their lives in Johannesburg, we understand in a greater depth, the nature of the boundaries

of power that constitutes the urban landscape. As women navigate the contours of city life through a multitude of relationships with the state and its agents, the economic system and ordinary urban dwellers in the city, we gain insights that expand, nuance and deepen our understanding of urban processes.

Migrant women's experiences of Johannesburg are not unique. They share much in common with other marginalised communities in the city. Nevertheless, this thesis is only a partial rendering of the urban experience. Much can be gained by looking at the situated experiences of other urban populations across the diverse spectrum that characterises the inner city, for example, the youth, the children of inner city dwellers, the elderly, young migrant men and also middle class groups moving into the inner city.

Urbanising Africans see cities as sites of opportunity, growth, and social and economic mobility. While there are risks and frustrations in these cities – as there are in cities throughout the world – those who choose to live here do so in the hope of fulfilling their ambitions of personal development, escaping patriarchy and accessing global networks. The challenge for African urban scholars is to use these experiences to develop more appropriate theoretical and policy models. This requires breaking free of the tradition that uses the experiences of Western cities as reference points. For those whose history and identity are intertwined with the continent's cities, this is not just a moral obligation, but also a deeply rewarding and enriching one.





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