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Sexual-Economic Entanglement: A Feminist Ethnography of Migrant Sex Work Spaces in Kenya

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Abstract

The recent anti-trafficking fervour as well as the moral panic surrounding prostitution has given rise to large gaps within migrant sex work research, especially in Africa. Despite this, sexual commerce remains a viable economic activity for many women in East Africa, a region where variable migration patterns are central to everyday social, cultural, and economic life. Framed by anthropology, feminist geography, and postcolonial theory, this research examines migrant female sex workers’ everyday experiences across time, space, place, and scale from one ethnographic location in Naivasha, Kenya. In order to explore how different migration patterns and types of sexual-economic exchange are entangled, qualitative research was conducted among 110 migrant female sex workers and 15 community representatives. Emphasizing the public relevance of both sexual commerce and everyday migration, African literary tools also frame the migration stories of female sex workers originating from, arriving to, or transiting through Naivasha. This research reveals how street level sex work is reproduced amidst the current global political economy at migrant spaces including an IDP camp, flower farms, along East African highways, and through mobile phone technology. This research also contributes to a better understanding of the often excluded female sex worker – the displaced, migrant, or sex worker in transit – as a complete, engendered person by recognizing her complex lived realities, relationships, and risks. And while migration is predominantly associated with increased vulnerabilities, this research further demonstrates how different types of sexual-economic exchange through different migration patterns variously entangle victimhood and empowerment in complex ways. These findings are especially significant for interdisciplinary academic studies as well as policy and programming addressing sex worker migration in Africa.

Keywords

Feminist anthropology, Sex work, Migration, Kenya, East Africa, Internal displacement, Cut flower industry, Mobile phones, HIV/AIDS, Globalization
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Chapter 1

1 Rescaling Street Level Sex Work and Intra-African Migrations from Kenya

1.1 Ethnography, Fiction, and Mobility

Friday night on Koinange Street in downtown Nairobi and all you can see are red lights of cars soundlessly gliding, windows tinted. Malayas with handkerchiefs for skirts, ostriches in heels clattering after red lights – tail-lights, brake-lights – and up and down the street the calls of ‘Hanee! Hanee!’ will echo in the darkness until it becomes grey and the sounds of other birds take over.

You have been here among the ostriches for two weeks, maybe less, and every night you learn how there is nothing new under the sun. They cackle and blow smoke in your face when you speak of a lost and painful childhood where you became your mother after she died, washing and cleaning and carrying the house during the day and carrying the weight of your father between your legs at night because he said you were now old enough to carry the family flag. They tell you to save it; everybody has a copy of that story. You can sell it for an extra 500 bob to a sad man in the short-time car park. They tell you that you in particular need every little extra that you can get. That you are too tall, too skinny and too dark, you don’t stand a chance against a long line of short, plump and brown ostriches. They tell you to soak in Jik, to use Ambi and Oil of Ulay or those little tablets from China that the Congolese girls like because in two weeks the men will be asking if your father was a German tourist. They call you Marabou. They say it is because you are tall and skinny and dark. That all you can expect from the street is garbage, like the Marabou Stork.

And it is true. You only get lucky towards the end of the night, when the good girls have gone off with the men in the soundless cars and the prices have dropped. You become a specialist of sad men with straggly beards and creaky cars that smell of sleep, sweaty socks and half-smoked cigarettes.
During the day, you live in a hole in the wall just off Kirinyaga Road, among the refugees and illegals – the Congolese, Rwandese and others; some Beninois who can never fully explain how and why they came halfway across a continent to idle around and plait each other’s hair and cook pounded banana and cassava in three different peppery sauces. But you like them, these people who talk about Brussels as if it is their village. And when you ask them who has ever been there they do something complicated with their mouths, roll their eyes and turn away. They say, with their mouths drooping and their wrists limp and their palms asking a question, you are Kenyan girl, you know notin.’

They tell you how much you will have to save to buy the Chinese pills, and you despair.

But Lingala is music to your ears. An endless succession of Franco and Kofi Olomide and Wenge Musica streamed through tiny cassette players at all hours of day and night. You want to know what “Bolingo” means, or “Motema na ngai.” On the stairs at the entrance of the tenement where everybody sits around after lunch talking about nothing in particular because they are really listening to the music and waiting for the night, you learn how to move your waist and your inner-thigh muscles while holding your shoulders completely still, your face communicating that you are appalled at what your buttocks are doing. And everyone rolls about and laughs until they are crying and saying “Marabou, Kenyan girl, arret, arret, s’il vous plait! You kill os! You know notin’, notin’ at all!”

You grasp at a French that floats along the dim, narrow corridors of the tenement, snatch the last ends of sentences bouncing against your plywood partition. You learn it the way people learn songs from radios playing in the upstairs room. Je pons kill fo ko tu ai. And always you will hear those words and see men leaving, tucking in their shirts and doing their belt-buckles in the corridor, and a formidable Congolese woman standing by a door, a flowery lesso tucked under her armpits, looking ready for war if he dared show his face here again.

“It means, ah tink you should get di fok out,” somebody tells you one day after you have heard it a million times and don’t care that you will look stupid if you ask...
Stop, your Rwandese friend who is almost your height and yellow like a mango in season, has told you no work, tonight we go party like regular people... You have put on jeans and a t-shirt and a New York Knicks baseball cap that you bought for 50 shillings on the street. You are at Madhouse discotheque on Koinange Street with all the ostriches who have made the step up from chasing red lights on the street downstairs. You have been told but you have never seen that this work of yours is a ladder. The street ostriches all want to climb up the stairs to Madhouse and the ostriches already up the stairs want to dance into a mzungu’s life because a mzungu has wings that will carry you over the hills and far away to Europe.

This excerpt from Parseleleo Kantai’s (2008) short story “You Wreck Her” elucidates the practice of ethnographic writing, the relationship between ethnography and fiction, and narrative ways of knowing everyday African migration. Didier Fassin (2014) has recently analysed how the process of shaping ethnographic data into writing sometimes involves an intimate relationship to fiction. Following Fassin, a better understanding of the parallels between ethnography and fiction can help to reinstate anthropologists in the public sphere. The relationship between feminist ethnography and fiction has been present from Ruth Benedict’s (1934) Patterns of Culture onward (cf. Leavy 2013; Visweswaran 1994), and literary ways of knowing have always been critical to African feminist and gender studies. Francis Nyamnjoh (2012b) has also recently noted that blurring these boundaries can emphasize perspectives that have been historically excluded by mainstream scholarship, the intricacies of intra-African migrations in particular. On the reality of mobility in Africa, fiction, and ethnography, Nyamnjoh (2012a) argues:

The physical and social mobility of Africans is best understood as an emotional, relational and social phenomenon captured in the complexities, contradictions and messiness of their everyday realities. In conventional scholarly writing, even when such dimensions are recognized, the standard expectations of what constitutes a scholarly text do little justice to the multilayered, multivocal and multifocal dimensions of everyday negotiation and navigation of myriad identity
margins. Complementing such scholarly texts with fictionalised accounts of the same or similar reality is at the heart of this address (1-2).

Conveying the richness of everyday migration and mobility in Kenya and writing affect like the shame, suffering, love, and aspirations expressed by migrant female sex workers; that is the central ethnographic challenge of this research, enriched by fictional, narrative descriptions. While few ethnographies of Africa deal overtly with sex work or sex as work, the African prostitute has figured prominently (and sometimes problematically) in novels, stories, and poetry by African literary legends including Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Okot p’Bitek, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Nwahunanya 2011; Wasosa 2010). Even problematic representations say something about the human experiences of shame and stigma associated with sex work. However, this research draws mostly on more contemporary, feminist, and critical literary readings of sex work, red light districts, and even media headlines and blogs, to help grasp the complexity of everyday migration patterns among Kenyan sex workers.

This opening narrative of Marabou is critical to imagining the street as a worldly place and the sexual-economic entanglement that form the theoretical foundation of this ethnography. The rich descriptions of the street, the sex worker community, and the aesthetic nature of sex work are important elements to the migratory patterns of circumstance and force and the gendered social networks and relationships that migrant sex workers navigate. The imagery of the strong sex worker migrant who tells her client to, “get di fok out,” and the mobile protagonist herself climbing the stepladder of street level sex work from the red light district to the nightclub, to Europe and then back to Koinange Street bear close resemblance to the sex worker migrants from Kenya whose migration stories I narrate. The ladder especially symbolizes the project of rescaling sexual commerce in East Africa that follows, which has so often understood the sex worker as immobile and excluded, disregarding the migrant sex work spaces that exist beyond the street level.
1.2 The Sex Worker Migrant

At the heart of this ethnography is how the most excluded female sex worker in “Africa” – the migrant or displaced, the sex worker in transit – exists in her everyday experience within the global political economy. In some ways, it is a critique of the rescue industry against a climate of anti-trafficking fervour and the moral panic surrounding sex work. Although, I mostly offer a collection of stories and emplacements to document migrants’ unique narratives of sexual commerce amid rapid social, economic, and political change in Kenya instead of engaging in polarizing feminist debates. Classic issues at the core of much sex work research are recounted, including stigmatization and shame, gender based violence, and HIV/AIDS against a backdrop of much structural, everyday suffering. But I challenge readers to understand the sex worker migrant as a complete person, focusing on her mobile sociality and worldliness rather than only her morality, through a gendered rescaling of sexual commerce. Rather than asking why a sex worker migrant might enter into sexual-economic transactions, I want to question how these transactions are made meaningful through variable migration patterns, specifically internal displacement, labour migration, and circular mobility, and multiple scales of power relations: the very geography of sexual commerce.

The following chapters are an assortment of sites that demands, I argue, a spatial “worlding” (Simone 2001) of sexual commerce in East African towns and cities as we come to understand how street level sex work is reproduced across time, space, place, and scale. I develop a theoretical framework of entanglement (Mbembe 2001; Nuttall 2009) in order to grasp the entangled sexual-economic mobilities of female sex workers; the convergence of histories, spaces, and subjectivities in new and gendered ways at one ethnographic location from Naivasha, Kenya. Naivasha is a unique site from which to study the sex worker migrant across East Africa. One of the major towns in the Great Rift Valley, it has historically been the centre of land conflicts and the legacy of the “White Highlands” plays out in the everyday imaginary of sex workers. Naivasha also has a large street-based sex economy and a tourist industry second only to Mombasa, and it is a place where unique migration patterns and types of sexual commerce converge. This is because it is home to one of the largest internally displaced person (IDP) camps in the Rift Valley,
the cut flower industry is concentrated at Naivasha, and it is also a major stop along the East African highway. Furthermore, the rapid explosion of mobile phone use has had a huge impact on the nature of sex worker mobility here (and across East Africa). From these different landscapes of sexual commerce, labour migrants, IDPs, and highly mobile women do sex work, engage in transactional sex relationships, and are subject to exploitative survival sex at multiple and overlapping points of intersection.

With Naivasha’s street-based economy at the epicentre of this convergence, how street level sex work is reproduced across different migrant sex work spaces illustrates how the sex worker migrant exists in the middle of multiple scales of subjective, local, national, and global processes and power dynamics. Studies of sexual commerce and migration often understand the sex worker in a nexus of criminalization and/or victimization rhetoric, either as trafficked, forced prostitutes or vectors of HIV transmission. I instead argue that sex worker migrants are active agents of social change and actors in the global political economy, revealing new gendered spaces of sexual commerce that clearly show the sex worker migrant as whole – a complete person empowered and disempowered, both agent and victim bound by worldly aspiration, action, desire, torment, love, and suffering. My main goal, then, is to complicate the essentialized category of the “Third World prostitute” (Kempadoo 1998), and in doing so contribute to addressing a lack of critical, feminist, ethnographic studies of sexual commerce, gender, and everyday migration in African societies.

1.3 Sex Work, Feminist Debates, and the “Third World Prostitute”

Historically, before there was “sex work” there was “prostitution.” The term prostitution, meaning the exchange of sex for money, evokes a morally laden transaction that has been problematic for successive generations of social thinkers in North America and Europe (Bernstein 1999; 2007b). The first sustained writing surrounding prostitution was in the late nineteenth century when attention was drawn to prostitution as a social problem (cf. Sanger 1858). By the early twentieth century, the problem of prostitution framed overtly as a social evil was solidified by a number of theorists arguing, essentially, that prostitution opposed the place of women’s sexuality within the private sphere (cf. Flexner
1914; Kneeland 1913). This was, of course, also the time when Emma Goldman (1910) wrote her famously titled essay, “The Traffic in Women,” arguing that prostitution was a manifestation of patriarchy, likened to white slavery, and the exploitation of women 

*par excellence.* This foreshadowed what would become known as the “sexuality debates” in the late 1980s and 1990s, placing prostitution at the centre of polarized feminist debates surrounding violence against women (Bernstein 2007b:11).

At the very core of these debates are questions of structure versus agency, resulting in heated debates by feminist scholars and activists arguing over the theoretical implications of the commodification of sex for women’s subordination or empowerment. Elizabeth Bernstein (ibid.) succinctly summarizes the foundation of these debates, as well as the shift in terminology from prostitution to sex work: “Rejecting the word “prostitute,” with its connotations of shame, unworthiness, or wrongdoing, some feminists introduced the term “sex worker” to suggest that the sale of sex was not necessarily any better or worse than other forms of service work or embodied labour” (11). On one side of this debate, echoing social reformist philosophy, some feminist scholars maintained prostitution (and pornography) were among the clearest indicators in society of the worldwide exploitation of women (cf. Barry 1979; 1995; Dworkin 1981; 1997; Jeffreys 1997; MacKinnon 1989).

Opposing feminists advocated for an ideological shift away from terms like “prostitute” and “whore” to “sex work” in order to reflect how women are actively engaged with a form of labour. This other side of the debate culminated in a special issue on sex work in *Social Text* edited by Anne McClintock (1993) and other works (cf. Carmen and Moody 1985; Chapkis 1997; Nagel 1997).

These early sexuality debates have been criticized for being predominantly theoretical, and both diametrically opposed sides have been discounted as one-dimensional (Bernstein 2007b; Weitzer 2009). As a result, there has been an explosion of empirical research reflecting both the scope and diversity of sexual commerce since the turn of this century. Ronald Weitzer (ibid.) offers an explanatory paradigm he terms “polymorphous” that accounts for both structure and agency in his review of this literature in the Euro-American context. Despite this widespread recognition and empirical evidence for both constraint and choice in doing sex work in the Global North, Weitzer (ibid.) justifies the
erasure of non-western sex work experiences, which he argues often operates under much harsher conditions than in developed countries (218). This points to how the surge in empirical studies on sex work has also indirectly created a “hegemonic western script about prostitution” that Kamala Kempadoo (1998) has called the “canon” in prostitution studies:

For the most part, contemporary writers on sex work construct the prostitute/sex worker from testimonies and analyses that are derived from struggles of “First World” women in the United States and Western Europe. While all these writings are important in uncovering prostitute politics and identities in some parts of the world, and certainly contribute to a fuller apprehension of sex work, without historicization and geo-political contextualization, they run the risk of universalizing the subject from bounded locations and experiences. Lacking an analysis of international relations and notions of differing cultural constructions and meaning of sexuality and gender, this body of literature appropriates the “nonwestern” woman’s experience without any investigation into the matter. Little research or theorizing to date is, for example, grounded in the lives, experiences, definitions and perspectives of Third World people in sex work, allowing western categories and subjects to be privileged in the international discourse on sex work. The distortion of relations between the First and Third Worlds, and privileging of the western prostitute subject thus places some prostitutes’ rights activists and allies in danger of a political alignment with movements that consolidate western hegemony (12-13).

This canon in sex work research has been perpetuated today predominantly though anti-trafficking campaigns, the rescue industry, and HIV/AIDS programming. Sex workers in the Global South, especially migrant female sex workers in Kenya at the centre of such movements, struggle against these power structures in their everyday, ordinary experience.

The earlier sexuality debates have been reproduced most fervently today in non-western societies through the global moral panic surrounding human trafficking (Doezema 2001;
Kempadoo 2007), having implications for both “Third World prostitute” and migrant sex worker subjectivities (Doezema 2000). One side of this debate again conflates all sex work, especially women from the Global South who cross borders to sell sex, with exploitation, while the other side argues for both migrant and labour rights for sex workers globally (Szörényi 2014). And similar to previous rejections of such a binary opposition, many feminist scholars have again argued against this victim/agency dichotomy that shifts the study of sex worker migrants to harmful domains of criminology and feminism (Agustín 2006; 2007b; Kempadoo 2004; Plambech 2014). Laura Agustín (2006) has argued that this silencing of the experiences of migrants who sell sex by the rescue industry has resulted in the complete disappearance of a category of migration studies. In response, recent ethnographic research has illustrated a more complex picture of agency through an explicit focus on power relations.

If, as Agustín (2007a) purports in her framework for the cultural study of commercial sex, the “meaning of buying and selling sex changes according to the social, cultural, and historical processes in which transactions are situated” (403), they are also embedded within multiple relations of power. As Kempadoo (2004) shows in her study of sex workers who engage in intraregional migration in the Caribbean, race, class, and gender are critical sets of power relations within which to theorize and explore migrant sex workers’ experiences, particularly in the Global South. And as I will show, multiple scales of power dictate female migrant sex workers’ everyday existence and migration is one way female sex workers actively navigate through, and are displaced amid, gendered structural power relations across categories of difference in postcolonial Africa. Rather than reproduce the binary opposition within feminist debates, I want to break down the dichotomy between trafficked victim and labour migrant, illuminating complex scales of power relationships that play out in sex workers’ everyday, mobile lives in the Global South.

1.4 Transnational Sexual Commerce; or, Sexscapes

Anthropologists have been at the centre of not only critically engaging with feminist debates surrounding structure and agency, but also situating sexual commerce within transnational social fields across the Global North and South. In Sealing Cheng’s (2010)
study of Filipina migrant entertainers in South Korea, she argues that ethnography is most effective for understanding the complexity of sex work, especially grasping local and global structures that engender inequality, but also capturing women’s agency throughout these processes. According to Cheng (ibid.), “There is no final verdict – except that women’s victimhood in sex work is not a universal truth” and given the various different forms of sexual commerce that have emerged with globalization, “we must ask ourselves seriously if there can be only one way of understanding commercial sexual exchanges” (24). The terms sexual commerce or sexual-economic exchange (and I use these interchangeably) now include a broad set of practices, interactions, and spaces that often operate transnationally. This diversity of contemporary sexual commerce in the current era of globalization has been captured by a number of interdisciplinary scholarly collections (cf. Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004; Maginn and Steinmetz 2014; Padilla, et al. 2008; Weitzer 2010).

Although female sex worker experiences, street-based sex work, and leisure spaces in the Global North still attract the majority of scholarly attention, studies of sexual commerce also include the experiences of female, male, and transgendered sex workers globally. Sex as work and for social mobility, the exchange of sex for gifts or consumption, and survival sex for basic needs, drug dependency, or to pay debts reflect both direct and indirect solicitations and the diversity of class, incomes, and types of exchange in sexual commerce (Harcourt and Donovan 2005). The most relevant types of sexual commerce that I am concerned with are sex work, transactional sex, and survival sex. Joanna Busza (2006) provides succinct definitions of these three terms:

Sex work is the most easily recognisable form of sexual exchange, consisting of a financial arrangement whereby a client pays a sex worker an agreed fee for sexual services. This…usually represents an occupation or business, in which sex workers engage full-time or on an occasional basis… Transactional sex refers to the exchange of sex for material support of some kind, including cash, gifts, and economic assistance such as payments for rent of school fees…the term generally does not refer to a professional interaction but rather a financial arrangement within other relationships, often characterized by friendship, affection, or
romantic attachment. *Survival sex* describes the use of sexual exchange as a measure to alleviate extreme poverty or meet immediate economic needs. Survival sex implies that trading sex for money, shelter, food, or protection is undertaken out of desperation, literally to ensure survival. This type of exchange is likely to be more sporadic, opportunistic, and unplanned and tends to be reported in situations of instability and deprivation, for instance in refugee camps and among marginalized groups (134-135).

Sex work, transactional sex, and survival sex exchanges may involve a number of different actors, including sellers and buyers, intermediaries, brokers, pimps, managers, boyfriends, husbands, dependents, and colleagues. Types of exchanges also occur in diverse spaces with various degrees of authenticity, performativity, and reality. These include red light districts, brothels, hotels, resorts, and nightclubs, window prostitution in public view or privatized escort services, massage parlours, as well as topless bars, erotic dancing, pornography, and telephone sex work (Harcourt and Donovan 2005). Globalized, shifting geographies of sexual commerce have also resulted in increasing scholarly attention to intimate and sexual transactions from a transnational perspective (Constable 2009; ibid.). While Nicole Constable (2009) agrees in her review of this literature that in comparison to examinations into the chain of care and cross-border marriages, studies of migrant sex workers have “been slower to appear” (52). However, she points to studies in sex tourism, new technologies, and other transnational social fields of sexual commerce critical to a reimagining of space and place in sex work research.

A number of scholars have studied sex tourist destinations in the Global South, examining transnational and racialized constructions of desire among sex workers (Brennan 2004; Cheng 2010; Kempadoo 2004; Kibicho 2009). In Denise Brennan’s (2004) ethnography of sex tourism and marriage migration at a Dominican town, she analyses how these transnational processes have drastically changed everyday life. Situating sex work practices within the global economy, she argues that these processes have transformed the town into “a space inextricably tied up with transactional sex,” resulting in what she calls a “sexscape” (15). For Brennan, the term sexscape captures
how globalization has facilitated the rise of entire economies in the Global South based on the buying and selling of sex to foreigners, implying that globalized landscapes of sexual-economic transactions can be theorized as another one of Arjun Appadurai’s (1990) global cultural flows (adding to ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, finanscape, and ideoscape). This geography of sex tourism points to the importance of both place and difference in constructing particular inequalities in the global political economy, but also to the ways in which scholars have paid increased attention to transnational spaces in sex work research. Such transnational spaces have been mediated through new technologies, and sex work scholars have noted how information and communication technologies (ICTs) have redefined the spaces of sexual commerce (Agustín 2007b; Bernstein 2007a).

It has been emphasized how internet technology specifically is critical in shaping new “electronic landscapes of intimacy for individuals who are otherwise geographically dispersed” (Constable 2009:53).

This creation of new virtual and physical landscapes of sexual commerce in the global political economy and the scholarly focus on micropolitics and macroprocesses, however, runs the risk of reconstructing a familiar binary between the local and the global. Studies of local-global contact often address the everyday experiences of structural power relations. As Lieba Faier (2009) argues in her study of Filipina women who migrate to Japan as entertainers, “Studies such as these tend to focus on how big global formations – capitalism, neoliberalism, the universal, human rights, justice, nationalism writ large – get made in situated, localized settings” (14). And while it is certainly true that migrant sex workers navigate such global power dynamics, these large-scale processes cannot be grasped by understanding solely “the ways people’s everyday lives relate to large-scale global formations of power,” instead we must also focus on the “in-between” (ibid. 14), including multiple scales from the local, national, regional, and global, as well as migration patterns, processes, and encounters.

Examining how variable migration patterns and forms of sexual commerce converge, and how these dynamics inform migrant female sex workers’ everyday experiences, illuminates how binary oppositions disappear somewhere in the middle. That is, a migrant female sex worker at an IDP camp, flower farm, or in transit along highways and
roadways is not merely a victim of globalization-gone-wrong or solely an active agent of her own making – her everyday experiences exist somewhere in between the two, where she encounters multiple scales and actors. Similar to Svati Shah’s (2014) goal in her study of rural sex worker migrants in multiple spaces of the city of Mumbai, I want to be careful not to reconstruct stereotypes of violence, prostitution, and trafficking among migrant sex workers in the Global South. I instead call for a gendered rescaling of sexual commerce. Such a rescaling examines how overlapping migration patterns are spatially and socially reorganizing street level sexual commerce in gendered, meaningful, and multi-scalar ways, not only in the midst of globalization, but also against the widespread HIV epidemic in Africa.

1.5 HIV/AIDS, Stigma, and Everyday Hazards

No group has been more affected by the HIV epidemic than sex workers in sub-Saharan Africa, who carry the highest burden of HIV prevalence globally (NSWP 2013). According to a recent World Bank study, a sample of over 20,000 female sex workers across 16 countries in sub-Saharan Africa had a pooled HIV prevalence of 36.9%, compared to 10.9% in Eastern Europe, 6.1% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 5.2% in Asia, and 1.7% in the Middle East and North Africa (Kerrigan, et al. 2013). This regional average varies considerably among African countries, and sex workers’ HIV prevalence ranges from 70.7% (Malawi), 59.6% (South Africa), 45.1% (Kenya), 37.2% (Uganda), 19.9% (Senegal), 9.4% (Democratic Republic of Congo) and 0.7% (Comoros) (Baral, et al. 2012). This disproportionate and unequal burden can be attributed to a number of social, economic, political and structural factors, mostly stemming from the criminalization and stigmatization of sex work in the majority of African countries (NSWP 2013; Shannon, et al. 2015).

The stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS is in many ways what perpetuates narratives of the female sex worker as less than a complete person. In Erving Goffman’s (1963) pioneering work on stigma, he defines this concept as being excluded from social acceptance and having a spoiled identity, whereby the stigmatized individual is “thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (3). The ensuing body of literature on stigma has been criticized for predominantly
conceiving stigmatization at the individual level. Stigma, like all lived, socially embedded experience, is produced at multiple levels from the individual to community, institutional, policy, state, and macro-structural, oppressive forces (Johnson 2012). The “in-between” is again critical here, and how state policy and police, health institutions, and the wider community simultaneously enact stigmatization for female sex workers all come into play in everyday, ordinary experiences.

Many scholars have tried to redress the individual-level focus in the context of the HIV epidemic, examining how HIV/AIDS-related stigma reproduces structural power relations (Parker and Aggleton 2003) or how structural violence determines who will suffer from stigmatization (Castro and Farmer 2005). Others still have argued that identity-level approaches to HIV/AIDS programming are also misplaced, reflecting neoliberal perspectives that overemphasize the role of the individual and deemphasize the responsibility of institutions in healthcare (Hirsch, et al. 2009). Most importantly, these political economy approaches illuminate the complex ways HIV and AIDS-related stigma exploit existing inequalities based on categories of difference, such as gender, race and class, among others. Daniel Jordan Smith (2014) extends this perspective, arguing that the stigma associated with HIV derives its power from broader categories of morality. Other scholars have further illuminated how stigmatization exists within a “moral economy of secrecy” (Haram 2005; Nguyen 2010).

Scholarship on sexuality in Africa has vastly increased with the HIV epidemic (Vance 1991), and the concepts of morality and secrecy have been used to characterize the management of illicit sexual relationships in this era of AIDS. Vinh-Kim Nguyen (2010) explains this secretive moral economy of sexual-economic exchange in West Africa:

For many, the secrets conveyed through rumours, gossip, and even pornography were about learning the ropes, about being part of a milieu where sex could more easily translate into love, emotional support, and even financial security… Rumours, gossip, and other secrets about wealthier men were treated like trade secrets, privileged insider information that could be used to gain access to a privileged club. They were valuable tools for self-fashioning in order to make
oneself desirable. The cheek-by-jowl social inequality of the city meant that getting food into one’s stomach, or perhaps even getting rich, was just a story away. Such stories were testimonials that could net a sugar daddy, teach a good scam, reveal a business secret, find a miraculous cure, or procure a meal. Sex talk could serve as a social technology, another tool for navigating urban life (163).

This moral economy of secrecy points to the vast literature in African studies focusing on women’s sexuality as an economic resource, the importance of exchange in sexual relationships, and HIV vulnerability. Many scholars have critically engaged with these issues, noting that such relationships cannot necessarily or easily be compared to a western-centric idea of commercial sex work. This has resulted in the widespread saying, “there is no romance without finance” in Nigeria (Smith 2014), and scholars have documented the exchange of sex for material gain in South Africa (Hunter 2002; Leclerc-Madlala 2004), the sugar-daddy phenomenon in Kenya (Luke 2005), and a number of culturally specific terms to characterize women engaging in these exchange relationships, such as godrap girls in Côte d’Ivoire (Newell 2009; 2012) and ashawos across West Africa (Chernoff 2003; 2005; Izugbara 2005). It has been argued that these transactional sex relationships are one of the main drivers of the HIV epidemic in Africa (Côté, et al. 2004; Stoebenau, et al. 2011).

Scholars have also distinguished survival sex as distinct from sex work in African studies, emphasizing the severe structural constraints, gender inequalities, and extreme poverty within which sexual exchanges sometimes operate. Janet Wojcicki (2002) uses the term survival sex to highlight not only dire economic restrictions, but also sexual and gender based violence against women and the inability to negotiate for condom use in South African taverns. Studies have also illuminated how survival sex is an undisputed reality in humanitarian settings often without access to HIV/AIDS programming (Burton, et al. 2010), particularly in refugee camps across Africa where women exchange sex for basic needs such as food, accommodation, or protection against sexual and gender based violence (Murray 2000). Most studies of sexual commerce in Africa have understood sex work, transactional sex, and survival sex as distinct categories, with the majority of ethnographic work focusing on transactional sex. I want to instead emphasize how female
sex workers often move among these categories throughout their overlapping migration trajectories, which can be associated with varying degrees of HIV (and other) risk.

The correlation between migration and HIV vulnerability has been well documented all over the world (Hirsch 2014), and in Africa specifically (Caldwell, et al. 1997). Meredith Turshen (1998) has argued that the labour structures adopted from the colonial period are what truly perpetuate HIV in sub-Saharan Africa today, the classic example being sex work in the male migrant labour enclaves of South African goldmines (Campbell 2000). Contributing to these perspectives is a growing body of literature on sexual commerce, labour migration, and HIV/AIDS in East Africa in particular. A number of interdisciplinary studies have examined truck drivers purchasing sex along the Kenya-Uganda highway (Ferguson and Morris 2007; Morris, et al. 2009), women’s migration and “sex for fish” at Lake Victoria’s fishing industry (Béné and Merten 2008; Camlin, et al. 2013a; Camlin, et al. 2013b), and transactional sex among labour migrants at Kenya’s tea estates (Ondimu 2010). Other recent scholarship has looked at sex work and forced migration, exploring HIV prevalence and access to HIV/AIDS programs among refugee sex workers in Nairobi (Kritmaa 2011) and Kampala (Nyanzi 2013). However, what is missing from this literature is a discussion of how female sex workers strategically use migration to navigate the HIV epidemic and other vulnerabilities.

There is a lack of critical examinations of how different migration patterns result in vulnerabilities but also mitigate risk for female sex workers in African studies. While a recent review of the HIV risk factors for female sex workers in Africa notes that, “any discussion of sex work in sub-Saharan Africa is incomplete without considering the role of population mobility in defining sex work patterns” (Scorgie, et al. 2012:7), migration has almost exclusively been associated with vulnerability. However, in the Lancet’s recent special issue on HIV and sex work, researchers emphasize migration has varying, complex, and non-linear effects on HIV risk for female sex workers, “both mitigating and conferring HIV risk” (Shannon, et al. 2015:4). Another recent study on short-term mobility among female sex workers explicitly calls for migrant health and sex work research to broaden the conceptualization of migration to include both vulnerability and increased social and economic opportunities (Goldenberg, et al. 2014). I am concerned
then, not only with how migration patterns differentially impact and restructure sexual commerce in meaningful and gendered ways, but also with how migrant sex workers navigate and mitigate risk, vulnerability, stigma, violence, and criminalization – everyday hazards – through migration trajectories. And being careful not to reconstruct female sex workers as vectors of disease, I want to understand how mobility is used as a way to pursue personal life projects, including activism and cosmopolitanism, as complete and whole, *engendered* persons.

1.6 Geographies of Gender, Power, and Affect in Sex Work

As Aderanti Adepoju (1992; 2000; 2004) has extensively documented, Africa is (and always has been) a hub of complex intraregional, inter-regional, and international migrations. While contemporary imageries of clandestine boat-migrants and refugees suggest Africa is predominantly a source of out-migration to the Global North, internal patterns continue to be several times more significant and sizeable than all emigrations to North America, Europe, and the Gulf regions combined (Bakewell and Hein de Haas 2007; Kane and Leedy 2013). As a result, classical migration concepts have been less often applied *within* Africa, such as transnationalism and diaspora (Bakewell 2008), and lesser still from a critical gendered perspective (Awumbila 2007). There are however some important recent anthropological exceptions to gendered migration scholarship in Africa that seek to deconstruct western-derived theories surrounding “migrant” and “gender” subjectivities (cf. Clark-Kazak 2011; Newell 2012).

The different types of gendered migration patterns in African sub-regions, often characterized by high mobility and regionalism, cannot easily be categorized under classical theorizations of the transnational (Schiller, et al. 1992). In Janine Dahinden’s (2010) study of migrant strippers in the sex industry, she describes their migration patterns as “female circular mobility,” illustrating how these migrant sex workers develop unique “transnational practices and subjectivities closely connected to the nature of their circular mobility” (324). There is a critical distinction here, in that highly mobile, itinerant sex workers are not moving their lives to a different location but rather using mobility as capital from a place that unquestionably remains home. While they inhabit a
continuous form of transnational migratory space, these women also return home regularly, if intermittently. Dahinden (ibid.) provides an excellent overview of cross-cultural examples of this female circular mobility, including domestic *pendulaires*, agricultural workers, and suitcase trading, arguing that these different types of circular, star-shaped, and shuttle migrations are also found in the sex industry when women travel as “weekend prostitutes” across borders to double or even triple their earnings in one trip. Women sometimes travel together in groups of two, three, or more sharing the cost of accommodations on such trips. Studies indirectly suggest that this type of itinerant sex work is particularly relevant in the context of sub-Saharan Africa (Pickering, et al. 1992; Tabet 1989; van Blerk 2007). Furthermore, this kind of circular mobility is not only integral to sexual commerce in Kenya, but also cannot be separated from other patterns of migration that often overlap in gendered and unequal ways including internal displacement and labour migration.

The concept of gender is critical to situating everyday sexual commerce within such variable migration patterns in Kenya. Feminist migration studies have paid particular attention to how gender and social location shape unequal geographies of migration, displacement, mobility, and immobility. In order to grasp intersectional gendered identities and relationships in transnational spaces, Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar (2001; 2006) have developed a critical theoretical framework they call “gendered geographies of power.” Integral to this framework are four fundamental components. The first is that gender operates on multiple scales and gender ideologies can be both reconfigured and reproduced, or even be contradictory across transnational spaces. Secondly, social location is crucial; “it provides a reference term for how individual and groups are situated in multiple, intersecting, and mutually constituting hierarchies of gender, class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and so on” (ibid.; 2006:43). Given these social locations, the third component analyses the degrees of agency people are able to enact within uneven structures of power. Finally, this framework also recognizes imagination and aspiration resulting from global cultural flows, and how these flows are gendered, intersectional, and both promote and constrain mobility (ibid.; 2006).
Gendered geographies of power is a critical framework for understanding scale and spatialities of power in sexual commerce (Silvey 2006); however, what is missing is a feminist critique of the fundamental concept of gender. Similar to migration, “gender” has, for the most part, been theorized as a western concept. As a result, much African feminist scholarship has been devoted to arguing against this concept being abstractly imported into the African context. Ifi Amadiume (1997) and Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (1998; 2000; 2005) have been among the most prominent scholars who explicitly criticize western gender theories. Oyèwùmí (2011) argues that gender must be understood as historically specific and socially constructed, taking seriously the idea that understanding African gender relations demands starting with Africa: “Studies of Africa should not rely on Western-derived concepts to map the issue of gender in African societies, but instead must ask questions about the meaning of gender and how to apprehend it in particular times and places” (1). Dissimilar to how gender has been used in the Global North to emphasize differences between male and female roles and relationships and to forward western feminist agendas, African gender studies privilege extended family relationships, motherhood and womanhood, landownership, and critical development issues of the day.

Focusing on these gendered concepts destabilizes the classic sex worker-client relationship and perceptions of intimacy. A number of scholars have addressed intimacy, love, and desire between sex workers and their clients in order to secure supportive relationships, including marriage (Brennan 2004; Mojola 2014). Much less research has explored affect outside of the relationship between the sex worker and her clientele. Affect is a critical concept for understanding the sex worker as a complete, gendered person and if we understand emotions as socio-cultural practices (Ahmed 2004), the emotionality of engaging in sexual-economic exchange reveals much about everyday relationships and experiences in Kenya. Emotions of love, longing, and resentment are often evoked through motherhood, so too are aspirations and feelings of independence as female heads of households. Shame, stigma, and disgust sometimes felt in sex work and the everyday fears of HIV transmission, gender based violence, and development encounters are critical between and among sex workers. Furthermore, calculating risk in some migration contexts is often based exclusively on intuition and feelings change from one client to the other, one day to the next, this town to that city. These complex
identities – gendered, affective, and mobile – are located at the interstices of multiple scales of power relations, including epistemology surrounding who is a migrant and what is gender, but also the very meaning of Africa as both idea and place.

1.7 Street Level Sex Work and Sexual-Economic Entanglement in the Postcolony

Writing on the construction of difference and othering of the non-west, Edward Said’s (1978) Orientalism is considered to be the “locus classicus” of postcolonial theory (Abrahamsen 2003:199). Although, it is in Achille Mbembe’s (2001) On the Postcolony where he argues, “it is in relation to Africa that the notion of “absolute otherness” has been taken the farthest” (2). Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2004) explain further that, 

Africa as a name, as an idea, and as an object of academic and public discourse has been, and remains, fraught. It is fraught in ways that go beyond even the paradigm of orientalism first introduced by Edward Said to speak to the staging of the difference of the non-West from the West. Indeed, Africa is not only perpetually caught and imagined within a web of difference and absolute otherness. More radically, the sign is fraught because Africa so often ends up epitomizing the intractable, the mute, the abject, or the other-worldly (348).

Such problematic, essential, and romantic interpretations of Africa have resulted in an understanding that it is, as an object, “apart from the world” (ibid.). As a response to this, part of the postcolonial project has been to grasp the full spectrum of complexity in African human experience; that is, to write Africa back into the world as a space of movements and a place in motion (ibid. 352).

African urban cities, especially Johannesburg (ibid.; 2008), but also Nairobi (Spronk 2012), Freetown and Monrovia (Hoffman 2007), have been the ideal place from which to examine circulations and worldliness from this postcolonial perspective. Scholars have therefore written “the world from an African metropolis” (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004), or “Afropolis” (ibid.; 2008), and on the “worlding” of African cities (Simone 2001). The world is, as Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) argues, made up of multiple worlds of diversity and
disparity (185) and Mbembe and Nuttall (2008) show that how we conceive of the world is critical:

Worldliness, in this context, has had to do not only with the capacity to generate one’s own cultural forms, institutions, and lifeways, but also with the ability to foreground, translate, fragment, and disrupt realities and imaginaries originating elsewhere, and in the process place these forms and processes in the service of one’s own making. This is why modernity and worldliness, here, have been so intrinsically connected to various forms of circulation – of people, capital, finance, and images – and to overlapping spaces and times (1).

I argue that in order to better understand the spatiality, mobility, and subjectivity of sex work in African contexts, this postcolonial perspective of grasping circulations and worldliness must be applied to the streets, street corners, and red light districts of street level sex work. In this sense, the street can be understood as a transnational space where sex work practices are connected to the global political economy at multiple scales of moving people, capital, ideas, and technology, but the street also becomes an ideological reference point that broadens conceptualizations of sex work in mainstream research beyond the street level. In particular, an examination of how street-based sex work is reconstituted across time, space, place, and scale in Naivasha reveals the street level cannot be conceived of as solely disparate or violent as it is reproduced, restructured, and returned to from an IDP camp, in flower farms, along highways and roadways, and through mobile phone technology. In this geography of sexual commerce, even the street level is about one’s own making and unmaking; migrant sex work spaces give rise to new fragmentations, opportunities, relationships, and imaginaries in multi-scalar ways that all become entangled at the street level.

Sexual-economic entanglement is the convergence of different migration patterns and types of sexual commerce across overlapping spaces and times all at one ethnographic moment. Sarah Nuttall (2009) defines entanglement as, “a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited” (1). This concept has been applied across several
disciplines and from a number of different vantage points, most notably in postcolonial theory. Lynn Thomas (2003) has understood reproductive politics in twentieth century Kenya as a process of historical entanglement, in order to elucidate how these struggles “connected and combined the material and the moral, the indigenous and the imperial, and the intimate and the global” (19). Mbembe (2001) has written extensively on the time of entanglement in response to the simplistic reduction of non-linearity to chaos in descriptions of African life. He argues that theory has failed to understand, “time as lived, not synchronically or diachronically, but in its multiplicity and simultaneities, its presence and absences” (8), and has underestimated “the fact that one characteristic of African societies over the long durée has been that they follow a great variety of temporal trajectories and a wide range of swings only reducible to an analysis in terms of convergent or divergent evolution” (17). The concept of racial entanglement, particularly out of South African literary and cultural scholarship, problematizes race as a given category essentializing difference, seeks to address the artificial categories of “whiteness” and “blackness,” and to understand the post-apartheid period (Nuttall 2009).

Nuttall (ibid.) succinctly defines the intricacy and interconnectivity of entanglement, which can then be applied to sexual-economic exchange:

Entanglement offers…a means by which to draw into our analyses those sites in which what was once thought of as separate – identities, spaces, histories – come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways. It is an idea which signals largely unexplored terrains of mutuality, wrought from a common, though often coercive and confrontational, experience. It enables a complex temporality of past, present, and future; one which points away from a time of resistance towards a more ambivalent moment…A focus on entanglement in part speaks to the need for a utopian horizon, while always being profoundly mindful of what is actually going on. Such a horizon carries particular weight in societies which confront the precariousness of life, crime, poverty, AIDS and violence on a daily basis; it suggests the importance, too, of holding ‘heretical conversations’ in order to question and even, at times, dislodge or supersede the tropes and analytical foci which quickly harden into conventions of how we read the ‘now’. So, too, reading
through entanglement makes it necessary to find registers for writing about...Africa that enable properly trans-national conversations (11-12).

Sexual-economic entanglement, then, challenges how we conceive of time, space, place, and scale, how we can locate the “in-between” among categories like agent/victim and local/global, while also grappling with the social precarity of everyday worldly, affective, and unequal life for the sex worker migrant. Sexual-economic entanglement allows for overlapping times and spaces and the contradictory ways of being in the world in explicitly gendered ways. Therefore, sexual-economic entanglement is able to conceive of how migrant female sex workers use different types of sexual commerce, sometimes simultaneously (survival sex, transactional sex, and sex work); navigate complex migration patterns and trajectories that can overlap and are multidirectional (internal displacement, labour migration, circular mobility); and, inhabit different sex work spaces in gendered and multi-scalar ways (at the street level, from an IDP camp, in flower farms, along highways, and through the mobile phone).

From this framework of sexual-economic entanglement, the following chapters seek to write the migrant female sex worker’s place in the global political economy, bringing together histories, spaces, and subjectivities from one ethnographic location in Naivasha, Kenya. Therefore, this feminist ethnography has four main research goals:

1. Contributing to the research gaps that have arisen from both the rescue industry and the moral panic surrounding prostitution, this ethnography seeks to document the everyday experiences of migrant female sex workers in Kenya. This further contributes to countering both the essential category of the “Third World prostitute” and the canon in prostitution studies that have privileged sex worker experiences in the Global North.

2. The second goal of this ethnography is to examine how the street level co-exists with multiple migrant sex worker spaces, calling for a rescaling of African sex work research. Exploring how throughout migration patterns and a reconstitution of the street level as a transnational space, the migrant sex worker exists amidst multiple local, global, and in-between scales of power relations reveals much
about social, economic, and political change in Naivasha and Kenya today. In particular, Kenya’s history of colonization, its transition to multi-party politics, the restructuring of its economy, intra-regional trade and infrastructure, and the introduction of new technology is focused on.

3. Thirdly, this ethnography seeks to conceptualize the realities of everyday migration patterns and trajectories as they occur and overlap across Kenya and sometimes further. Internal displacement from Eldoret to Naivasha’s IDP camp, labour migration from all over Kenya to the cut flower industry there, as well as circular mobility, both cross-border and seasonal, where migrant female sex workers inhabit continuous migratory space are all examined. How migrant female sex workers navigate these different migration patterns through everyday hazards, and how migration and mobility simultaneously occur through a range of overlapping and multidirectional trajectories, contributes to a better understanding of intra-African migrations as variable and flexible.

4. The fourth goal of this ethnography is to better understand the gendered roles and relationships that are being restructured in Naivasha’s geography of sexual commerce. Privileging tenets in Kenyan social organization, especially motherhood, this research especially seeks to explore the ways in which migrant female sex workers pursue female headed households, but also personal projects including cosmopolitan identities and HIV/AIDS activism. This also elucidates the composite realities of everyday life as mothers, women, workers, girlfriends, daughters, sisters, and community members across categories of difference such as class, race, ethnicity, and age, being both empowered and disempowered.

1.8 Methodology

1.8.1 Feminist Ethnography and Sex Work Research

The methodology used in these four-fold research goals is predominantly informed by feminist anthropology and qualitative methods. The history of feminism in anthropology has been widely documented, evolving from a preoccupation with correcting the male bias, to an analysis of gender, to a more recent focus on difference and identity (cf. di
Leonardo 1991; Rosaldo 1980; Strathern 1987; Visweswaran 1997). While feminist anthropologists have consistently critiqued the structures that oppress women and the ways women negotiate and resist gender relationships within the global political economy, increased global connectedness has had significant methodological implications for research. This, according to Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True (2010), has resulted in a fundamental shift within the feminist social science agenda to focusing on revealing the concealed and globalized “intersectional exercises of power,” while also demanding we rethink our methodologies for analysing the global dimensions of the 21st century (470). Therefore, feminist ethnography as well as additional qualitative methods able to grasp the migration trajectories of female sex workers was critical to this research.

Feminist ethnography and the implementation of mixed methods are not unique to sex work research; rather, it is the norm, especially within the discipline of anthropology. However, the majority of ethnographic sex work research has been conducted at the working spaces where sexual-economic exchanges occur, ranging from street markets and red light districts to brothels and strip clubs, as opposed to their homes and everyday social interactions. This is because the private lives and personal accounts of sex workers are more difficult to access, and the majority of in-depth accounts are largely autobiographical. This is, of course, a result of the secrecy sex workers often operate from on a daily basis, which determines when and where interviews can take place and how often. The predominance of ethnography being conducted at sex work spaces has also resulted in methodological debates surrounding what constitutes participant observation, especially for female researchers (Sanders 2006).

Even within the academy, sex work research is lumped together with voyeuristic “cowboy ethnography” that takes the reader on a reflexive journey into the difficulties of accessing dangerous field sites. However, there is a general tendency to valorise these studies by male ethnographers, while female researchers studying sex work are often delegitimised and sexualized, sometimes experiencing stigma by association (Hammond and Kingston 2014). For example, in Kimberly Kay Hoang’s (2015) study of Vietnamese hostess bars, she found that reflexivity only served to reinforce perceptions of women ethnographers in academia and in the field, with constant questions about the “fun”
aspects of sex work research and whether or not she herself had engaged in sex work. This only reinforces the gendered power dynamics present in the research process that reflexivity aims to counter by further marginalizing research subjects. Therefore, following Hoang’s (ibid.) deliberate move away from voyeuristic ethnography, this research was conducted at work spaces but also women’s everyday environments, and rather than document my own ethnographic journey, the voices and stories of migrant female sex workers are privileged.

1.8.2 Migrant Sex Worker Subjects, Mobility, and Methods

Map 1: Migrant spaces and migration story collection in Naivasha

Over the course of two field visits (May-September 2011; May 2012-March 2013), ethnography was conducted across multiple spaces in Naivasha, including at the street
level, the IDP camp, at flower farms, in transit and at transit stages, as well as in the communities, neighbourhoods, and homes of migrant sex workers. By spending time at two different community organizations targeting sex workers, one local NGO and another multi-laterally funded drop-in centre, as well as multiple street-based venues including nightclubs, discos, and pubs, rapport was initially established at the street level in Naivasha Town. From there, one key informant was identified each at the street level, the IDP camp, the flower farms, and along the corridors. Snowball sampling was conducted at each migrant sex work space, with all four key informants recruiting research participants, and some participants were also identified through ethnographic research across these spaces.

One hundred and ten migration stories were collected using an oral life history guide for sex workers (see Appendix A), 50 from the street level in Naivasha Town, 15 at the IDP camp, 25 at the flower farms, and 20 along the corridors (see Map 1). Increasingly, life stories and personal narratives have been used as methods within migration studies to explore everyday, lived experiences (Clark-Kazak 2009; Eastmond 2007; Miles and Crush 1993). Caroline Brettell (2003) has defined migration stories as the oral life histories of the migration experience, so as to: “Emphasize what generalizations about migration look like on the ground and to delineate how migrants make decisions, forge social relationships, and exercise agency in the face of various local, national, and international constraints” (32). Therefore, the collection of migration stories is a method that sheds light on migration patterns and trajectories, but also the multiple scales of power dynamics that tell us about both victimhood and agency in everyday lived experiences. To further contextualize these migration stories, an additional 15 semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with a number of community representatives across all migrant spaces, spanning NGOs, the rescue industry, the private sector, flower farms, law enforcement, and government in Naivasha.

The majority of interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and Swahili, the lingua franca of East Africa widely spoken everywhere in Kenya, and learning Swahili both through formal courses and immersion was critical to these research methods. On few occasions key informants also acted as translators from Kikuyu to English if
participants were more comfortable speaking Kikuyu than Swahili. Many interviews were conducted with a key informant present if it was our first time meeting, which often made participants feel more comfortable and open to repeat interactions. These interviews were conducted in a number of different places, including lodgings, pubs, and in transit, but most often in women’s homes. Migration story collection ranged from the shortest being a single interview of approximately one hour, to recurrent interviews over several weeks or months, to the entire duration of fieldwork. When recorded, both migration stories and semi-structured interviews were transcribed in English, unedited unless where indicated, and are presented in participants’ own words.

Over time and owing to the mobility of many migrant female sex workers, recurrent migration stories evolved into informal, ethnographic encounters often with multiple participants and key informants, frequently including childcare, some form of public transit or travel, and always phone calls and text messages. As Julien Brachet (2012) has argued, it is difficult to understand complex migratory systems and everyday migration in sub-Saharan Africa from one fixed location. Travelling with migrant sex workers and collecting parts of their migration stories while in transit, or road ethnography, allows mobility itself to become part of the analysis and also makes accessible parts of the migration process that cannot be observed when stationary at one ethnographic field site (ibid.). In addition to being mobile and understanding transport itself as part of the research design, mobile phone use was a critical tool for data collection with migrant female sex workers. Since Patricia Sunderland (1999) first examined how the telephone has been incorporated into the anthropologist’s ethnographic toolkit, the mobile phone revolution in Africa now demands this technology be a critical methodological device. Especially for migrant female sex workers, phone calls, text messages, and mobile money transfers were important ways to trace women’s migration patterns but also in analysing their everyday experiences, relationships, and risks.

1.8.3 Migrant Female Sex Worker Subjects and Ethics

Research with marginalized populations who navigate a great deal of everyday hazards demand several ethical considerations, especially in the context of sex work research (Shaver 2005). However, Susan Dewey and Tiantian Zheng (2013) have recently noted
that within the discipline of anthropology in particular, the ethical challenges to research with sex workers have not been extensively documented. This is despite the fact that sex workers in most societies are criminalized, both legally and morally, which immediately complicates anthropologists’ ethical responsibilities. For example, in attempts to establish rapport and conduct ethnography across migrant sex work spaces, the risk of revealing participants’ identities to police, society, or even family that could result in harmful experiences of criminalization or stigmatization was often present. Recounting migration stories and sex worker experiences, especially those that involved violence, displacement, or loss, risked being emotionally distressing to research participants. Furthermore, conducting research at migrant sex workers’ places of work, especially at the street level, potentially interfered with women’s ability to solicit clients and ultimately could have affected their incomes (ibid.).

In order to mitigate these risks, both the professional and personal everyday lives of migrant female sex workers were carefully navigated with discretion and concealment. Verbal consent was acquired from the participants in this ethnography and they were informed that they could withdraw their participation from this study at any time (see Appendix B). Being aware of the fact that most migrant female sex workers sell in relative secrecy, strategies were employed to ensure participants’ anonymity including conducting interviews at their time and place of choice and communicating through mobile phones. The confidentiality of research participants was ensured through the use of pseudonyms, and also removing any identifying details such as the name of the flower farm where they worked or the street-based venue from which they sold. Learning Swahili further enabled this study to be conducted with a high level of ethical rigour as it significantly lessened the power dynamics and distinctions between researcher and subjects. Finally, all migrant female sex workers were provided with the contact information of the Research and Ethics Board at the University of Western Ontario, who granted ethics approval for this study (see Appendix C).

1.8.4 The Migrant Female Sex Worker Participant Profile

The migrant female sex workers in this ethnography ranged between the ages of 16 and 58 years old, with the average age being approximately 28 years old. About one third of
these women had been divorced previously, one woman had been left by her husband and
two women widowed, leaving the majority single and never married. The education
levels of sex workers varied; however, all women had attended some school, the lowest
level being grade three and the highest some college level education. Just over 90 percent
of research participants had children, varying from one to five, with the average number
of children being about three. One participant was pregnant at the time of this study and
the ages of participants’ children varied considerably from infants to adults, with a few
women even having grandchildren. Approximately 10 migrant female sex workers did
not have any children at all, nine who had actively chosen not to have kids and one
woman who was unable to. While nearly all participants were Kenyan, one was Ugandan
and another Tanzanian. Out of the Kenyan female sex workers, over 60 percent were
Kikuyu, the rest representing ethnic groups including Luo, Luhya, Kamba, Maasai, Kisii,
Meru, Turkana, Nandi, and Kalenjin. Almost all research participants were also Christian,
with only two women being Muslim, and only approximately 20 percent of these migrant
female sex workers had been born in Naivasha. It is impossible to estimate the HIV
prevalence among these research participants, as only 15 out of the 110 migrant female
sex workers divulged openly that they were HIV positive and rumours and gossip within
this community further confused any approximation. Out of these 110 research
participants, 60 of their migration stories across the street level and all migrant sex work
spaces appear in this ethnography.

1.9 Chapter Organization

This chapter has delineated the main objective of this research by problematizing the
portrayal of the Third World prostitute as immobile and incomplete, through the lenses of
both anti-trafficking fervour and moral panic. The project of writing migrant female sex
workers’ everyday experiences across time, space, place, and scale from Naivasha has
been outlined, drawing specifically on interdisciplinary theory from anthropology,
geography, and postcolonial studies as well as feminist methodology. So as to illustrate
how migrant female sex workers exist at the centre of multiple power relations within the
current global political economy, and owing to how African sex work research needs to
be rethought and rescaled in critical and transnational ways, subsequent chapters reflect
distinct migration processes and spaces. While these chapters serve as organizational categories, many migrant female sex workers occupy multiple migrant spaces throughout their migration stories, and also continuously inhabit the street-based sex economy.

Chapter two, then, serves two purposes: providing the historical background for migrant sex work in Kenya and East Africa by documenting the region’s colonial encounter, and also examining street level sex work specifically in Naivasha Town. From here, the chapters move across Naivasha’s topography of migrant sex work spaces. Chapter three documents the migration stories of internally displaced sex workers from Eldoret during the 2007/2008 post-election crisis, exploring different types of sexual-economic exchange throughout resettlement to Naivasha’s IDP camp. Chapter four explores female labour migrants from throughout Kenya who exchange sex for employment at Naivasha’s flower farms and supplement their low incomes with transactional sex and part-time sex work, and who ultimately choose street level sex work over flower farm work. Chapter five focuses on the circular mobility of itinerant female sex workers internally and intra-regionally, mapping their movements across highways and roadways and documenting both their economic and personal projects. Chapter six examines the impact of mobile phone technology for migrant female sex workers, using the mobile phone as a mechanism to explore changing gendered roles and relationships; specifically, migrant sex workers’ social networks, kinship, and intimate relationships. Finally, chapter seven concludes by emphasizing the contributions of this research to interdisciplinary studies and policy and programming, as well as addressing its limitations and considerations for future research.
Chapter 2

2 The Street

Map 2: The street level in Naivasha

This chapter chronicles the spatial organization of prostitution in Africa from a historical perspective. After problematizing colonial representations of sexual commerce across Africa, this chapter focuses specifically on the relationship between prostitution and migration as they evolved alongside colonialism in East Africa. It presents a critical examination of the first documentation of prostitution in colonial Nairobi, street level prostitution in its various forms, and transitions to literary and ethnographic descriptions of street-based sex work as it is practiced in Naivasha today. This chapter predominantly
draws on the 50 migration stories of migrant female sex workers who were based from, moved to, or transited through Naivasha Town, selling sex at its small red light district, from nightclubs, pubs, lodgings, and streets. A number of everyday experiences sex workers navigate at the street level are recounted, including sex worker social organization, stigmatization, and criminalization in Naivasha. This juxtaposition of historical and contemporary forms of sexual-economic exchange at the street level illustrates differences and continuities over time. Even in its layout, this chapter also makes a comment on the entanglement of it all – the past to the present; fiction to ethnography to oral history; and, the geography of sex work across time, space, place, and scale. Finally, this chapter critically sets up the street level and street-based sex work as historical, theoretical, and ethnographic bases for comparison to migrant sex worker spaces at the IDP camp, flower farms, the corridors, and through mobile phones.

2.1 Histories of Street Level Prostitution in Africa

The historiography of prostitution in Africa is, in many ways, a history of encounter and industrialization, migration, and the spatial organization of prostitution at the street level. There have been some anthologies documenting the world history of prostitution, particularly in North America and Europe (cf. Roberts 1998; Rutter 2005; Smith 2012; Walkowitz 1992), with the fewest accounts focused on Africa. One of the earliest is William Sanger’s (1858) section on Africa in his chapter “Barbarous Nations” within his history of prostitution. Here, Sanger tells us, the least immorality exists among these the most “wild and savage tribes” of Africa, where “parents sell their children, husbands sell their wives, women sell themselves, for a trifling sum” (388). This account equates prostitution with a kind of cultural immorality, providing flawed and incomplete examples of marriage, polygamy, and divorce across the continent. According to Sanger (ibid.), these are fundamentally immoral and sexually excessive cultural practices comparable to different forms of prostitution, particularly for women. Sanger’s account is exemplary of the problematic history of prostitution in sub-Saharan Africa that is, for the most part, reliant on European male perspectives drawing from a history of conquest, colonialism, and racism. While little is known about prostitution prior to Africa’s colonial encounter, it is unlikely that any institutionalized form of sexual commerce existed
(Nelson 1987), and it is certain that what would become street-based prostitution developed alongside colonialism.

Many historians have documented that slavery and forced prostitution were often synonymous in the early colonization of Africa. According to Nils Ringdal’s (2003) historical account, the earliest documentation of prostitution was in the 17th century, not long after Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1497. European merchants sailing to the Orient often traded along West Africa’s Guinea Coast, and it was common for chiefs to send women onto these merchant ships as a sign of hospitality. Similarly, under Arab colonization in East Africa, sex with women slaves in plantations was offered to all visitors. By the beginning of the 18th century the East India Company had established a slave lodge, housing female sex slaves for its employees, sailors, and soldiers in the newly founded Cape Town. This is widely regarded as South Africa’s first major brothel. Here, female slaves were brought from West Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Madagascar, Mauritius, India, and Indonesia (ibid.).

As Henry Trotter (2008) has documented in his study of dockside prostitution in Cape Town, one official from the East India Company crudely said: “the motto of the slave women was Kammene Kas, Kammene Kunte,” which translates as “no cash, no cunt” (7). Slave traders who explored Africa’s interior observed free women who sold sexual services and even bartered in public over prices, but did not work for themselves. According to Ringdal (2003), these women “were content, self-assured, and well-dressed. But the women did not keep their earnings – they went to the local prince, their chief and employer” (230). In Nigeria, women reportedly sold kola nuts to men and also brought them back to their huts to sell sex. In Ghana, some women left their husbands and travelled to neighbouring villages negotiating the sale of sexual services in each new place (ibid.).

By the year 1900, missionaries had a stronghold across the continent within the context of an increasingly socially stratified Africa. While polygamy expanded alongside social and economic institutions among the elite, this was strongly opposed by Christian
religious missions. Women and daughters of converted families were encouraged to migrate to cities:

Missionaries…strongly urged the women to seize the day, leave the village, and become independent; they iterated repeatedly that men and women were the same in the eyes of God. As they explained about Jerusalem and its pearly gates, they surely didn’t have in mind prostitution in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, or Lagos. But in new African cities, there were almost no industries providing good money to women, apart from prostitution (ibid. 233-234).

In fact, in some historical accounts missionaries were actually running the brothels. For example in 1874 Benin, one Wesleyan Pastor had been operating a West African brothel for more than 20 years where he employed his own daughters as prostitutes. During this same time throughout the scramble for Africa, “prostitution spread over almost the whole continent, following the heels of the colonial armies and in pacts with the expansion of colonial administration” (ibid. 235). The discovery and extraction of natural resources resulted in global migrations to African sub-regions. With the allowable infrastructure and a client base of male workers, migrant female prostitution also exploded across the continent, particularly in South and East Africa.

2.2 Migration and Street Prostitution in Colonial East Africa

The railway lines from Mozambique to Johannesburg and from Mombasa to Lake Victoria gave both European and African prostitutes greater access to almost exclusively male migrants without wives throughout the development of mining societies, the growth of bureaucracies, and industrial development. Prostitution became more and more prevalent, even in remote station towns along the railways, but especially in the cities. The East India Company’s slave lodge in Cape Town was gradually replaced with independent, mostly white, prostitutes and in Johannesburg as soon as the railway finished, 133 brothels were quickly established. According to Trotter’s (2008) historical account, “diggers, pimps, and prostitutes passed through the ports, some never going any further,” and European traffickers brought in “continental women” by the thousands to
sell sex throughout South Africa (8). The Boer War resulted in a surge in prostitution there due to demand from soldiers, and as Ringdal (2003) argues, Johannesburg was soon among the world’s “sex metropoles” (239) with many brothels catering to particular nationalities (Trotter 2008).

In East Africa, World War I resulted in a comparable upsurge; however, prostitution there had followed a unique trajectory. Most notably, female migrant prostitutes were predominantly independent and had been engaging in intraregional migration since the early 1900s. According to Ringdal (2003),

A woman from Uganda could perhaps become a prostitute in Nairobi and contemplate traveling to Mombasa or Dar es Salaam, scarcely any farther. Almost all worked for themselves, and very few agents or middlemen demanded a share of the profits (240-241).

This points to a body of feminist scholarship that documents the history of migration and prostitution in colonial Nairobi in particular from a critical perspective, supplementing historical documents with oral life histories.

According to these accounts, migrant prostitution for women in colonial Nairobi was built on the foundation of freedom from marriage and property ownership. The first prostitutes in Nairobi certainly followed the camps of British soldiers and Asian railway workers in the early 1900s; however, what compelled them to migrate to Nairobi was largely a reflection of unequal patriarchal norms. In Janet Bujra’s (1975) historical account, she cites a Luhya woman who ran away from an abusive husband, a Nandi woman who left after her husband took a second wife, and a Kikuyu woman avoiding a forced marriage all migrating to Nairobi for prostitution (217). Similarly, Paola Tabet (1989) explains why women migrated to Nairobi as prostitutes:

They migrate to escape an intolerable marriage, to avoid being beaten by a husband, or being forced into another marriage, to get out of the control of their families, and/or to get economic autonomy… And cities are the places where most opportunities are available (205).
Thus for many women the old saying, “town air makes free” was especially applicable (Bujra 1975:230), and property ownership was critical for these migrant prostitutes.

Bujra (ibid.) also tells the story of one of the first Nandi prostitutes in Nairobi who was legendary for her success. She was able to build a house for herself and by the late 1920s, several settlements had a large population of migrant prostitutes living independently and owning their own houses. Some women were even able to acquire multiple houses and become landlords and shop owners (ibid.). However, other women decided to invest in property outside of Nairobi or even resettle back to their rural homes. By the mid-1900s, the association of female autonomous migration to urban centres with promiscuity was firmly entrenched in Kenyan society (and across Africa). The “Lost Women Ordinance” stipulated no Nandi woman could migrate without the Chief’s permission and the Luo Welfare Association of Mombasa forcibly transported migrant prostitutes back to their rural homes (Tabet 1989:204-205). In similar efforts to rid Nairobi of prostitution, police carried out sweeps and arrested unmarried or unemployed women who were abruptly sent back to their place of origin (Nelson 1987). Despite these attempts at regulation and criminalization, migration for prostitution in colonial Nairobi continued to grow and prostitution took on distinct forms of labour throughout the 20th century at the street level.

2.3 Forms of Street Level Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi

Luise White (1990) has most extensively documented different forms of prostitution in colonial Nairobi from a gendered perspective. Focusing on the earnings of Kenyan prostitutes, she uses historical data and oral histories to argue that these different forms directly reflected prostitutes’ access to housing during a time when the colonial system relied on male migrant labour. A unique set of gendered relationships, organization of work, and rate of accumulation characterized each form. Furthermore, women often practiced more than one form or even adapted labour forms to suit their economic needs. Most importantly, all of the different forms of prostitution were defined by a specific relationship to property in the highly competitive housing market of colonial Nairobi. This was critical for White (ibid.) because such a conceptualization challenged normative descriptions of prostitution during the 1900s as fraught with deviance and immorality,
showed that the sex worker-pimp is not an inevitable relationship in the evolution of prostitution, and emphasized how early prostitutes in Kenya used their income to own property and gain economic independence (ibid.).

*Watembezi*, which loosely translates from Swahili to streetwalking, was firmly established in Kenyan cities by the 1800s (Izugbara 2011). Originating from the Swahili verb *kutembea*, or “to walk,” *watembezi* prostitution refers to women who sold sex from public places, not only streets, but also from hotels, pubs, and bars. This type of prostitution was associated with high earnings over short periods of time, the greatest risk faced being police harassment. *Watembezi* prostitutes were usually migrant women who often shared a room together and financially supported extended families, spouses, and dependents. *Malaya*, which is the Swahili word for prostitute, first emerged in Nairobi around the 1920s, and refers to women who provided men with domestic services and a room in addition to sex. *Malaya* women in Nairobi provided food, washing, and companionship, mimicking traditional gender roles in marriage. This type of prostitution often resulted in slow and steady accumulation and required financial planning and a long-term commitment. *Malaya* prostitutes most often established themselves as female heads of households and invested their earnings in urban real estate. *Malaya* prostitution was generally perceived as more respectable than streetwalking because it was a professional labour form and it also reproduced male migrant labour (White 1990). In fact, *malaya* prostitution was seen as indispensable to the colonial administration because they saw it as a way to save on housing costs for migrant labourers while also allowing for wages insufficient to support a migrant labourer’s family (Robertson 1997).

With much more control over their clients and labour form, *wazi-wazi* prostitution emerged alongside *malaya* women during the 1920s and was mostly associated with women from present-day Tanzania. *Wazi-wazi* women, which translates as clearly or openly, solicited men by the doors of their rooms, outside apartments, or in balconies and provided few, if any, domestic or overnight services. These women were known for working intensely for periods of years in order to send remittances home to their parents in times of economic stress. As White (1990) notes, “In the 1940s returning Haya women – who had given the wazi-wazi form its name in Nairobi – were said to have saved a
generation of indebted cash crop producers” (321). Wazi-wazi women were also renowned for being aggressive and bold, often yelling publicly what sexual services they offered and soliciting clients as they returned home from work (ibid.).

In Ringdal’s (2003) account he notes this was part of a historical transition in the labour forms of prostitution in Kenya during the colonial period, moving away from the provision of domestic services and a substitute-wife relationship (319). This advent of the wazi-wazi labour form, wherein the price of sex was always determined beforehand, predicated the social reorganization of prostitution in colonial Nairobi after Kenya’s independence in 1963. As a result of relaxed mobility laws during the post-independence period, rural to urban migration drastically increased and a rise in tourism, industrialization, the intensification of cash crops, and the growth in cross-border trade all contributed to an increase in prostitution (Izugbara 2011). By the 1970s in Nairobi, “quick service” – a transaction lasting only about twenty-minutes – was now offered, so too were relationships that mimicked traditional gender relationships and sometimes lasted for years, termed “town marriage” (Nelson 1987). Street level prostitution became more common than ever before, Nairobi’s commercial sector grew, and the first nightclubs opened by the early 1980s along its epicentre, Koinange Street, where Kenya’s infamous red light district remains today (White 1990).

2.4 Urban Geographies and Kenya’s Red Light District

Some say that the term “red light district” originates from railroading in the early American west, when workers left red lanterns outside of brothels so they could be located quickly when trains were leaving. While the origins of the term are uncertain, the colour red has held historical meaning for commercial sex globally. In times of high criminalization and regulation, prostitutes all over the world would use red lanterns, a red scarf, or a red piece of clothing hung outside their rooms or inside their window to indicate they were open for business. In China, red paper lanterns have also been used to mark brothels and in Japan the term for red light district is akasen, which translates directly to “red line,” from when police would draw red lines on maps to indicate legal areas of prostitution. Of course in Amsterdam, perhaps the most famous red light district of all, the first window prostitutes illuminated their rooms with red lampshades before
being replaced with the neon red-lit windows of today (Keire 2010; Ryder 2010; Sabat 2012). And since 2003, the red umbrella has now become the internationally recognized symbol of the global sex workers’ rights movement.

Most importantly, the widespread use of the term red light district emerged from the distinct spatial organization of prostitution within cities (Hubbard and Whowell 2008; Maginn and Steinmetz 2014). In Kenya, Koinange Street evolved, like many red light districts do, organized around Nairobi’s central business and entertainment zones. Today what characterizes Koinange Street, also known as K-Street, is how Kantai (2008) describes it in the narrative of Marabou: “red lights of cars soundlessly gliding…heels clattering after red lights – tail-lights, brake-lights – and up and down the street.” Nairobi is also Kenya’s capital for sex workers’ rights activism and for the first time in 2010, sex workers joined other major cities throughout the world on December 17th, the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, marching down K-Street in a sea of red umbrellas. However, all of the actors, organizations, policies, and gendered sexual-economic transactions that occur in this socio-spatial geography of street level sex work extend far beyond Nairobi’s notorious Koinange Street.

2.4.1 Interlude: “The Street is Kenya”

We must not think that Koinange Street ends here in Nairobi… As she walked along the streets, the history of women in Kenya spoke to Rika. People spoke about single women as a ‘phenomenon’ that sprang up mainly after the Kenyan Emergency and Mau Mau struggle for independence when men were detained. Rika knew that all sorts of women always existed but that their diversity was often overlooked… In the past they were accepted if they became mothers, but now, not all single women were getting babies. Single women even when they had babies were seen as outsiders...

Rika knew that the girls on the streets looking for money were bright. They understood that the underworld is not always in dark places and slums. They knew there was an underworld even where lights twinkled best. They also knew how to handle their issues. For them, it did not matter what they were charged with in the law courts when they were
arraigned in Makadara and Kibera. They knew their own law and how to make it hurt them less.

“Let me tell you,” Deni who had been arrested the previous night was heard by Rika warning the girls, “If you have never been arrested again, this is the trick. Say yes, to everything they charge you with!”

“Aaaah?” questioned the voice of one new to the streets.

“Yes, this is how to handle the swoop. If they say you are a prostitute you say ‘yes’ and pay 500 shillings and you can go home, if you say ‘no’ thinking to fight for your morality, you will be incarcerated in Lang’ata Women’s prison for fourteen days, and that is hard! Think of your children. It is tough!”...

Koinange Street is about 800 metres long. It has the University of Nairobi Campus for its head if you prefer, facing Gandhi Wing, and the Catholic Holy Family Minor Basilica… for its feet… In the colonial past, Koinange Street was known as Sadler Street… When she thought of it, Koinange Street, Nairobi’s famous red-light district was interesting. Perhaps all red-light districts are. By day, Koinange Street is a serious business hub with up-market traders going in and out of shops… Koinange Street is kissed by important places and people.

The red-business district was intricate and so much wider than people thought. Rika remembered Nguvu the driver who could find a direct route through the back streets from Mathare slums to K-Street as he called Koinange Street almost with his eyes closed. On this K-Street and other places, poor girls in glamour that would outdo Donna’s dressing and when necessary Queen Sheba’s regalia marched gloriously in clothes bought from previous earnings, borrowed or hired. They zigzagged from poverty and found a way to meet men from the club of the upperworld...

Some of these girls moved on to the suburbs of the wealthy; initially sharing rented guest wing houses. They ended up buying out entire estate houses in Eastlands, and finally houses in the Westlands posh area too.
But a happy ending was not for everyone, many girls died before they even knew the whole city. Yet others were stuck in the streets and gummed down in the slums by disease. They were in a sea of greater moral depravity and material poverty coping with stigmas galore; and yet, here in the slums, they still found laughter in their bones and the tickle of adventure did not abandon them. This was something that truly fascinated Rika... This made her think about all humanity... Rika saw many times that Kenyans walking, talking, eating, and laughing on K-Street come from anywhere. Some had been to church early in the morning, others to Parliament. Some had just been released from hospital after about four weeks in the wards, others had come from other towns, classrooms, hotels, and the slums too. The street was Kenya.

From the perspective of Rika, a journalist writing about K-Street sex workers, this excerpt from feminist activist Philo Ikonya’s (2010:32-71) novel Leading the Night introduces a number of street level realities that resonate with female sex workers across Kenya. Such everyday, work-related hazards include high rates of sexual and gender based violence, increased risk of STI and HIV transmission, and levels of criminalization and stigmatization so powerful that Kenyan female sex workers often encounter basic human rights violations on a daily basis. However, Ikonya also emphasizes the importance of both humanizing and complicating stereotypical sex worker narratives, making sure voices of agency are heard within the geography of street level sex work. Furthermore, when Ikonya says Koinange Street does not end in Nairobi and that the street is Kenya, she alludes to the spatial myth that the red light district is an urban phenomenon exclusive to major cities (Maginn and Steinmetz 2014), while also providing an important comparative dimension for the scope of street-based sex work in Naivasha.

2.5 Little K-Street: Naivasha’s Red Light District

Naivasha’s red light district is considerably smaller than Koinange Street, a couple of street blocks surrounded by several transit stages and extending along the major highway; some people refer to it as K-Street kidogo, or, “little K-Street.” Officially known as Kariuki Chotara Road, in between Biashara Road and Kenyatta Avenue, the two main streets in Naivasha, it is, like Koinange Street, a smaller scale business district by day.
Map 3: Little K-Street in Naivasha Town

During business hours, the pavement is lined with the traffic of everyday commercial life: professionals, vendors, and hawkers; moto-taxis, cars, matatus, and donkey-carts; dusty walkways leading the way from shop to shop and people with their livelihoods in tow. Some carried on their heads or in their pockets, some pushed in wagons or held in paper bags. The transition from day to night-work on the street is gradual. Commercial businesses close in the early evening and by that time the street is already lined with women in the shadows, alone or groups of two and three, standing in doorways or seated on window ledges. It might take 15 minutes to walk from the first bar at the southern end
of the street, close to Naivas Supermarket, to the last nightclub on Moi Avenue traveling north along the highway, before you leave Naivasha Town (See Map 3).

Corner Bar, SupaLodge, Othaya, Top Lodge, Kafico’s, Thrills, Litmus, Labelle’s, Carnival – these are some of the most popular bars, pubs, hotels, lodgings, and clubs that street-based sex work occurs from, either inside these venues or along the stoops, curbsides, and highway that connect them all. If you enter SupaLodge, one of the first bars, you can see some women sitting alone with a drink, waiting for a client, while others already sit next to someone, pretending to be interested in conversation. Smoke fills the air and loud music booms from a television, mounted in a corner. At the back another door opens up to a small compound surrounded by ten or so rooms for rent. You pass several more of these smaller pubs along K-Street before you reach Othaya, the largest, two-story bar that also has lodgings. By nine or ten o’clock at night, all of the moto-taxis in Naivasha, the most affordable mode of transport after public means, have gathered in front of its entrance waiting for customers.

From here, a quick left turn and you will arrive at LaBelle Inn, along the highway now. Just opposite the historical railway station, this hotel was established in 1926 to accommodate colonial travellers at the mouth of the Great Rift Valley. Ownership has passed down from generation to generation, this the most coveted place to work from for a sex worker, catering to Naivasha’s highest paying upper class, expatriates, and tourists. Any sex worker from Naivasha who frequents LaBelle’s will be able to survey the big cars parked out front and tell you who is inside, what land and property they own, and how much they have paid, or might pay, for sex. Othaya, with a balcony overlooking K-Street, and LaBelle’s with a veranda along the highway, provide the two best viewpoints from which to observe street level nightlife and listen to sex worker gossip.

By 11 or so everyone’s gaze is upon the women you will surely see passing by in skin-tight mini-dresses and sky-high heels on their way to the clubs. Trucks will be parked all along the highway, a small Total gas station with a restaurant on the right hand side. Once every couple of months the Total café by day turns into a bar at night, hosting topless strippers from Nairobi. Three nightclubs are clustered together just before the
roundabout that leads out of Naivasha. You have to cross a gravel pathway to enter Thrills, the busiest on Thursday nights when they have a live band playing. More than once a man will offer his hand to help steady a woman’s stilettos on the gravel and a sex worker with great skill might even secure her client in that moment, before even entering the small and narrow, dimly lit club. Across the highway is Litmus, a modernized disco complete with bouncers, strobe lights, a dance floor, and booths lined in fake red leather for seating. Along these streets and inside these venues, this is the core of Naivasha’s red light district, the geography of K-Street *kidogo*, from which multiple different types of sex work are practiced.

2.6 Forms of Street Level Sex Work in Contemporary Naivasha

In the Ministry of Public Health’s (2010a) national guidelines for STI and HIV programming for sex workers, the structure of sex work in Kenya is defined by the sex work pattern, price, and transaction at distinct spots. Among these spot typologies they identify street-based, where sex workers solicit clients in public places, on streets and in car parks; venue-based, where sex workers work from locations such as bars, nightclubs, or hotels; and, sex den-based, where sex workers operate from a lodging or other establishment with a number of rooms used for selling sex. Using these spot typologies, a recent study estimated that there are approximately 925 female sex workers operating from 152 active and distinct sex work spots in Naivasha (Odek, et al. 2014). However, this research reveals that multiple spot typologies overlap at the street level, the nature of sexual-economic transactions at sex work spots reflect distinct labour forms and gender norms, and that these sex work spaces are governed by a stratified, hierarchical sex worker organizing system.

Contemporary sexual-economic exchange from the street level in Naivasha can generally be grouped into three different forms: “short time” and per night, dating, and “come we stay.” Ultimately, what define these transactions today are the different levels of gendered ambiguity and directive in which sexual service is being transacted for what economic benefits. Against a local context that warrants female sex workers battle intense criminalization and stigma daily, individual sex work practices, the sex worker
community, and traditional gender norms reflected in sexual-economic exchanges are constantly changing. Furthermore, class, race, ethnicity, age, and HIV status have emerged as powerful social locations complicating sex workers’ everyday experiences in street-based sex work. While these different street level labour forms still bear some resemblance to those in colonial and post-independent Kenya, we see in the everyday working environment of the contemporary street-based economy what challenges and opportunities the turn of the globalized, 21st century has brought for female sex workers in Naivasha.

2.6.1 “Short Time” and Per Night

Short time is now a widespread practice similar to what Nici Nelson (1987) observed in the late 1970’s Nairobi slums – the 20 minute “quick service” she referred to. While short time has been a predominantly urban phenomenon, over the last 15 years it has gradually taken root in smaller towns throughout Kenya. In places where it is highly institutionalized, like the city-centres of Nairobi and Mombasa for example, you will find sex workers operating from lodgings selling sex in five-minute increments of time. If that time is exceeded, the client must add money to the agreed upon price, which varies from 300-500 Kenyan shillings (KES), about three to five US dollars (USD). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, short time was not well known in Naivasha and was introduced during a time when STI and HIV programs were not yet well established in rural areas, sometime after the year 2000. Sex workers today tell ghost stories of women who, during those early days, would sell short time for 50 KES without condoms, using coca cola douches between clients. In Naivasha today, short time, while much more widely practised and with better-informed protective strategies, is still sold although in longer, 30-minute increments of time. Short time results in a higher income for many women who are able to sell sex to multiple clients in one night, making it preferable to spending the entire night with just one client. Short time versus per night is often a purely economic calculation and, if a woman has already had two or three short time clients or cannot find short time work, she will seek out a per night customer. What defines both short time and per night sexual-economic transactions are not the sex work spot, because
they can be solicited from anywhere at the street level; rather, it is the explicit nature of the transaction.

2.6.2 Dating

Much sexual commerce in Naivasha, however, is more ambiguous, mimicking modernized notions of dating and romance, especially from pubs, bars, hotels, and nightclubs. In these sexual-economic exchanges, there are often differing levels of performativity, authenticity, and underlying gender norms. Women sometimes find it difficult to negotiate prices for selling sex directly and men often do not identify themselves as a client interested in purchasing sex. As a result, the interaction looks like gendered ideas of dating in Kenya, where the man purchases drinks and maybe even dinner, and the woman will often spend the night without negotiating a price beforehand. Although you will also find even the most established and skilful sex workers ascribe to the performativity of dating in order to secure transactional sex relationships with high end clients, wazungu, businessmen, and government officials among the most desirable. The economic benefits in these relationships are almost never immediate, involving considerable time, investment, and even cunning while women juggle other clients making sure these boyfriends or “sugar daddies” are unaware that they are sex workers.

What defines sexual-economic transactions in dating is not only their ambiguity, but also the critical element of secrecy wherein both the seller and the buyer understand that they are engaging in sexual-economic exchange but neither one is able to directly negotiate this transaction.

2.6.3 “Come We Stay”

Come we stay is a term for a live-in transactional sex relationship, which again involves varying degrees of performativity, authenticity, and underlying gender norms. This type of “town marriage” (Nelson 1987) sometimes results in a mutually beneficial arrangement wherein women provide both sexual and domestic services and men provide basic needs, like food and shelter, in times of economic crisis. However, the majority of female sex workers who engage in come we stay relationships often continue to sell sex at the street level, at least part-time, without their live-in boyfriends knowing in order to
maintain some level of economic independence and generate savings. Female sex workers often resist particular gendered expectations within these relationships, especially visiting the man’s rural home to meet his extended family and having children, which is what distinguishes a temporary come we stay from a more permanent, traditional marriage. In traditional Kenyan society, especially in rural areas, it is still very uncommon for unmarried men and women to live together and many people view come we stays as damaging to the institution of marriage, associated with both immorality and promiscuity. These relationships can last anywhere from several months to years, although usually not longer than one year, and sex workers often move in and out of come we stays purely based on economic need.

2.7 Sex Worker Social Organization

All of these different forms of sex work and all of the different sex worker spots at the street level in Naivasha are overseen by a stratified and hierarchical system of sex worker governance. Across East Africa, few studies have examined the socio-political organization of sex workers and so very little is known about how sexual commerce is structured. There are some notable exceptions. For example, in both Uganda and Ethiopia it has been documented that sex workers sometimes work from specific bars where the owners regulate sex workers’ behaviours and also act as intermediaries in negotiating with clients (Gysels, et al. 2002; van Blerk 2011). However, as White (1990) notes the absence of pimps in Kenya’s history, she argues that there is nothing inevitable about intermediaries in sexual-economic transactions. Whether pimps, madams, bar owners, or other actors, no intermediaries were present in street level sex work in Naivasha. Instead, it is sex worker leaders who dictate who gains access to selling sex at particular spots, who both construct and enforce ideas of good and bad sex work practices, and who also promote safe working environments in a number of ways.

At the foundation of this sex worker organizing system is the payment of fees to sex worker leaders, which are known as penalties. When a woman decides to enter sex work, she must pay a penalty to sell at any spot and when a sex worker wants to sell at multiple locations, she must pay a penalty at each separate spot. When a sex worker moves to new places, she must also pay penalties to sex worker leaders in each town or city. These
leaders are referred to as sex workers *wakubwa*, which loosely translates as elders, and the prices of penalties vary considerably from spot to spot and from place to place. Along K-Street *kidogo* in Naivasha, to sell at most of the bars and pubs like SupaLodge and Othaya sex workers charge 200-300 KES for penalties. The penalties at nightclubs like Litmus and Thrills are slightly more, costing 500 KES and at LaBelle’s, the most elite sex worker spot, the penalty price is 1,000 KES. These different penalty prices represent lower, middle, and upper status sex worker spots, a hierarchy of sorts, that is reinforced by the sex worker leaders. This is similar to Lorraine van Blerk’s (2011) findings in Ethiopia where such a hierarchy results in exclusionary spaces of sex work based on women’s economic and social status; however, in Naivasha it is sex worker leaders and not bar owners who regulate these spaces.

The following narrative of Wanjiku demonstrates how you become a sex worker *mkubwa* in Naivasha and the responsibilities of this role. Wanjiku was a 32-year-old sex worker who came from a middle class farming family in Naivasha and was also a divorced, single mother of three. She had been doing sex work along little K-Street for nearly 10 years and had been a sex worker leader for about five years, elected informally by the larger sex worker community when she demonstrated leadership qualities:

> When I started, they went for funeral arrangement of another woman who was hit by a car, we were contributing, there was nobody to keep the money. I volunteered myself. Since then, they elected me, other sex workers, to keep their money, stay with them, and be their leader… It depends with the way you keep yourself. People can see you and see you’re a leader.

Wanjiku alluded to the informal process by which most sex worker leaders are identified and then elected, normally on the basis of seniority, a non-migrant, and someone who displays the abilities to both manage and mentor street level sex workers. While there are few monetary benefits to being a sex worker leader because these penalties are normally shared or otherwise distributed, this is a highly respected and powerful position socially. Wanjiku described the kinds of responsibilities of a sex worker *mkubwa*, which involved
not only determining who can sell sex and collecting penalties, but also addressing the complaints of the larger sex worker community:

I can even go speak to a lady who isn’t feeding her kids. They want to complain on anything, they send me. They send new sex workers to me, here on the street. If they are well disciplined they can continue working for their kids’ money. I charge them maybe 100 or 200 KES, like that. I take and give the rest to other sex workers; they take and share a cup of tea together. Then they accept you in the street.

One of the most important roles of a sex worker leader, then, is to promote a particular kind of behaviour among sex workers that constructs an idea of who is a good and bad sex worker. This notion extends to ideas of good and bad mothering practices. Excessive alcohol consumption, fighting with other sex workers or clients, stealing, unkempt appearance or poor personal hygiene, and neglecting your children were qualities Wanjiku listed as bad sex work practices. She further explained the consequences of not ascribing to the principles of a good sex worker:

There are like two other sex workers wakubwa [at this spot] and we discipline you, if you stay good you’re okay. But you come and every now and then you’re fighting, you’re not a good person, you can be abandoning your kids. If somebody is fighting always and everybody is complaining about her, we call the rest and we chase her from the street. Or maybe she changes. Someone can talk to her and she changes. Every town has sex workers wakubwa like this.

Sex worker leaders’ responsibilities go beyond this construction of good and bad sex working and include helping to ensure a safe and secure working environment for sex workers. For example, Wanjiku is a trained peer educator under the Ministry of Public Health’s (2010b) standards for peer education and outreach programs for sex workers and often counsels women on how to negotiate for condom use and where to access pro-sex healthcare services. Furthermore, when a sex worker pays a penalty she is not only purchasing the right to sell sex at a specific spot, she is also buying into a form of collective social protection that the larger sex worker community provides. Sex workers
often tip each other off to a police presence or an aggressive client, pool their money and fundraise for a particular cause, and participate in community development initiatives wherein sex workers *wakubwa* play key leadership roles.

### 2.8 Criminalization and Stigmatization in Street Level Sex Work

Street level sex work in Naivasha comes with a number of occupational dangers due to the intense criminalization and stigmatization experienced by female sex workers. The resulting sexual and gender based violence, unlawful arrest and imprisonment, extortion, exploitation, and exclusion experienced by female sex workers in Kenya, especially their extensive human rights violations, have been well documented (cf. FIDA 2008; Izugbara 2011; Okal, et al. 2011; Scorgie, et al. 2013b). Most studies are located in major Kenyan cities, such as Nairobi and Mombasa, providing critical narratives on the socio-legal context of urban street level sex work. One comparative study examined sexual and physical violence against female sex workers in Naivasha, noting too that this town has a concentrated sex worker population from both truck drivers and flower farms (Okal, et al. 2011). Jerry Okal et al. (ibid.) argue that female sex workers here predominantly experience violence from police and clients as a result of the legal institutions and social norms surrounding sex work in Kenya. This research similarly found that the crime and stigma associated with sex work profoundly shapes women’s relationships with police, their clients, and the larger society.

#### 2.8.1 Police and Sex Worker Interactions

In Naivasha, Kenyan national law and municipal by-laws criminalize sex work both indirectly and directly. The Penal Code, adopted from the British colonial government, identifies “living on the earnings of prostitution” as a punishable offence. Neither the Penal Code nor the more recent 2006 Sexual Offences Act defines or directly criminalizes prostitution, but the legislation instead criminalizes third parties who financially benefit from sex work. However, subsidiary legislation across Kenya directly criminalizes sex work. For example, the Nairobi General Nuisance by-laws state: “any person who in any street – loiters or importunes for the purposes of prostitution is guilty
of an offence” (FIDA 2008; Okal, et al. 2011). Through the enforcement of these anti-prostitution laws, female sex workers in Naivasha face abuse and arrest by police in their everyday, lived experiences of criminalization.

The narrative of Alice clearly demonstrates the kind of daily police and sex worker interactions in Naivasha, which often involved bribery, extortion, and violence. Alice was a 36-year-old single mother of three who had been a sex worker for 13 years. During that time, she recounted her experiences with police in Naivasha:

I’ve been arrested so many times. Sometimes we fuck with them or bribe them; they release you… When you get to the station he tells you to go to his place. If he's done with you he releases you. A shot then you're released to go to work.

Monica, a 39-year-old, divorced, single mother of four who had been doing sex work for 12 years echoed a similar story of her encounters with police:

I've been arrested so many times, it's like 20 times. There are those who take you to his place, you fuck, he releases you. I've fucked at least five times [to be released]… They don't use condoms. None of the five used condoms.

Because police in Kenya are underpaid, making at most 20,000 KES monthly, female sex workers are often arbitrarily arrested in order to supplement these incomes with bribes. This entrenched system of bribery has also led to repeated sexual extortion from sex workers where women will exchange a short time to be released from custody. These exchanges often occur at the police station, in holding cells, in police officers’ cars or their personal residences. Furthermore, women lose all negotiating power for protection in these interactions when facing arrest and detention, and all participants reported low condom use by police. When arrested, women also sometimes faced exploitation and mistreatment. For example, Nyambura, a 23-year-old sex worker and single mother of one who had been a sex worker for one year told of her experience:
I was arrested for 12 hours. Imprisonment. I cleaned the offices there, sweeping, then I was released in the evening. When you are arrested and the following day you are forced to work there, that’s the worst thing.

Most street level sex workers expressed that they felt abject hatred from police officers on a daily basis. In addition to bribery, extortion, and exploitation, women also reported being beaten, humiliated, and harassed during arrest and while in custody. Few female sex workers understood their legal rights and none had access to legal representation when they were charged or faced jail time. This led some women to seek out protection from police officers through transactional sex relationships, although this seldom prevented women from being subject to abuse and arrest by police.

2.8.2 Client and Sex Worker Interactions

Consistent with other findings from Kenya, female sex workers’ everyday interactions with clients along little K-Street resulted in high incidents of sexual and gender based violence (Izugbara 2011; Okal, et al. 2011; Scorgie, et al. 2013b). Customers often took advantage of female sex workers’ discriminatory working conditions and poor police relations, aware that there were seldom any legal consequences for committing violence against sex workers in Kenya (FIDA 2008). All research participants in Naivasha had at some point in their career experienced forms of violence, including beatings, rape, gang rape, sodomy, forced bestiality, intentional STI and HIV infection, and armed robbery, among others. Many instances of violence were the result of clients refusing to wear condoms (Okal, et al. 2011). These narratives of violence were often framed as clients using or owning women not only because they had paid for sex, but also simply because they were sex workers. For example, Mercy was a 23-year-old, single sex worker without dependents who had been doing sex work for four years in Naivasha. She described how degrading she found clients’ treatment of her:

The word prostitute… in the Swahili language it’s you malaya, it’s very hurting. And someone tells you, you malaya come here do this and do that; you’re here to do what I want.
Similarly, Waringa, a 32-year-old single mother of two who had been in sex work for fifteen years, noted how this sometimes resulted in rough or violent sex: “Men take you as a bad person. Even if it’s a shot they fuck you bad, they use you very badly.” In addition to cases of sexual and gender based violence that almost always go unreported, many women had known, or known of, female sex workers who had been murdered by clients. These cases are rarely prosecuted in Kenya (Izugbara 2011). Linda, a 24-year-old single mother of two who had been doing sex work for four years explained the everyday fear she experienced because of this daily threat of violence when interacting with clients: “I’m scared because you know you can go to a room…ladies are killed in their rooms… They’re beaten, some are killed in their rooms, and others are not paid.”

2.8.3 Society and Sex Worker Interactions

As in most countries, sex work in is so severely stigmatized in Kenya that female sex workers navigate shame within the larger society on a daily basis. In their comparative study of the human rights abuses among sex workers across Africa, Fiona Scorgie et al. (2013b) note that in East Africa especially the theme emerges that sex workers are not even perceived to be human. This is consistent with female sex workers in Naivasha who repeatedly expressed that people in Kenya do not see sex workers like people. For example, Waithira, a 29-year-old single mother of two and a sex worker for two years said, “They hate us. They don’t see us like people. We just look like problems.” Wanjiru, a 27-year-old sex worker for four years and single, without dependents also described the perceptions of the wider society:

People think sex workers are bad, they are dangerous, they are diseased. They believe that the sex workers are the ones who have HIV, who commit crimes; who commit the worst sins just by being a sex worker.

This stigma was often closely associated with the perception that sex work is not only immoral but also that all sex workers are HIV positive and spread disease. For Nekesa, a 32-year-old sex worker also single and without children, she had been in sex work for 13 years and often experienced this kind of stigma:
Most people hate prostitutes. There are those ones who tell me to stop…there are those ones who laugh at you and won’t tell you anything… There are those who say prostitutes are all sick. Such things like that.

As a result of this everyday stigmatization, most female sex workers in Naivasha tried to conceal that they were doing sex work especially from their families and other women in their neighbourhoods and communities. This was due to a dominant narrative that female sex workers are widely perceived as “husband snatchers.” Pauline, a 24-year-old sex worker for three years, explained this:

You don’t want them to know the kind of work you do. Because some people think bad when they know what you’re doing. You see when someone knows you’re a prostitute and she’s married she’ll feel that you’ll snatch her husband.

If a married woman discovered her neighbour or friend was a sex worker she could no longer be seen with her for fear of being called a prostitute simply by association. One of the ways married women would stigmatize female sex workers most often was through their children. Mumbi, a retired sex worker who provided an overnight childcare service for sex workers and whose narrative will figure prominently in chapter four, had often experienced this kind of cruelty:

I can remember when I was staying in another plot there. There was a mother who used to hate my kids so much. She used to call them kids of prostitutes. So when we come home from town, we sleep at daytime. I heard her abuse the kids and by then we used to get late to cook for them because we were sleeping. I heard the neighbour telling the kids move from here, you kids of prostitutes. You are prostitutes, your mother goes to sell herself. I don’t have food for kids of prostitutes. Later I heard her say go, your mothers will die of AIDS.

In addition to experiencing stigma at the community level, female sex workers further felt stigmatized when accessing healthcare. This is also consistent with findings in Kenya and across Africa that documents how the criminalization and stigmatization of sex work creates barriers to accessing health services (NSWP 2013; Scorgie, et al. 2013a). Female
sex workers in Naivasha similarly experienced hostility, humiliation, violation of privacy, denial of treatment, and difficulty accessing condoms and lubricant, which often pushed sex workers into expensive, private healthcare or resulted in delayed or no treatment.

2.9 Conclusion

From Africa’s earlier encounters to colonial Nairobi, this chapter has documented the spatial organization of migrant prostitution historically. Seeing the evolution of the different forms of street level sex work in Kenya, beginning with the provision of domestic services to the more direct labour forms of *wazi-wazi*, quick service, and the short time of today has been demonstrated. How shifting gender norms are reproduced in sex work labour forms over time has been further examined, with the colonial substitute-wife relationship being replaced by town marriage in post-independent Kenya, and again evolving into the more casual come we stay arrangements now found in contemporary Naivasha. Furthermore, exploring street-based sex work today reveals many of the issues migrant sex workers face across time and space and in the context of multiple sets of power relationships, at the individual, community, society, and state levels.

In so far as essential, stereotypical representations of street sex work should be countered, the street level is at the same time critical to an understanding of other sex work spaces in Naivasha. While it is demonstrated in this chapter how migration has always been an important dimension to the historical evolution of labour forms in street-based sex work, this chapter also provides an analytical reference point to show how migrant sex work has been reorganized from the street level in the current global political economy. Therefore, the street is in many ways the epicentre; that is, the place which migrant female sex workers will always encounter as they arrive, depart, and transit through Naivasha and also the place from where different migration trajectories overlap. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, displaced sex workers, flower farm workers supplementing their incomes with sex work, and women selling sex along the highways or from their mobile phones still move in and out of the street in various ways.

Street level sex work then, is key to understanding how the street is reconstituted at different migrant sex work spaces in Naivasha. As historical, theoretical, and
ethnographic premise, from the central point of convergence and interconnection at the street, it can be illustrated how migration patterns give different meanings to sexual-economic exchange and shape migrant sex workers’ everyday experiences. Although in this chapter, migrant sex work has been the most marked in historical processes of urbanization at the street level, in subsequent chapters it is demonstrated how different migration patterns shape sexual commerce and migrant sex workers’ lives throughout Kenya’s transition to multi-party politics, structural adjustment, increased highway infrastructure, and the introduction of technology at the very height of globalization. The street is therefore the focal point from which all of these histories, sites, and subjectivities are entangled across time, space, and place and multiple scales of power dynamics, actors, and processes as the following chapters move geographically and phenomenologically from one to the other.
Chapter 3

3 The IDP Camp

Map 4: The IDP camp in Naivasha

This chapter provides an overview of Kenya’s political history throughout colonial rule and post-independence, showing how land and ethnicity have become key issues at the centre of contemporary political clashes. The most recent 2007/2008 post-election violence is examined in detail from a critical gendered perspective, focusing specifically on how women and girls were disproportionately affected during this conflict in Kenya. Problematizing the sexual exploitation and sexualized violence framework of gender and displacement, while also drawing on literary descriptions to further humanize everyday
life in an IDP camp, this chapter primarily documents the 15 migration stories of displaced female sex workers collected at Naivasha’s IDP camp. Recounting the experiences of sex workers resettled in Naivasha who entered sex work at various stages of their displacement – before, during, and after the post-election violence – Naivasha’s IDP camp is conceptualized as a space of overlapping types of sexual-economic exchange over time. This chapter illustrates not only how different types of sexual commerce simultaneously occur at the IDP camp, but also how sex worker IDPs engage in survival sex, transactional sex, and sex work throughout their migration experiences. Furthermore, how displaced sex workers encounter the street level and other scales including, the state, society, and humanitarian aid is also emphasized at this migrant sex work space.

3.1 Kenya’s Political Histories

Kenya’s transition to multi-party politics has been violent, and the Great Rift Valley has been at the centre of historical land and ethnic clashes. Naivasha still bears visible scars from these most recent conflicts in 2007 and 2008: deep on the valley floor as you drive towards the town, you can see on its periphery an IDP camp that is home to thousands who were internally displaced as a result of this post-election violence. However, what happened in the 2007 General Elections and its aftermath was not unique in Kenya’s political history, being rooted deeply in colonialism and land-related conflicts beginning well before the country’s independence in 1963.

When the British arrived in Kenya around 1895, the traditional land tenure systems in Kenyan society were entirely reorganized. The main objective of settlers was to cultivate the agricultural land of the Great Rift Valley, and as a result new land policies and legislation were immediately developed. For example, in 1902 the First Crown Lands Ordinance stated any unoccupied land belonged to the crown, disregarding traditional land rights, and consequently many ethnic groups suffered great land losses. Because the Rift Valley’s agricultural territory was especially attractive to settlers, hundreds of thousands of acres of land were already distributed among British aristocrats in the Naivasha area by this time by the colonial government. For example, 100,000 acres were given to the infamous Lord Delamere alone, who subsequently acquired over 200,000
more acres in the early 1900s extending from Naivasha up the Rift Valley (Rutten and Owuor 2009).

These huge land losses coupled with other policies of the colonial government, including forced labour, taxation, and a mandatory identity card, resulted in protests from local Kenyans. This led to the 1932 Land Commission that investigated these grievances, but ultimately further exacerbated land-related conflicts by promoting the segregation of ethnic groups and land holdings. For example, the administration established native reserves based on ethnicity, which ultimately served as a cheap, landless, labour pool for settler farmlands and there was a further influx of migrant squatters in search of wage labour. This colonial restructuring of access to land was at the core of the Mau Mau rebellion, when Kenya was officially under a state of emergency from 1952-1959 during a period of violent, anti-colonial insurgency. As a result, the colonial government ultimately agreed to introduce the first resettlement schemes by 1960, at the same time the first Kenyan political parties were forming around ethnic lines and the politicization of the control of land (Kanyinga 2009).

The first two political parties in Kenya were the Kenya African Democratic Party (KADU) and the Kenya African National Union (KANU). KADU advocated for the return of land to its pre-colonial inhabitants, which would give the Kalenjin and Maasai control of the Great Rift Valley, while KANU promoted currently established property rights, as their supporters were mostly Kikuyu who had migrated to the Rift Valley under colonialism. KANU won the first elections in 1963, and under the new independent administration of President Jomo Kenyatta resettlement schemes were initiated. By focusing resettlement on landless Kikuyu to the Great Rift Valley, the new Kenyan government and settlers provoked hostility between this ethnic group and Kalenjin, who maintained that they had pre-colonial rights to the arable Rift Valley. Karuti Kanyinga (ibid.) succinctly summarized these hardening ethnic boundaries, noting that:

The solution to landlessness thus resulted in ethnicity becoming an important factor in the land problem and also in national politics. It hardened inter-ethnic
animosity between the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin, the main groups competing to secure rights in the former white highlands (332).

From the 1970s onward, intense land buying competition ensued between the Kikuyu and Kalenjin throughout the Rift Valley through land purchase programmes, which only deepened this ethnic animosity (ibid.).

In 1978, Vice President Daniel Arap Moi became Kenya’s second president and was able to suppress land grievances until the early 1990s, when Kenyan citizens demanded the introduction of multi-party politics. In response, Moi and KANU used the land question to gain political support based on ethnicity, again using the Rift Valley to pit Kikuyu against Kalenjin. This campaign became violent in 1991 when KADU supporters invaded farms and forcibly evicted mostly Kikuyus from the Rift Valley. After Moi was again elected in 1992, ethnic violence erupted throughout the country and approximately 300,000 people were affected and displaced (Adeagbo and Iyi 2011). In 1997 during the weeks after the General Elections, another KANU victory mobilized around the land question, violence targeting the Kikuyu and forced displacement again erupted in the Great Rift Valley. In 2002, Mwai Kibaki ended the 40-year KANU reign since Kenya’s independence, becoming the country’s third president relatively peacefully, with only approximately 325 people dying from election-related violence during this time (Kamungi 2009; Rutten and Owuor 2009).

3.1.1 The 2007/2008 Post-Election Crisis

While the 1992, 1997, and 2002 elections all saw some degree of land related conflicts and ethnic polarization, the issues of land and ethnicity and the ensuing post-election violence in 2007 was the worst Kenya had ever experienced. Two main political parties, the Orange Democratic Movement Party of Kenya (ODM) led by Raila Odinga, and the Party of National Unity (PNU) led by Kibaki, became the main actors throughout this election. ODM’s ethnic alliances included the Luo, Luhya, Nandi, and Kalenjin, while PNU’s supporters were dominated by Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru. Again, the issue of land rights was used as a political tool pitting these ethnic groups against each other, especially through the use of anti-Kikuyu rhetoric. In the months leading up to the
election, hundreds of people had already died in politically fuelled violence and soon after Kibaki was sworn in for a second term on December 30, 2007, post-election violence exploded throughout the country (Kanyinga 2009).

On New Year’s Day 2008, 39 people seeking asylum inside of an Eldoret church, mostly Kikuyus, were burnt to death by ODM supporters. In Naivasha revenge killings of about 50 people, mostly Luos, were subsequently carried out by PNU counterparts, with such spontaneous violence continuing until April 2008. This post-election violence was mostly concentrated in the Great Rift Valley, where Kikuyus were violently forced from their lands and in counter attacks, Luo, Luhya, and Kalenjins were also forced from Kikuyu-dominated areas. Illegal roadblocks were set up by perpetrators on both sides along the Nairobi-Eldoret and Nairobi-Kisumu highways, targeting members of the opposition’s ethnic groups. By the time of the resolution, a coalition government negotiated by former United Nations General Secretary Kofi Annan, nearly 2,000 people had lost their lives and 600,000 had been internally displaced (Kagwanja and Southall 2009; Rutten and Owuor 2009).

In addition to the magnitude of 2007/2008 post-election violence, it is also important to note that this election was distinctive for Kenya in a number of other ways. While land and ethnicity remained at the forefront of political debates, for the first time religion was used as a mobilizing issue in attempts to align with Christians and Muslims. Generation also became a political tool with nearly 60% of the population age 15-35, and the ODM especially campaigned to attract younger supporters. This too was the first time independent opinion polls were used during the campaigns and became contested by both major political parties. Furthermore, the 2007 General Elections were the first to be held during the explosion of new information and communication technologies, and the use of text messages and the internet disseminated election-related information more rapidly than ever before (Cheeseman 2008; Kagwanja and Southall 2009). Finally, the 2007/2008 post-election violence was, for the first time in Kenya’s political history, analysed the most thoroughly from a gendered perspective.
3.2 Gender and the Post-Election Violence

The post-election violence following the 2007 General Elections included, like many conflicts do, an outbreak of sexual violence. While men were certainly affected, and indeed there were reports of sodomy, forced circumcision, and castration of Luo men by Kikuyu perpetrators, women and girls from all ethnic backgrounds were disproportionately targeted (Some 2008; Wanyeki 2008). It is estimated that rape cases in hospitals across Kenya doubled during the post-election period from January to April 2008, with major hospitals in Nairobi reporting up to a three-fold increase in the number of women seeking treatment for sexual violence. For example, the Nairobi Women’s Hospital documented that over 80 percent of their cases during this period were related to sexual violence and 93 percent of these were women. In another Nairobi clinic, it was reported that incidents of rape among women and girls had risen from one per week to 45 rape victims per day during the post-election violence (Shekhawat 2008:13-14).

As Seema Shekhawat (ibid.) rightly emphasizes, this sexual violence against women in Kenya was not merely a reflection of the chaos and anarchy during the post-election period, rather it was a tool used to displace, disrupt, and terrorize. The threat of rape against women was used to chase families from their homes, women were raped with the intention of HIV infection, and wives to husbands from rival ethnic groups were punished through gang rape. Given the patriarchal nature of Kenyan society, sexual violence during the post-election period was also used as a tool to return to traditional, cultural gender norms. Especially in the Great Rift Valley, women and girls experienced forced female genital cutting and there was a widely enforced ban on women wearing trousers through the use of sexualized violence and gang rape (Myrum, et al. 2008; Shekhawat 2008; Wanyeki 2008).

Women and girls seeking refuge at the rapidly established, emergency relief camps for IDPs across Kenya further faced additional forms of sexual and gender based violence. As a result of insecure sleeping arrangements in makeshift tents or out in the open, women and girls remained vulnerable to sexual assault and rape. Because of the design of IDP camps, which lack electricity, water and sanitation, women and girls also reported cases of sexual violence when attempting to access these camp services or when
searching for unavailable basic needs, such as firewood. Throughout this period of violence, displacement, and encampment, it is unknown how many instances of sexual and gender based violence went unreported. Despite efforts from the Kenya Red Cross and other international humanitarian agencies, this reflects the gap in gender equality that persists in Kenya today, the cultural shame associated with disclosing rape, and women’s and girls’ challenges to accessing both police and medical assistance (Myrum, et al. 2008:2).

3.2.1 Forced Migration, IDPs, and Sexual Exploitation

Due to its geopolitical location and because it is home to the Dadaab camps, the largest refugee settlement in the world, Kenya has mainly been analysed as a receiving country for refugees in the forced migration literature. Studies of internal displacement in Kenya are scarce in comparison, despite the fact that those displaced from this election-related violence put Kenya’s IDPs at over one million, most of whom live on the fringes of international refugee law (Kamungi 2013; Parsitau 2011). And while women’s experiences of violence and vulnerability to sexual exploitation during forced migration and political clashes have been widely recognized (Leatherman 2011; Raven-Roberts 2013), sex workers’ experiences are not often examined. Across Africa, this literature on sexual exploitation spans women being forced to live as militants’ “bush wives” (Coulter 2009), forced prostitution, and sexual slavery (Barstow 2000; Sjoberg 2013); women being forced to trade sex for food and humanitarian relief in refugee camps (Murray 2000); and armies militarizing women’s lives in regulated and forced prostitution (cf. "comfort women"; Enloe 1993; 2000; White 1990).

These sexual exploitation narratives are also prevalent within reports of sexual and gender based violence in the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya, especially throughout experiences of encampment (Myrum, et al. 2008; Some 2008). Jody Myrum et al. (2008) summarize these reports across Kenya’s IDP camps:

Sexual exploitation is…a major concern amongst the IDPs. Both women and humanitarian actors across multiple sites reported cases in which women and girls are coerced into exchanging sex for basic resources, such as food, sanitary
supplies, transport, etc. Perpetrators were identified as men from the encamped population, the community, and, in some cases, security personnel. Some reports suggest that sexual exploitation “rings” are being organized by profiteering men from the camps and/or host communities (2).

This concern that women and girls were being forced into “commercial sexual exploitation” (ibid.), while this certainly could have occurred for some women, such narratives of sexualized violence and exploitation overpower the different types of sexual-economic exchange that persist in these contexts. Most notably, this victimization rhetoric does not fully grasp the complexity of sexual commerce as a viable economic activity neither does it recognize sex workers’ unique experiences during Kenya’s post-election violence.

3.3 Internal Displacement and Sex Work

There is a small body of literature in East Africa that seeks to redress the erasure of sex workers’ gendered experiences of violence, displacement, and post-conflict settings. Most notably, Stella Nyanzi (2013) in her study of refugee sex workers in Uganda argues: “Sex work is work, and the rights of sex workers must be respected, protected, and fulfilled in displacement and post-conflict settings” (464). While Nyanzi (ibid.) uses everyday sex worker experiences to contribute to the little knowledge surrounding the characteristics of sexual commerce within displaced communities, it has been noted that the dynamics of sexual-economic exchange are complex among IDPs. Bayard Roberts and Preeti Patel (2010) emphasize these complexities, arguing:

The level of...sex work may depend upon the impoverishment of the displaced population, whether displaced persons’ settlements are located close to heavily populated areas, transportation routes, or other groups such as army or peacekeeping units (57).

This points to the multiple different types of sexual commerce that can overlap in a given IDP camp, as the poverty that results from forced migration and encampment can result in survival sex, while transactional sex and/or sex work can also occur both among IDPs
and between the displaced and host communities (ibid.). These are only some of the surface dynamics of the sexual-economic exchange sex workers engage in at Naivasha’s IDP camp.

3.3.1 Naivasha’s IDP Camp

Just beyond Naivasha Town, along the trans-African Highway and near the Mai Mahiu settlement is home to an oft-forgotten camp for IDPs from the 2007/2008 post-election violence. This camp lies at the very mouth of the Great Rift Valley, resting at the base of sprawling Mount Longonot, on traditional Maasai pastoral lands. There is no road leading into the camp from the highway, and while driveways wind along the row after row of temporary homes, it is only the occasional moto-taxi that might pass by unsettling the dust. Temporary has become transitional for some and permanent for others, even though in 2012 there still remained some families living in plastic tents branded by the United Nations Refugee Agency’s faded UNHCR logos. However for the majority of the 3,000 IDPs living among 10 distinct, smaller camps they are now housed within a Habitat for Humanity settlement project.

Between 2009 and 2012, this international organization gradually replaced the white tents characteristic of emergency relief camps with structured houses. These small, brick homes can be seen one after the other, identical in shape, size, and simplicity. Each has three rooms with cemented walls and floors inside, aluminium rooftops, and an outdoor latrine. There is no running water or electricity, and many homes have only the basic necessities: a few plastic chairs, a mattress on the floor, a handful of donated clothing, and some cooking utensils. It is an ironic inversion of the 12 X 12 homes in bustling human settlements often bursting with furniture, possessions, TVs and radios – instead well-constructed, larger structures stand nearly empty, its residents hidden. It is as though the IDP community here is waiting; waiting for their livelihoods to return, their land and property to be reinstated, their belongings replaced. It is from here; this isolated camp laying in wait, from which sex worker IDPs are using sexual-economic exchange to rebuild their lives and support their families.
3.4 Waiting

My name is Orlando Zaki. Orlando is taken from Orlando, Florida, which is what is written on the t-shirt given to me by the Red Cross. Zaki is the name of the town where I was found and from which I was brought to this refugee camp. My friends in the camp are known by the inscriptions written on their t-shirts. Acapulco wears a t-shirt with the inscription, Acapulco. Sexy’s t-shirt has the inscription Tell Me I’m Sexy. Paris’s t-shirt says See Paris And Die. When she is coming toward me, I close my eyes because I don’t want to die. Even when one gets a new t-shirt, your old name stays with you. Paris just got a new t-shirt that says Ask Me About Jesus, but we still call her Paris and we are not asking her about anybody. There was a girl in the camp once whose t-shirt said Got Milk? She threw the t-shirt away because some of the boys in the camp were always pressing her breasts forcefully to see if they had milk. You cannot know what will be written on your t-shirt. We struggle and fight for them and count ourselves lucky that we get anything at all. Take Lousy for instance; his t-shirt says My Dad Went To Yellowstone And Got Me This Lousy T-shirt. He cannot fight, so he’s not been able to get another one and has been wearing the same t-shirt since he came to the camp...

Here in the camp, we wait and wait and then wait some more. It is the only thing we do. We wait for the food trucks to come and then we form a straight line and then we wait a few minutes for the line to scatter, then we wait for the fight to begin, and then we fight and struggle and bite and kick and curse and tear and grab and run. And then we begin to watch the road and wait to see if the water trucks are coming, we watch for the dust trail, and then we go and fetch our containers and start waiting and then the trucks come and the first few containers are filled and the fight and struggle and tearing and scratching begin because someone has whispered to someone that the water tanker only has little water in it. That is, if we are lucky and the water tanker comes; oftentimes, we just bring out our containers and start waiting and praying for rain to fall...

I want to go and join my friend under the only tree still standing in the camp. Acapulco is raising a handful of red dust into the air to test for breeze; the air is stagnant and the red earth falls back in a straight line...
Pus is coming out of his ears and this gives him the smell of an egg that is a little rotten...

A fly is buzzing around his ear; he ignores it for some time and at the exact moment the fly is about to perch, he waves it away furiously.

“I wish I had a dog,” he said.

“What do you want to do with the dog?”

“I will pose with the dog in my photograph that they are sending to America because white people love dogs.”

“But they also like people.”

“Yes, but they like people who like dogs.”

“London did not take a picture with a dog.”

“Yes, London is now in London.”

“Maybe you will soon be in Acapulco,” I said laughing.

“Where is Acapulco?”

“They have a big ocean there, it is blue and beautiful.”

“I don’t like the ocean, I don’t know how to swim, I want to go to America.”

“Everyone in America knows how to swim; all the houses have swimming pools.”

“I will like to swim in a swimming pool, not the ocean. I hear swimming pool water is sweet and clean and blue and is good for the skin.”

We are silent. We can hear the sound of the aluminum sheets with which the houses are built. They make an angry noise like pin-sized bullets when going off. The houses built with tarpaulin and plastic sheets are fluttering in the breeze like a thousand plastic kites going off. Acapulco raises a handful of dust in the air. The breeze carries it away. Some of it blows into our faces and Acapulco smiles.
Although this short story is written from the perspective of displaced children, E.C. Osondu’s (2008) “Waiting” captures everyday life and humanity in a camp, including conditions similar to the Showgrounds and IDP camps across Kenya where the displaced wait for, and navigate through, the politics of restitution.

3.5 Gender, the 2007/2008 Conflict, and Sexual-Economic Exchange

Naivasha’s IDP camp no longer receives any humanitarian assistance and although the IDP community still waits for resettlement assistance from the national government, the majority of community development that goes on is at the grassroots level. For example, one community representative, Chege, worked on a voluntary basis to organize peace-building activities, disseminate knowledge surrounding gender based violence, and also hold small workshops on simple farming methods. Chege had one of the more successful displacement stories, as he was able to secure employment in Naivasha Town. So while he had to start over, his Habitat for Humanity home was the only one I visited that looked like any other Kenyan-style dwelling, completely furnished. Emphasizing the issues of land and ethnicity, Chege explained the 2007/2008 post-election crisis in his own words:

When I discuss the conflict, this is something that has actually been there. In Kenya you know people go along with ethnicity, along their tribe. So you’ll find mostly during general elections people tend to be in contrast. During that time, you’ll find Kikuyu people were supporting Kibaki. Other people, the other people were not supporting Kibaki. They were supporting a different person. So what happened these two groups were like rivals. So they felt like they were not on good terms. And also we have other issues, like land issues that has dominated for a long time it has been an issue. With a certain ethnic group feeling another tribe has invaded their lands or has just come to take away what is theirs. There are people who feel they are not comfortable with others. Okay so things do come out during elections, general elections… Like land, particularly the major issues are land and negative ethnicity. Those are the two factors that usually lead to war.
Chege also recognized the gendered (and class) dimensions to the post-election violence, and he himself was aware that he had fared better throughout the violence and displacement in large part because he was a man with higher education. Chege explained further how patriarchal Kenyan society and its inherent gender discrimination resulted in married or widowed women suffering greatly during the post-election violence:

Women have suffered a lot. Because first of all you’ll find that women in Kenya they usually suffer when you have problems, but particularly with this one most of the women depend on their husbands and now, you’ll find that because their husbands were displaced, they’re not earning or they’re not working. And these women have been not working. So they suffer a lot. They struggle to raise their children, to educate their children. And also they suffer from domestic violence mostly. And also some of the women their husbands were maybe maimed or others were killed, so you find there’s struggle to raise their children. They don’t have resources, and most of them they don’t participate in politics. So it’s like they don’t know what is happening. Lack of education is also a factor because most women, particularly girls, they are not in school. Or if they, maybe they reach a certain level, they opt to terminate education. Maybe in favour of their brothers. You know because we still have that gender discrimination also.

Chege also explained, however, that single mother headed households accounted for approximately 70 percent of the over 600 families living in Naivasha’s IDP camp. As a result, he explained that instances of gender based violence are frequent, although not often reported. Furthermore, because of the high number of single mothers, many of them engage in different types of sexual-economic exchange:

There are quite a number of women [single mothers] who depend on other men. There are those who look for casual labours, like washing clothes for other people, like weeding farms, to get some little amount of money. But the majority of them, they depend on other men. It can be transactional sex, where maybe they exchange sex for food to sustain their children. Because when a mother feels that she’s not able to provide for the child, and there is a man who can provide at least
even a kilogram of flour, she can exchange her body for that kilogram of flour to save the life of that child… Particularly those young girls and young single mothers, they engage in sex work… You know we have those who do sex work and those who exchange sex for food. They are here, they just live here. And they…are many who do transactional sex.

Noting that survival sex, transactional sex, and sex work all simultaneously occur within the camp, Chege expressed that he thought the post-election violence and displacement had greatly contributed to an increase in sexual commerce for women. He estimated that within his sub-camp alone, which has 222 households, there were approximately 30 female sex workers, at least 50 women doing transactional sex, and an unknown number of women engaging in survival sex.

3.5.1 IDPs Entry into Sex Work

Despite the widely accepted belief that sexual commerce occurs predominantly during political clashes and forced migration, many sex worker IDPs had actually entered into sex work prior to the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya. This perception was even reflected among the displaced sex workers themselves. For example, Wahu, a 26-year-old sex worker and single mother of two who entered sex work back in 2005 explained: “Not many did sex work before, I’m the only one. Most of them started from here. I’ve taught some – I can’t feed someone else daily and if she asks me where I get my money I just show her.” However, at least one third of the displaced sex workers in this study had started sex work well before the 2007 General Elections for reasons unrelated to political violence, displacement, or encampment.

The reasons these displaced women had entered into sex work varied. For Wamere, a 32-year-old single mother of three, she started in 2002 five years before the post-election violence of 2007/2008. She explained how that year, her mother died and her father decided to remarry. Wamere’s stepmother chased her and her sister from their home and she decided to do sex work in order to support herself: “Immediately I cleared class 8, my mother died and my father remarried. We were chased away from home. We were chased with another sister of mine and I started this business.” Similarly, Esther, a 27-year-old
single mother of two, started sex work in 2006 when her husband died in a road accident and she needed to find employment in order to support her children: “After my husband’s death I was struggling very much. I did not have an alternative other than that,” she explained.

For others, peer pressure played a part. For example, Christine was a 22-year-old sex worker who had just recently given birth to her first child, and had entered sex work in 2007. Then 17 years old, she was raised by her grandmother who could not afford to pay her school fees, and met a friend who showed her how to do sex work:

I started in 2007, yes before the clashes. When you’re alone and you don’t have money, see I’m telling you, you meet with a person and tells you I go to a certain place and get money, you find it’s good. A lady friend of mine taught me. She took me there, she showed me how I’m going to stand. I get money.

Peer pressure also played a part in Anne’s entry into sex work, a 26-year-old single mother of two who was four months pregnant with her third child. Anne started selling in 2006 after she became pregnant with her first child by her high school teacher:

I decided to go, look for my own money. I was working from a hotel, I also went to go start selling at a bar. After the bar I started sex work. I had shifted to Eldoret. The peers I was with were telling me life is not hard. Only if you make life hard it will be hard for you. They could get me a customer and tell me not to fuck him without money.

All of these sex worker IDPs remained in sex work because of the financial freedom and independence it allowed, which was ultimately why Irene entered in the first place. Irene, one of the oldest migrant sex workers whose migration story I collected, was 58-years-old and had been in sex work since the early 1970s. Leaving home at age 17, Irene had never married, brought up three children, had seven grandchildren, and had been displaced twice before during the post-election violence in the 1990s. She noted the difference between sex work then and now:
I started in 1970-something. Then, it was good. It’s not like now. You could go and even be given money that you bring up your kids with… I used to sell vegetables during the day and in the evening sell sex. I did not sell much because I got pregnant immediately. I beared my kids during 70s, so maybe I started 1971 or 1972 there. I was between 19 and 18 years when I had my firstborn. Yea, it’s many years, I’ve been selling sex for 40 years, but I brought up my kids.

So while there is a tendency within the literature and even among sex workers themselves to assume sexual commerce is a consequence of political conflict, these narratives clearly demonstrate that several sex worker IDPs had entered sex work prior to the 2007/2008 post-election violence.

### 3.5.2 Sex Worker IDPs’ Experiences of Post-Election Violence

While some sex worker IDPs did enter sex work prior to the post-election violence of 2007/2008, many also entered as a direct result of the clashes, at the emergency relief camps known as Showgrounds, or at the IDP camp in Naivasha. What all of these sex worker IDPs had in common was that they had all been displaced from Eldoret, spent at least one to two years at the Eldoret Showground, and were then relocated to the Naivasha IDP camp. Furthermore, all of these sex worker IDPs witnessed and experienced the 2007/2008 post-election violence. These experiences included their homes and all their possessions being burnt, seeing community and family members being murdered, and witnessing women and girls being raped, among other daily threats, fears, and acts of violence.

These narratives of the post-election violence became clear in the following sex worker IDP narratives. Wamere went on to describe her experience, explaining: “I was in Eldoret, we were forced to leave. When those people started to fight they said Kikuyus must leave so we left. Our house was burnt.” All displaced sex workers had their homes burnt and lost all of their possessions, and they told similar stories over and over of how they forcibly ended up at the Naivasha camp. Njambi, a 26-year-old sex worker and single mother, succinctly stated: “Everything was burned… We could not go back. There
was nowhere to go back to.” Irene went on to recount how, when her house was burnt, she fled with her grandchildren to a church and then to the Eldoret Showground:

They were even coming to our homes to take us out. They burned my house. I ran away when I saw they were starting to burn, I took the kids and ran away. We went to a church and later we went to the tents. I even felt sick. It was a good house full of everything and everything was burnt.

Similarly, Wangeci, a 25-year-old sex worker and single mother of two whose parents were separated during the violence, told of her experience:

I was in Eldoret during the violence. After we voted, we finished. We stayed then it was announced there are those people who were happy and those people who were not happy. That is how the fights started. Our houses were burnt. We went to Showground, we organized a group, we came here…. The house that was burnt was my mother’s. We were not hurt, but there were those in my family who were hurt, cut by machete.

In the same way that Wangeci noted how the results were announced and the clashes immediately ensued, Judy further explained how messages of violence were spread throughout Kenya following the election. Just 16 years old at the time of the post-election violence, Judy remembered her family’s experience of being forced out of their home:

Before the election was done, there were flyers scattered everywhere saying we should shift from there to Othaya. On my way to fetch water, we saw a paper. And we were told before seven in the evening we should have left. We took the letter, fetched the water, and took the letter to our parents. We read. We stayed in the house talking, if we went to the shop we were abused. We were forced to leave. Because we did not carry anything, it was difficult. When we reached at the police station my father said he wanted to go back home and get his car, he found his car was burned and his house was burned too. He didn’t stay, he came back and told us what had happened. The police told us we should stay there and know
what the government is going to do with us. We stayed almost one week, [then] we were taken by a lorry to the Eldoret Showground.

These narratives of violence also included witnessing acts of both murder and rape. While none of the sex worker IDPs admitted to being raped, which may be a result of the shame and stigma associated with rape, all women had felt threatened by sexual violence and many talked about witnessing other women being raped in addition to feeling that their lives were in danger. These fears of being killed or raped were constantly present in their migration stories. Irene went on to explain:

The time there were clashes, it was like we Kikuyu were told to move from Nandi we don’t belong there. We were chased there, some were killed. If you refuse to move you were being killed or women were being raped. So we felt we cannot stay together, we decided to shift. I was staying alone, I was renting. We were told to move from the plot because it was a Nandi’s.

Similarly, Rachel, a 22-year-old sex worker and single mother of one, just 17 at the time of the post-election violence, recounted how her family was forced to flee, her neighbour was raped, and her brother disappeared and is presumably dead:

It was after the election, some politicians incited some other tribes. So the Nandis chased us away. The plot where my mother had rented a house, everything was burnt and they were even raping women. There was one of our neighbours who was raped. You know that time everybody was running for herself, we’ve not met again. I have an uncle who was killed. The time people were running, I went away with my mother. We don’t know where my brother went to, we’ve looked for him. He’s probably dead, we don’t know.

In addition to witnessing and experiencing these acts of violence, sex worker IDPs who had been doing sex work prior to the 2007 General Elections clearly remarked on how the post-election violence affected their sex work. For example, Esther expressed that she was not able to sell sex at all during this period, completely disrupting her livelihood:
I was in Eldoret during the post-election violence. It was bad because we could not even go to work. It was bad I can say it was bad, it was bad. Because we could not go, everywhere was fire. Wherever we were staying because we were staying inside, wherever you were staying we could not even move. We were given soldiers to get out of there for security to the police station. We were confused. After we were moved from the police station and taken to [the] cathedral, after that to the Showground. After that we came here. Our home was burned and everything was spoiled, there was no home, no anything. You were forced to leave and go look for peace.

Not only were displaced sex workers unable to sell sex during the post-election violence, because their client base was ethnically diverse they were further targeted and sometimes forced to disclose the location of their clients from rival ethnic groups. Linda clearly expressed this when she talked about her post-election experience and not only witnessed her clients being murdered, but also felt a degree of complicity:

The things that happened I've never seen, I've never seen a person being killed. But I saw. You know me I'm known by the boys, so they came to my house saying they want the man I've been seen with. Even that person, if you went to bed with him and he paid you, and you saw him being killed how would you feel? You won't feel good. Not only one, there are so many here. Not only one, so many.

These narratives illustrate not only how sex workers’ livelihoods were disrupted by the post-election violence, but also suggest that some women were made to witness and participate in violence as a direct result of their sex work. Ultimately, these various experiences of post-election violence led to the displacement of female sex workers to the nearest IDP camp at Eldoret, in the northern Great Rift Valley.

### 3.6 Sexual Commerce and the Eldoret Show

One of the largest emergency relief camps for IDPs that was immediately established during the post-election violence was on the Agricultural Showgrounds of Kenya in
Eldoret. Managed by the Kenya Red Cross, when it first was allocated for IDPs in January 2008, within 48 hours the population grew exponentially from the first few displaced families to 500, to 10,000, eventually reaching approximately 19,400 by February 15 (Myrum, et al. 2008:44). Referred to by most as the Eldoret Show, 99 percent of these displaced persons were Kikuyu mostly from the North Rift Valley, divided among four smaller, tented, sub-camps provided by the UNHCR. This camp remained there, about two kilometres from the Eldoret city centre, for nearly two years until the Kenyan government closed its gates to the last of the IDPs at the end of 2009. It is here, at the Eldoret Show, where many women IDPs began to engage in different types of sexual-economic exchange in order to secure basic needs for themselves and their families.

Many sex worker IDPs spoke about the poor conditions they faced at the Eldoret Show, and while they received plastic tents and blankets within the first few days of arriving, they spent several nights with nothing but the clothes they were wearing when they fled their homes. Even inside these tents, multiple families were staying together, sleeping on the ground, relying completely on humanitarian aid. In her forced migration story, Judy went on to tell of her experiences at the Showground:

The problem was in the Showground because we didn’t have things to use like utensils. We didn’t have clothes. Like for me I was in a short and a sleeveless top, that was how I was staying and it was cold at night. My stepmother had just given birth to a baby who wasn’t even two weeks old. [The] problem was clothing and feeding…my mother had the small kids. It was difficult the kids were getting sick at the Showground she didn’t have money to take the kids to the hospital. There was not enough food to feed them.

Just as Judy suggests, many sex worker IDPs expressed that a lack of food and clothing were the main difficulties they faced at the Eldoret Show. Rachel also clearly stated this, pointing out especially how this affected the families at the camp: “Showground had the problems of food and clothes; people were not going to school. And you could find parents being sad because they were not able to feed their kids.” This observation of their
parents’ suffering at the Showground, particularly by girls like Rachel and Judy, who were between the ages of 16 and 18 at the time of displacement, became a critical factor in determining their entry into different types of sexual commerce.

With their schooling disrupted, their way of life devastated, and no longer able to depend on their parents, these young girls realized that they needed to both support themselves and also do what they could to alleviate the suffering of their families. This was further demonstrated in the migration story of Wanja, a 22-year-old who had also entered sex work at the Eldoret Show and, after becoming pregnant in Naivasha’s IDP camp, was a single mother to a one year old. Because of the inconsistency of humanitarian aid and its uneven distribution through the Showground, Wanja explained that she needed to find money for her basic needs and was unable to ask her mother:

Do you know there were times we could not even get food, oil? Sometimes we don’t even have pads, ladies were staying together. You can’t ask your mother because that would have added to her stress. The way we came from home, we could not take anything from there. It’s only the clothes you own. We went to the Show sometimes you want to shower you want to change. You have to look for money for your own.

Like Wanja notes, sex worker IDPs most often expressed that in addition to food and clothing, the most desirable items they did not have access to included oil and feminine hygiene products. Judy explained this further: “You’re being forced to do things you never want to do. For us ladies we want pads, we want oil. You cannot go and ask your father because he’s also struggling to get.” These conditions directly contributed to women and girl IDP’s engaging in survival sex to acquire such basic needs. Mukami, just 15 years old when she was displaced and went to the Eldoret Show with her three siblings and her parents, explained how she started selling sex out of necessity:

Because clothes it was upon me, everything was upon me…so I decided to help myself. I started working with another girl, we started walking together. I knew to sell pussy because pussy is a good thing. My first problem was I didn’t have
clothes, the second thing I did not have food or oil. I saw my parents were having a hard life also, I couldn’t ask them.

Rachel further remembered how she started to engage in survival sex within the Eldoret Show, where she eventually met with other sex worker IDPs:

I saw my mom was suffering and the life we were staying was not the life we were used to [so I started selling sex at the Showground]. I met with those ladies who do the same same business because we came from different places. They taught me how I can go meet a guy and sell sex, things like that… I used to buy clothes and the rest I give to my mother to help our young ones.

When Rachel notes she met sex worker IDPs at the Eldoret Show, she alludes to how peer pressure contributed to some women and girls shifting from engaging in survival sex inside the camp to doing sex work outside of the camp. In her narrative Judy talked about how her peers affected her sex work entry at the Showground:

I started sex work in 2008 in Eldoret when I was living at the Showground. My best friend called Kim showed me. You know there were so many problems there, there are things you need but you can’t go and ask from your parent. You want clothes. If you see another lady dressed well you feel it. Almost every lady was doing that work. And if you go ask a friend of yours to put on clothes that day, they talk badly about you. They were like so you can also join us. Even peer pressure can make you do things that you’ve never wanted to do. That is how I started.

However, Jane, a 27-year-old sex worker and single mother of two who had also entered into sex work at the Eldoret Show, explained how meeting other sex worker IDPs was not simply about peer pressure. Jane suggested that when she saw how her peers were able to support themselves through sex work, she also felt it could be a successful economic activity for her as well:

Because of the problems there, there wasn’t even food, so I started. And also the friends I met with said that work could be of help to me. We were talking and I
was telling them how life was hard, and they were telling me what they were
doing so I decided to do.

While survival sex inside of the camp was predominantly an individual, discreet
transaction within an environment of severe constraints, when these displaced women
and girls shifted their sexual commerce to sex work these sexual-economic transactions
changed. After meeting with other sex worker IDPs, many women discovered sex work
outside of the camp was an employment option they needed to consider. For example,
Rachel stated: “We met with those ladies who told me to go to a disco, we went and met
with other guys. We went for the first, second, and third time I got used [to it].” Wanja
further explained how she got used to selling sex outside of the Showground, describing
her ability to do sex work as entering into her blood:

I started in 2008 in Eldoret because my mother didn’t have money and I had
younger brothers and sisters, I decided to get money and try to help her bring
them up… I started selling at the Showground. It’s when the violence started and
we were staying between the Nandi and the Luhya. We were told to go to the
police station rather than staying and be killed like our neighbours who were
killed. When we went to the police station they said all the IDPs should go to the
Showground… I met with my friends, some who are here now. We started going
out like a group and I was in it. We go to big clubs I saw how someone was
treating clients; they go with them and I also did it. It entered into my blood and I
started.

Both of these statements by Rachel and Wanja allude to the fact that these women
internalized the challenges and opportunities in sex work, and after careful consideration
decided they were able to get used to, and benefit from, sex work.

For many women and girl IDPs who entered into sex work, they immediately discovered
how profitable this job was and how helpful the income could be to their families. Judy
succinctly summarized how sex worker IDPs would leave the Showground in the
evening, often in a small group, and do street-based sex work from nightclubs, bars, pubs,
and discos in Eldoret Town:
We used to leave the Showground at six in the evening, you go to town, you meet with the friends and go to a pub. It was a good job you could get money because at the time you’re getting in you could meet with a man who could pay you 1,000 KES or even 800 KES. You could have slept with eight men per night, and that is much money. You can leave with even 6,000 KES. Those men could help us buy the things we did not have.

While sex worker IDPs were able to sell sex in Eldoret Town during this post-conflict period, especially after the peace resolution in April 2008, they continued to face extremely high rates of sexual and gender based violence within the Showground. In fact, the persistent incidences of sexual assault and the risk of rape even factored into some women’s decisions to do sex work. This was the case for Wangeci, who saw other women and even young girls being raped and thought if this could happen to her, she might as well use sex to get the things she needed:

At the Showground I saw so many ladies were being raped. At the road you could not walk alone. I decided rather than being raped, I could be raped and get diseases, I decided I could go and look for myself. I used to go early not very late, a time like this five o’clock, I go where I’m going. You can go get finished with someone and they pay for a taxi back or pay for a lodging for us. They were being raped because some of them were drinking alcohol. They came back without knowing themselves. That is when I decided rather than going and drinking alcohol and spoiling myself, rather you go and look for yourself. Some were being raped even if they were young girls.

Furthermore, because women and girl sex worker IDPs sold sex outside of the camp, they often faced sexual and gender based violence from the policemen who were providing security to the Eldoret Show. Sex worker IDPs were never able to bring clients back to the camp, and their movements in and out of the camp were strictly regulated. Wangeci explained how sex workers were often forced to give police guards a shot in order to be permitted to exit the Showground: “You’ll be forced to sleep with those policemen who
were at the gate to be allowed to go out. We used to give them a shot before going, to be allowed to go out of the Showground; yea you know at the gate there were policemen.”

3.7 The IDP Camp in Naivasha, Sexual Commerce, and Resettlement

3.7.1 Sex Work at the IDP Camp

Over the two-year period of time that the Eldoret Show existed, its IDP population slowly declined as the displaced decided to return home, were absorbed into urban human settlements, or were resettled to secondary IDP camps like the one in Naivasha. This resettlement project was part of the Kenyan government’s highly controversial Rudi Nyumbani campaign, also known as Operation Return Home. Under this resettlement scheme, each IDP family was given 10,000 KES to purchase land at secondary camps throughout Kenya. The displaced sex workers who resettled at the IDP camp in Naivasha again experienced the poor conditions of an emergency relief camp but also underwent a drastic shift in their sex work practices from the Eldoret Show to the Naivasha camp. Furthermore, some displaced women and girls who had not yet entered sex work throughout their forced migration experiences ultimately decided to enter sex work here, at the IDP camp in Naivasha.

When these IDPs relocated to Naivasha, they were again living in tents and facing food insecurity with no additional humanitarian relief, and many felt they were starting over again, for the second time. These precarious living conditions once more contributed to displaced women and girls who had not already done so entering into sex work. This was clearly reflected in Ruth’s narrative, a 20-year-old sex worker and single mother to one two-year old, who started sex work at the Naivasha IDP camp: “I started sex work in 2009 here. I needed food, I needed clothing for me and my son. My mom is in Eldoret, sometimes she calls and tells me she’s in shit. I need to help her.” Like Ruth notes, such family responsibilities, including childcare, elder care, and supporting extended family members, was a key factor when displaced women were considering entering sex work.

Njambi also recounted her sex worker entry and similarly expressed that caring for her dependents was one of the main reasons she started selling sex:
When we came here I started sex work. I stayed for one year, I found that life was hard; I was forced to start. That was 2010. Because of my kid, he needs to eat he needs to clothe, I myself also. So I found it was good if I start. My friends from here they started telling me that they were going to Mai Mahiu I found that I’ve gotten used, I even know. We stayed they told me rather than sleeping without food you can go talk to a man, even if you’re given 200 KES it will be of help to you. They taught me about condoms.

Njambi, similar to the displaced women and girls at the Eldoret Show, suggested again that at the IDP camp in Naivasha peers and other sex worker IDPs influenced women’s choices to do sex work, often in a positive way. Akinyi, a 19-year-old sex worker, single and without children, who had been doing sex work for one year at the IDP camp since she finished high school also emphasized this in her narrative:

I started sex work last year, when I’m through with form four. No one is providing for me, like my grandma is like… I can’t borrow her money. Because she paid for my secondary fees. So I’m like if I start asking for money for my upkeep what will she think of me. Because she’s paying for my brother’s fees and my sister’s fees, there’s food, there’s everything. So telling her my problems will be a big burden… So I had this friend of mine, she had everything. She’s here in the camp. She had everything I used to use her oil, her stuff, her everything. Then she’s like you should start buying your own things. I’m like I don’t have money, where will I get money. Then she’s like you have something that people don’t have, as in men don’t have. So use it. And I’m like okay, one day she took me out. I’d never gone out. She’s the first one to take me out. We went there, she was having a dude. She told me to dress up, she even gave me her clothes by the way. I’m like where are we going, she said don’t worry. I’m like my grandmother will worry but she’s like no, tell her you’re sleeping at my house. We went, she had a dude and she brought another dude. She’s like don’t be afraid just give it. Then I was like okay. The guy gave me 2,000, I was like wow! This is a miracle! 2,000 in a night. It wasn’t like my first time, I had another dude who had broken my
virginity so it wasn’t hard. So I’m like 2,000, and that dude didn’t give me money so this one is giving me money for sex, ah okay, I’ll go along.

While entering into sex work allowed displaced women, like Ruth, Njambi, and Akinyi, a marginal income and some financial freedom, for sex worker IDPs who had started selling sex either before the post-election violence or at the Eldoret Show, the Naivasha IDP camp had a mostly negative impact on their sex work. Wamere, who had started back in 2002, clearly stated that her income from sex work had drastically decreased from when she was displaced from selling sex in Eldoret:

We were brought backwards, even we could not get customers here the customers here are problems. You can get a customer who’s telling you he doesn’t have money or you can even go with him, he gives you 50 KES or 100 bob… You can stay even a day without getting someone.

Sex worker IDPs repeatedly expressed that this decrease in their incomes resulted in confrontations and struggles with their clients. Mukami, who had started in 2008 at the Showground, talked about how hard life was at the Naivasha IDP camp in comparison: “Here it’s a new place, it’s not like where we were… I struggle with men from here to get money from them.” Anne, who had been doing sex work for seven years, also compared clients from Eldoret to Naivasha in her forced migration story, noting that she sometimes had to fight with clients for payment:

The place we came from, Nandis are so good. Even if you say 1,000 KES they can’t say no for the night. Per shot is 200 or 3[00]. Nowadays it’s hard because people from here don’t want to give you money; sometimes you’re even forced to fight.

These narratives, then, illustrate not only how some women entered into sexual commerce in Naivasha, but also how pre-established sex worker IDPs felt their work was impacted negatively moving from Eldoret to Naivasha.
3.7.2 Resettled Sex Worker IDPs and the Host Community

For many sex worker IDPs resettled at the camp in Naivasha, they recognized that the decrease in their incomes from sex work was a reflection of their host community. Displaced sex workers explained how Eldoret was a major town, in fact the fastest growing city in Kenya, and clients there were mostly well paying and middle-class, from a variety of different professions. At the IDP camp in Naivasha however, sex workers’ clientele shifted to reflect the socio-economic demographics of their new host community, the closest settlement being Mai Mahiu. Mai Mahiu is small, with a population of about 30,000, just one third of the size of the sprawling human settlements that surround Naivasha’s flower farms. Here, sex worker IDPs’ clients are mostly truck drivers and sand harvesters, which result in charging less for sex and also securing fewer clients. Wahu succinctly explained this change in her clientele throughout her forced migration story:

Here there’s no work so I charge them 200 [per] shot and you might struggle with him to get that 200. At least in Eldoret it was good there was money. You could even charge 500 per shot. Here you can even go an entire day without getting a single client. In a week you might get three or four clients. People from here are stubborn. Most clients are drivers or work with the sand company, they take sand and sell it there. In Eldoret the clients are any it’s a big town.

Like Wahu, Judy further explained how the size and demographic structure of a given place throughout her forced migration story impacted the amount she was able to charge a client and ultimately her overall income, while her family responsibilities still remained the same:

The disadvantage is like here, you’ll find business is down. Because like here you’ll find it’s those men of transit. You’ll go with a man who pays 200, 250, sometimes you’ll even go with a man who says 100. I don’t have otherwise; you’re forced to take it. You must help your parents home, you have your needs too.
In addition to caring for dependents and contributing to their IDP household, most displaced sex workers also had varying responsibilities to send remittances to family members elsewhere in Kenya. Similar to Judy, Rachel further noted that despite the drastic decrease in her salary her family members were still relying on her income:

You know here it’s not like Eldoret. Eldoret is a town. Sometimes I got 10,000 or 9k in a week. I pay for my mother’s house rent, they’re depending on me. Money for food, now I’m squeezing myself so much but I’m forced to send to them. I also pay school fees for my younger brothers.

Displaced sex workers suggested too that their IDP status contributed to the decrease in their sex work salaries, which they could not easily hide within such a small host community. In particular, they were able to charge more in Mai Mahiu among other sex workers but when selling from their homes or within the camp, their rates decreased again. Furthermore, they experienced a mixed reaction from the pre-existing sex worker community at the street level. Wamere, who had been a sex worker for 11 years, explained how in her experience the Mai Mahiu sex workers were welcoming and gave her local sex work tips:

They welcome us [sex workers in Mai Mahiu], they are good because they welcome us. They tell us it’s this way and that way, and don’t spoil the business. Because someone can tell you to go with a person for 100 KES and they can tell you please no, we don’t do it that way. In Mai Mahiu I’ve ever gone there its 300 KES per shot. Here [in the IDP camp] it’s 100 and if he pities you very much it’s 150.

However, many sex worker IDPs did not feel welcomed by the sex worker community in Mai Mahiu because they were perceived to be outsiders. In some cases, this marginalization had devastating consequences. For example, Wahu explained how sex worker IDPs face harassment in Mai Mahiu and how one displaced woman had been physically assaulted by the other sex workers there:
Here if you go to Mai Mahiu ladies of there are rude, you can even fight with them because of a man because you’re new. You don’t belong there. There they fight so much they even come with blades so they can destroy your face. Another lady was cut in her face from here.

Jane, a resettled sex worker IDP at the Naivasha camp who had started sex work at the Eldoret Show, had such a traumatizing experience at the street level in Mai Mahiu that she had decided to stop sex work for a period of time. After selling sex in Mai Mahiu only a few times, she went with a client who refused to pay her, beat her, and raped her without a condom. Jane felt the sex workers in Mai Mahiu deliberately discouraged her from going to the hospital, and has always regretted not seeking medical attention afterwards:

> He raped me and he didn’t use a condom. My heart felt bad. When I told them they told me it’s usual, sometimes you’ll go and it happens like that. So I kept quiet. It’s after I started feeling pains I went and got tested and tested positive after two months. I felt bad and that is why I stopped.

These narratives, and that of Jane perhaps most poignantly, illustrate how sex worker IDPs moved in and out of sexual commerce from the camp to the street level throughout their forced migration story, with varying degrees of success and suffering.

### 3.8 Sexual Commerce, Displacement, and Politics

#### 3.8.1 Sex Worker IDPs and the 2013 General Elections

These migration stories were collected just weeks before the 2013 General Elections in Kenya, the first to be held after the 2007/2008 post-election violence, and politics dominated nearly all conversations throughout the country including the migration stories of sex worker IDPs. While the 2007/2008 crisis saw more rapid gendered assessments of election-related violence than previously, perhaps what made the 2013 election distinctive was that more women than ever before were participating in Kenyan politics and the democratic political process. Politicians campaigned around the IDP and resettlement issues, and both female sex workers and single mothers were targeted for
political support. So while sex worker IDPs saw women’s political presence increase and were offered 200 or 300 KES to attend campaign events during this time, they were predominantly afraid that the 2013 General Elections would again turn violent. This fear was apparent in nearly all displaced sex workers’ forced migration stories, exemplary in Jane’s narrative when she said:

I’m feeling afraid about this election. You know last time they never said there would be fighting until the president was announced and the violence started. Now the way they are silent you cannot know if they’re planning what. If it will happen we’re going to move like we did last time, but I’m praying it won’t happen because it won’t be good.

The unpredictable nature of post-election violence coupled with Kenya’s long history of internal displacement created an environment of fear among the sex worker IDPs at the Naivasha camp. These displaced sex workers were not only afraid of recurring violence, but also the possibility of being displaced yet again. Similar to how Jane expressed these fears, Mukami went on to say, “Now I’m afraid because we can do the voting and then the violence starts again,” and Christine further explained: “I’m fearing the coming elections. I’m afraid because I don’t want to be another IDP again in my own country.”

3.8.2 Reflections on the Politics of Displacement and Sex Work

Recounting how painful the 2007/2008 post-election violence was and their fears for the 2013 General Elections eventually led to many displaced women and girls reflecting on the politics of displacement and their sex work. While this did not hold true for sex workers who sold sex prior to the post-election violence, many sex worker IDPs who entered sex work at the Eldoret Show or the IDP camp in Naivasha clearly blamed the 2007/2008 clashes for having to do this work. This was especially true for the IDP girls whose family support ended and whose education was disrupted by the post-election violence. For example, Akinyi expressed that she did not think she would be doing sex work had it not been for the post-election violence because:
Compared to the life we used to live before the post-election violence as in, my like my parents would not have separated. They separated because of that. My mom was not feeling secure with my dad after the violence so she had to go. So I think that we would still be together as a family. We wouldn’t lack anything, they would be there to provide everything for me. So after that period of chaos and everything, it just happened. After people were killing each other, like in our neighbourhood there was this Nandi person who had killed a Kikuyu. Imagine he killed his wife. So my mom was like if that Nandi person can kill his wife why not this husband of mine. So my mom ran away, she went to Malindi and she never came back.

In addition to this breakdown of family structures, nearly all younger sex worker IDPs felt that had the post-election violence and their displacement not occurred, they could have continued on with their education and been able to secure formal employment. This was clear in the following statement from Wanja: “If it wasn’t for the clashes I doubt I could have started this work. Maybe we would have stayed at our place; God would have blessed our mom with school fees for me I could have been continuing with my education.” Judy further expressed this desire to have gone to school, although she also noted that she did not regret her entry into sex work throughout her forced migration story of violence, encampment, and resettlement:

I wouldn’t have been doing sex work if it wasn’t for the post-election violence because my father had gotten a job and he was insisting if he had enough money he was to take me back to school. If I had gone back to school I wouldn’t have done this work. But I’m okay, I’m satisfied with everything.

This concluding statement by Judy, that, “I’m okay, I’m satisfied with everything,” alludes to the way in which sex worker IDPs were able to attain personal projects and aspirations of varying sorts despite their forced migration stories. These ranged from pursuing consumption wants like beauty products, clothing, and mobile phones, to ensuring the comfort of their family members by sending remittances home, to saving money for college tuition or purchasing land.
3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how different types of sexual-economic exchange, specifically survival sex, transactional sex, and sex work, overlap at the IDP camp in Naivasha. Not only do these different types of sexual commerce simultaneously occur at the IDP camp, but they also appear throughout sex worker IDPs’ narratives in ways that are not chronological but complex and entangled. For example, this chapter has shown how a sex worker throughout experiences of displacement could engage in survival sex for basic needs or transactional sex with security guards to exit the camp and sell sex at the street level. Therefore, these migration stories illuminate how sex workers use these different types of sexual commerce at different or even concurrent times during their migration stories, largely dependent on varying scales of power dynamics and structural constraints. On a daily basis these women interact with host communities, humanitarian aid, state regulation of both sex work and camp life, continuously navigating local, societal, national, and international levels in any given sexual-economic transaction.

The transactions and everyday experiences of sex worker IDPs documented in this chapter show how, even in the context of adversity, constraints, and precarity, these women develop livelihood strategies, make choices, and pursue life projects. This can be seen in some women’s and girls’ abilities to support their families, send remittances home, purchase beauty products, and even save money for university tuition. The IDP camp in this sense becomes not only a place of waiting, as it is so often characterized as, but also a worldly place of flows, circulation, consumption, aspiration, and various comings and goings. Especially in the way that sex worker IDPs strategically come and go from the camp to the street, this chapter has also demonstrated how the IDP camp overlaps with the street level in Naivasha. While for many women street-based sex work allowed them to earn higher incomes before they were displaced and even from the Showground, at the street level in Naivasha sex worker IDPs were largely perceived as outsiders. Therefore, the street continued to shape sex worker IDPs’ experiences in uneven ways throughout their migration stories, sometimes empowering them with the capital to start rebuilding their lives and at other times resulting in harm and violence.
Chapter 4

4 The Flower Farms

Map 5: The flower farms in Naivasha

This chapter chronicles the growth of the cut flower industry in Naivasha, women’s labour migration to work in flower farms, and the different types of sexual-economic exchange that occur in connection to this global economy of production. How Kenya’s economy was restructured after independence and the introduction of flower farms under structural adjustment is first documented and problematized. An examination of the Kenya-UK supply chain, media speculation, and the emergence of fair trade flowers are presupposed by an ethnographic description of the landscape of this industry in Naivasha.
How everyday life for women workers is hidden and secretive behind the conspicuously patrolled gates of the flower farms is emphasized. An exploration of the development encounter at the cut flower industry in Naivasha reveals the emergence of community organizations and NGOs as well as a growing, public recognition of how labour migration, flower farms, and sexual commerce are interconnected. This chapter mostly draws from the 25 migration stories collected in flower farms, at employee housing, and in the human settlements around the flower farms including labour migrants from Western, Nyanza, Rift Valley, Central, and Eastern provinces in Kenya. How some female labour migrants exchange sex for work at flower farms, engage in transactional sex relationships with male managers and supervisors, supplement their low incomes with part-time sex work, and enter street level sex work full-time is specifically examined. HIV vulnerability in sex for work transactions at flower farms and how migrant women manage their paid and unpaid labours are also documented in this chapter.

4.1 Restructuring Kenya’s Economy

Reflecting a period of intense economic growth and social development, the first ten years after Kenya gained independence are often referred to as the “golden years.” Kenya’s gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 6.6 percent, largely due to high commodity prices for traditional exports like coffee and tea, and a significant amount of foreign exchange reserves remained in the country, resulting in an independence-era economic boom. During this time period, social indicators also demonstrated a significant increase in school and university enrolment, life expectancy rose from 44 to 69 years of age, and infant mortality rates per 1,000 live births decreased from 219 to 68 deaths. In comparison to countries across sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya’s markers for economic and social development were thriving in this independence decade up until the year 1973 (Rono 2002).

The 1970s saw a world economic crisis and recession that ushered in a devastating period for Kenya’s economy, which has come to be known as the “lost decade.” Increasing oil prices and decreasing export values, exhausted foreign exchange reserves, the East African Community’s collapse, and rising foreign debt coupled with population growth,
urbanization, drought, and poverty had a crippling effect on Kenya’s economy and society from 1973 onwards. When Kenya (and other African countries) faced this threat of bankruptcy, a new development model emerged that would drastically restructure its economy beginning in the mid-1980s. With its particular set of economic policies enforced by international agencies, Peter Little and Catherine Dolan (2000) succinctly define this new approach to development:

The new paradigm advocated private-sector development with an emphasis on export-led growth, monetary and fiscal reform, and government deregulation in agricultural production and marketing. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank became part of the new development agenda, and non-traditional export activities were central to reforms that promoted export diversification (63).

Under SAPs and this promotion of export diversification, high-value commodities were rapidly expanded in Kenya, specifically the production and export of cut flowers, so as to generate foreign exchange (Hughes 2001; Rono 2002).

SAPs have been widely critiqued and their harmful socio-economic impacts difficult to reverse. Under these economic reforms, Kenya’s debt increased by 362 percent coupled with high interest rate payments, resulting in huge decreases in government spending on social services and welfare sectors. Unemployment levels soared, poverty and inequality increased, and throughout the 1990s Kenya’s GDP had been declining an average of 0.5 percent annually. Despite the failure of SAPs, the cut flower industry in Kenya grew consistently and remains today a key source of foreign exchange, touted by the World Bank as, “one of the rare success stories of non-traditional export development in sub-Saharan Africa” (Andersson, et al. 2005:26). However, because the cut flower industry has not been able to counteract Kenya’s economic decline and also because of its environmental, social, and gendered impacts on everyday life, the level of its success remains highly scrutinized and controversial (ibid.; Rono 2002).
4.2 Everyday Life and Flower Farms in Naivasha

Today Kenya boasts the longest standing, largest, and most lucrative cut flower industry across Africa. The core of Kenya’s floriculture production surrounds Lake Naivasha, where the first flower farms were established in the late 1960s. Many of these early farms were small, family owned agricultural producers that supplied flowers to niche markets. Floriculture in Naivasha expanded exponentially during the 1980s, attracting considerable foreign investment, and in the 1990s was promoted as export diversification under SAPs. By the year 2000, floriculture had emerged as one of Kenya’s most important sectors, growing at an annual rate of about 20 percent and increasing production by nearly 200-fold. The cut flower industry is the second largest source of foreign exchange and critical to Kenya’s economy, providing jobs to approximately 90,000 workers and majorly contributing to the country’s GDP (Hale and Opondo 2005). On the surface, at eye level, and in the normality of everyday life it often goes unnoticed just how profoundly this industry has impacted socio-economic life in Naivasha.

If you drive or take a matatu around Lake Naivasha, you will certainly pass many signposts indicating flower farms: Bilishaka Flowers, Oserian, Finlays, Karuturi, Nini Farm, and Wildfire Flowers are just a few of the largest among the over-50. However, unless you are an employee, rarely do you see beyond the armoured gates and security guards. You may catch a glimpse of the row after row of white, plastic greenhouses through tree-lined fences, and you will often see busloads of employees and trucks filled with cut flowers in transit. You will pass several townships of dusty, dirt roads and 12 X 12 corrugated roofs home to migrant labourers, the largest being Karagita with a population of nearly 80,000. Yet the magnitude of the flower farms largely remains hidden. Many farms provide their own facilities and communities of thousands, complete with housing, hospitals, schools, markets, and pubs live unseen, behind their gates along with the approximately 5,000 hectares of land used for floriculture. In her ethnographic description of an aerial view overlooking Lake Naivasha, Catherine Dolan (2007) writes:

The landscape is dominated by sheets of shimmering white plastic, the hippo-filled lake framed by a labyrinth of modern greenhouses that comprise some of the largest flower farms in the world. It’s disturbingly beautiful – techno-
capitalism etched into the birthplace of humanity – and easy to suppress the sprawling slums of migrant labourers these greenhouses have spawned (239-240).

At night-time, the flower farms are even more pronounced with the greenhouses illuminated for the overnight workers spraying pesticides, a sea of lights among the blacked out settlements often without electricity. At night too is when women flower farm workers will travel by matatu to bars at different settlements along the Lake or even to Naivasha Town to do street-based sex work. Here, at the production site of Kenya’s global cut flower commodity chain, female migrants often exchange sex for employment at flower farms, engage in transactional sex with flower farm managers, and move in and out of part-time and full-time sex work as their temporary contracts turnover.

4.2.1 Kenya’s Global Cut Flower Supply Chain

As the country’s main floriculture production site, Naivasha is part of the global Kenyan-European supply chain for cut flowers and an examination of this international supply chain reveals the various levels of unequal power relations of globalization. While several supply chains link Naivasha to international markets in the Middle East and Asia, Europe remains the most significant in terms of volume and sales. Kenya is the largest exporter of cut flowers to the European Union, dominating over 25 percent of the market share; because of the Dutch flower auction system, the Netherlands is the most important export market, followed by the UK, then Germany. The UK market in particular is more buyer-driven, increasingly bypassing the Dutch auction system altogether, and so the Kenya-UK supply chain has been the most widely examined in both academic literature and public discourse surrounding ethical consumption. Not only does direct sourcing from Kenya increase profit margins and shorten the time cut flowers are in the distribution system, it also allows buyers more control over the type of flowers imported. Since the mid-1990s, the increase in buyer direct sourcing of cut flowers from Kenya to the UK has also resulted in pressure on suppliers to implement and follow codes of conduct. Initially these codes were instituted to protect both buyers and consumers handling flowers after harvest, especially through codes addressing chemical and pesticide usage and eventually environmental codes of conduct. However, social components addressing labour standards at production sites are much more recent
developments, reflecting an increase in consumer awareness from public campaigns. These climaxed in the early 2000s when a series of exposés from rights-based organizations and media in the UK headlined the negative social and environmental impacts of Kenyan flower farms exporting to Europe (Dolan 2007; Hale and Opondo 2005).

4.3 Kenya’s Flower Farms and the Development Encounter

4.3.1 The Media Headlines

“A Flowering Evil” by Mark Seal (Vanity Fair, August 2006)

“Why Flowers in UK Vases are Causing Tensions in Kenya” by Matthew Wilson (Financial Times, February 27, 2015)

“The Cost of a Valentine’s Rose – Poor Kenyan Workers on £30 a Month” by Tom Parry (Mirror, February 13, 2014)

“Kenya’s Flower Farms No Bed of Roses” by David Njagi (Inter Press Service, June 10, 2013)

“How Kenya is Caught on the Thorns of Britain’s Love Affair with the Rose” by Jeevan Vasagar (The Guardian, February 13, 2006)

“Cultivating an Ethical Flower Trade” by Richard Black (BBC News, March 10, 2004)

“UK Consumers Urged to Think Where Valentine’s Flowers Come From” by Catherine Drew (Channel NewsAsia, February 15, 2015)

“Flower Farms in Naivasha, Kenya – Not All Smelling of Roses” by Janani Vivekananda (International Alert, December 13, 2013)

“In Kenya’s Rift Valley, A Global Business is Blooming” by Alexis Okeowo (Slate, July 28, 2010)
“Wake Up and Smell the Roses: Campaigners Are Exposing the Conditions that Predominantly Women Workers Suffer in Kenya to Bring Cheap Cut Flowers to Western Europe” by Siobhan McGuirk (Red Pepper, April, 2008)

With all of this public attention and media speculation, as Dolan (2007) so succinctly states, “Kenya’s cut flowers became the symbol for globalization gone awry, bringing the African worker and the British consumer into a highly moralized conversation on the injustices of global trade” (244). The result has been that the Kenya-UK supply chain is one of the most heavily coded in the industry and this code development and implementation and emerging corporate social responsibility has been well documented in academic literature (cf. Barrientos, et al. 2003; Dolan 2007; 2008; Hale and Opondo 2005; Opondo 2006; Riisgaard 2009). Gender-sensitive codes of conduct and the gendered aspects of flower farm labour in Naivasha have also been examined (Dolan, et al. 2002; English 2007). However, despite these policies, the impact of the cut flower industry on Naivasha at both community and individual levels have played out in a way that more closely reflects media speculation, albeit sensationalized.

4.3.2 Public Perception, NGOs, and Flower Farms in Naivasha

At the core of both public and academic debate, and even community development initiatives in Naivasha targeting flower farms, is the issue of fair trade accountability. Dolan (2005; 2007) argues that fair trade flowers are sites of moral commerce where, in the context of neoliberal globalization, consumers articulate political activism and social consciousness by purchasing what they perceive to be ethically produced flowers. Situated within yet another development agenda, the Kenyan flower therefore becomes an avenue through which the British consumer, as opposed to the state or civic society, can give charitably to the Kenyan producer (Dolan 2009:167). This, what Dolan (2007) calls a moral encounter with Kenyan fair trade flowers, has certainly been reinforced through problematic and exotic representations of the African producer in the media; however, little is known about how these codes of conduct have affected day to day life for flower farm workers in Naivasha. The culmination of such media headlines in the early 2000s resulted in a report by the London-based War on Want, a global justice organization campaigning for workers’ rights in the Global South (Morser and McRae
This study found that even flower farms that had adopted codes of conduct and ethical certifications in Naivasha still operated under poor working conditions, which was echoed by a number of grassroots organizations and NGOs doing community outreach there.

For example, one community worker from a local NGO explained how the response from the cut flower industry in its codes of conduct was not only inadequate and uneven, but how the idea of fair trade flowers as a forced development strategy was also problematic:

*The problem is that some don’t respond at all, so they spoil for the ones who are responding. There are some who don’t care, it’s all about production. The ones that are caring are less. The law. They are private businesses so you can’t say so much, but we have mechanisms in place for the welfare of their workers so its part of the working culture and also the people buying the flowers. The ones responding are responding because they are forced by the people who are buying the flowers and some of them have adopted fair trade and corporate responsibility. But it’s by force, before we buy your flowers you must be fair trade.*

Ultimately, fair trade certification means that flower farm companies adhere to both environmental and social codes, although the latter has proved much more complex. This is especially because of the living conditions within the employee housing and human settlements that have sprung up in Naivasha to accommodate labour migrants. In compliance with both national law and codes of conduct, flower farms are required to either provide housing or a housing allowance for its employees; however, in both cases these living conditions are often inadequate. Furthermore, as flower farms recognize the issues (and expenses) that arise in these kinds of environments, for example the need to provide schools for children, clinics and healthcare, and the demand for basic necessities like access to water and sanitation and electricity, providing employee housing is increasingly seen as problematic. The same community worker explained how within the cut flower industry there is now a shift away from providing employee housing to investing in infrastructure and housing allowances in order to avoid further social responsibilities to their workers:
I was talking to one of the directors of [a large flower farm] sometime back and I asked him why they have chosen not to house their employees and he says he doesn’t want to deal with the social issues. The social issues are too much. And then their employees do not grow in terms of exposure and expansion of the mind and thinking because you work with the same people, you go in the evening and you’re sharing the toilets with the same people, you’re neighbours with the same people. So in terms of expansion of the mind and everything; so you’d rather get integrated into the wider community. So they invest in the transport system, I think that one is better I think to get integrated into society. Imagine if we had the ministry of water and sanitation, the municipal council all living together, what kind of society would we be. What the company does now once you’ve left, you’re no longer our responsibility so wherever you live we don’t care. They get housing allowance but it’s small, like if its 1,000 KES imagine the house you could get.

So while there is a widespread, public perception within Naivasha and indeed across Kenya that the cut flower industry is detrimental to the environment, exemplary through the well-known phrase, “flower farms are killing Lake Naivasha,” it is the social issues that people most often encounter on a daily basis. Furthermore, while the environmental impacts have garnered the most academic and research attention internationally, it is again the social issues that have created a multi-lateral development response at the community level in Naivasha.

The Kenyan government has made significant efforts to respond to the social consequences of the cut flower industry in Naivasha, with the state itself operating under limiting constraints. For example, if the government intervenes directly in the industry it risks flower farms relocating to neighbouring countries and losing its preferential access to European markets (Andersson, et al. 2005). One positive response for the community in Naivasha has been the recent establishment of a Gender and Social Development Department. While previously part of the Nakuru district, with the population explosion in Naivasha since the growth of the cut flower industry it was in 2006 made its own district. After this there was an outcry from the community and social services sector in
Naivasha to house its own gender and social development programmes, like other districts in Kenya. This outcry, arguably in part because of the cut flower industry, was a direct result of the high rates of gender based violence occurring in Naivasha, among the highest country-wide. Naivasha’s first Gender and Social Development officer explained some of the key social issues present within the flower farms, including the prevalence of gender based violence, which she refers to as GBV:

Number one I think those people get very little pay. Very little pay. So sometimes it becomes very difficult to maintain a family. Number two, the living conditions. I’m not against the flower farms, but the living conditions within the flower farms. These contribute to a lot of GBV, like when you hear of a father having defiled a daughter it is because of the living conditions. This is a one-room house, we are all living in this one room. The mother leaves and goes to work, as the father I’m left with the daughter in the house and the next thing I’ll just be watching the daughter as she moves around the house I’ll be looking at her and remembering her mother when she was a young girl so what is the next thing? Defilement. It contributes a lot to GBV in Naivasha. Number three, I think about the frustrations these people go through in the flower farms, you find most of the men want to look for solace in women. So even if he has a woman in that house he’ll go looking for other women that they’re working with and by the end of the day they’ll get a child with this other woman.

Since its establishment in 2011, the Gender and Social Development Department has therefore been working towards gender equality and empowerment, reducing gender based violence, mobilizing community groups, facilitating community development, promoting social welfare and protection programs, and poverty reduction, along with other local community development organizations and NGOs tackling the social impacts of the cut flower industry.

Through narratives, mandates, and anecdotes from these local development initiatives, it becomes clear how the woman flower farm labourer enacts multiple scales of development paradigms, but also how through the emergence of local level community
organizations there is growing recognition of a correlation between sex work and the cut flower industry. This connection has been recognized in various ways by different organizations and NGOs. For example, one representative from a government-funded development project that conducted HIV/AIDS outreach among transit workers argued both transport and flower farm workers made Naivasha a sex worker hot spot:

Naivasha happens to be a transit town, most of the truckers pass through and spend the night here. The truckers are a “hot cake,” to use that word, to the sex workers. Naivasha is a town that hosts so many people working in the flower farms, we have so many flower farms. So there is a lot of money circulating in the town. Those are two contributing factors.

In addition to male flower farm workers creating a demand for sex workers, other development organizations noted the correlation between women flower farm workers and different types of sexual-economic exchange. One representative from a multi-laterally funded organization that provided a free drop-in clinic and reproductive and sexual health services noted that many women workers exchange sex for their jobs: “It’s like if you want to be employed there you have to sleep with certain people, those ones who are in big positions, [to be] able to get you employment. So this also makes women vulnerable to sex maybe they’re not doing it out of their will.” Another representative from an NGO conducting outreach with sex workers from a rehabilitation framework argued that the flower farms were creating unique forms of sexual-economic exchange in Naivasha:

There’s sex work in all towns in Kenya, even villages today. But the dynamics of sex work in Naivasha are unique. Very, very unique. The fact that we have the flower farms, especially the flower farms, because that is a pull factor. And also the fact that the flower farms employ more women than men. When the women come here, some of them are even underage. And there’s the issue of identity cards here. So what the women would do to get jobs is that they will use each other’s identity card. It’s a survival tactic for those who really want to find work. Also because of a big influx, between 2002 and 2010 very many flower farms
were opened in Naivasha. So everybody comes with everybody else and invites everybody else. Most of the women, especially if they are underage and they don’t have the skills that are needed, they have to sell their bodies to be able to get the jobs.

This same NGO worker explained that not only were women exchanging sex for jobs, but also engaging in transactional sex relationships with senior male managers at the flower farms, and many eventually end up doing street-based sex work:

The flower farms employ the women when they should be going to colleges and when they should be learning skills, whether it’s vocational schools or formal colleges but they don’t go. So their transition into employment is through an arrangement where they’re working so many hours and an arrangement that leaves them with very little time to advance their careers, to advance their dreams. So by the time they’re 15 years old going to 30, they have children, they hardly have husbands. Because the kind of arrangements, the marital arrangements that are in the flower farms and even here in Naivasha are funny. A woman could be married to one man this month and another man next month. It’s a relationship but not marriage. But they talk about marriages and about husbands and about whatever else. So by the time a woman is leaving the flower farms she has no skills, but she has kids. So she cannot move on to another town to seek employment. So they come and join the others in the streets.

Depending on the development project and its funders, different aspects of the cut flower industry and its women workers have been emphasized over time and across multiple scales, ranging from corporate social responsibility and human rights, to gender based violence and sexual exploitation. However, in the grandiose development encounter and media speculation of it all, the everyday voices and complexities of these women flower farm workers are often distorted amidst a working environment of intense gendered discrimination.
4.4 Gendered Labour at Naivasha’s Flower Farms

It has been widely documented that the cut flower industry, like many global economies of production, operates on a system of institutionalized gender discrimination. Women dominate floriculture in Naivasha as a result of the feminization of flexible labour, wherein notions of what constitutes “women’s work” form the foundation of employment. The gendered division of labour is organized such that women are responsible for the tasks that are most important for the cosmetic appearance of the final product, including picking, packing, and value-added processing, because women are thought of to be more dexterous than men. Men are primarily responsible for irrigation, construction, maintenance, and spraying chemicals and pesticides, which are considered to be more physical tasks, as well as management positions (Dolan, et al. 2002:28).

A senior, male manager who had been working at one of the largest flower farms in Naivasha for over ten years explained this inherent gender discrimination that exists in the logic of hiring a female labour force:

It is not that women are attracted to the job; it is the nature of the job also. It is more favouring women than men, the kind of job. Most employers feel like it suits women [more] than men because it is some enduring task most men can’t do. I think it is not skills, but the kind of job, the task that men can’t do that women can do. Most employees find it more suitable to hire women than men. Picking flowers, chopping, weeding, push carting [is women’s work].

This same manager also estimated that in a typical flower farm in Naivasha out of 3,500 employees, 2,800 were women and the rest men, meaning that approximately 80 percent of the current labour force is female. Furthermore, because these women workers are predominantly temporary, casual labourers in unskilled positions while men largely occupy the more permanent positions of power, this reinforces a working environment of not only institutionalized gender discrimination, but also sexual harassment.

Despite many flower farms implementing codes and policies to prevent sexual harassment, especially between female labourers and their male supervisors, these
incidents persist. In a study that examined seven flower farms across Kenya including Naivasha, women workers at all farms expressed that they were subject to sexual harassment by their supervisors and also felt unable to report these incidences (Dolan, et al. 2002). While Kenya’s 2007 Employment Act mandates flower farm companies implement policies for handling harassment, more recent reports document that sexual harassment continues to be a problem at Naivasha’s cut flower industry (KHRC 2012; Wilshaw 2013). Rachel Wilshaw (2013), for example, recently noted in a study of poverty and flower farm conditions that in extreme cases she heard of supervisors demanding sexual favours from women workers in exchange for increased wages or lighter work and that, “in virtually all of these cases, the women involved were said to be poor and disempowered” (86). It is undeniable that women workers often experience harassment by their male supervisors; however, little is known about the types of sexual commerce that exist at the cut flower industry because it is so shrouded in secrecy and victimization rhetoric.

Sexual harassment in the cut flower industry was recognized by both senior management at flower farms and community development organizations in Naivasha. The male flower farm manager, although hesitant, went on to explain this further:

Sometimes you have people in senior positions, especially when you hire young ladies within the farms and they’re employed with a low salary, at times they are going to be taken advantage [of] by those people in higher positions… At times you find they have even become pregnant.

Similarly, the above-mentioned employee from the sex worker NGO noted not only this dimension of male supervisors taking advantage of women workers, but also the high expectations of female migrants from rural areas seeking formal employment:

In most of the flower farms, 70 percent or more are women. They also don’t hire elderly women, they target young women. The flower farms are a gold rush. They come with very high expectations; it’s town life, a job. There are very few men who are there, they get attracted to them [young women]. Some of them are forced to sleep with them to retain that job.
These narratives of harassment, being taken advantage of, and exploitation, while they certainly may occur for some women, do not adequately convey how female migrants’ individual choices and structural constraints co-exist in complex ways at the cut flower industry. This victimization rhetoric denies female migrant labourers any element of choice to seek out or engage in transactional sex relationships at the cut flower industry, and does not recognize how labour markets influence female migrants’ choice to do sex work over flower farm work. It especially obscures how specific choices to offer sex in exchange for employment, engage in transactional sex relationships, and do sex work are informed by local labour markets and working conditions at the cut flower industry.

4.5 Sexual Commerce and Migrant Labour Markets

The notion that migrant labour, sexual commerce, and global economies of production overlap is not new, and has been previously examined at the *maquiladoras* of Central America and in the garment factories of Southeast Asia. For example, in Ciudad Juárez, Melissa Wright (2004) has documented how migrant female sex workers are reasserting their presence as women workers and members of society after being pushed out of a new, male-dominated *maquiladora* industry. And in Phnom Penh, Kasumi Nishigaya (2002) has argued that it is migrant women labourers’ low wages in garment factories that directly determine their entry into different types of sex work. In Africa, studies surrounding migrant labour markets and sexual commerce have focused predominantly on HIV transmission. In fact, due to economic restructuring and the drastic increase in labour migration in post-independent Africa, Turshen (1998) has argued that the labour structures and resource extraction adopted from the colonial period are what truly perpetuate HIV in Africa, the classic example being sex workers in the male migrant labour enclaves of South African gold mines (Campbell 2000; Hirsch 2014).

In Kenya, recent literature has pointed to this connection between economies dependent on labour migration and the spread of HIV/AIDS at the fishing and tea industries. These studies reveal how some female labour migrants engage in different types of sexual commerce based on these different labour markets. For example, how experiences of labour migration and high-risk transactional sex overlap at Lake Victoria’s fishing industry has gained much attention due to a skyrocketing HIV prevalence there. Nyanza
province, where the fishing industry is located, has the highest HIV prevalence in Kenya and many studies have documented how migrant fishmongers exchange high-risk sex with fishermen; this phenomenon has been termed “sex for fish” (Béné and Merten 2008; Camlin, et al. 2013a; Camlin, et al. 2013b), and is colloquially known as “fishtitution.” Similarly, studies have also documented high rates of HIV transmission among migrant labourers at the tea industry in Kericho (Foglia, et al. 2008; Ondimu 2005; 2010).

Kennedy Ondimu (2010) has noted migrant female heads of household there seek out protection from sexual harassment by male colleagues and supplement their low incomes with cash and goods through transactional sex relationships (164).

These case studies of increased HIV vulnerability also point to the need to understand the meaningful socio-economic roles that are created when migrant labour markets overlap with different types of sexual commerce. Most sex work research focuses exclusively on street level sex work and assumes this is the only work sex workers do, erasing the culturally specific ways that sexual commerce interacts with other kinds of work. Understanding sex work in relation to labour market options can illuminate how women workers decide to enter into different types of sexual commerce in light of local employment options, opportunities, and conditions. As JaneMaree Maher et al. (2013) argue, placing the sex work as work debate squarely in the context of other paid, migrant labour like in global economies of production results in a focus on employment considerations, work practices, and even unpaid labour. The casual, unskilled positions in these economies of production are ideal for female migrants because they require little education or training for women who are often single mothers in search of wage labour to support their dependents.

In the cut flower industry, this has been supported in the study by Dolan et al. (2002), where they found 75 percent of female and 70 percent of male workers to be migrants. And while the study by Wilshaw (2013) did not explore the migration patterns of flower farm workers, they did find that about 75 percent of workers said they spent a portion of their monthly incomes on remittances. Current statistics across flower farms remain steady at a 70 percent migrant worker population and migrants from all over Kenya are now represented in the flower farm industry. My research participants included migrants
from most rural parts of Kenya, especially the Nyanza, Western, Rift Valley, and Central provinces. Furthermore, 70 percent is a modest estimate of the true magnitude of female labour migrants because they do not account for the phenomenon of second-generation migrants. For example, some flower farm workers were the daughters of first generation female labour migrants to the cut flower industry when it exploded in the 1980s and 1990s, growing up themselves in female headed households and employee housing at the cut flower industry. The well established nature of the cut flower industry has resulted in an intergenerational female migrant labour force that includes mothers, daughters, sisters, and intricate networks of extended family ties providing the flower farms with a large, flexible labour pool of migrant female workers from all over Kenya.

4.6 The Continuum of Sexual Commerce at the Cut Flower Industry

The different types of sexual commerce at the cut flower industry often operated along a continuum, and included exchanging sex for work, transactional sex, and both part-time and full-time sex work. A common narrative was to migrate to Naivasha and exchange sex for work at the flower farms and then continue in a transactional sex relationship with managers for a number of work-related and economic benefits. After entering into these types of sexual-economic exchanges, women often then began to supplement their low incomes with part-time sex work at night after a full day of work in the flower farms. In many cases women made careful, calculated decisions to enter sex work full-time and leave flower farm work altogether as a result of the poor working conditions and extremely low salaries at the cut flower industry.

The following narrative of Rose clearly illustrates the different forms of sexual commerce that occur at flower farms in Naivasha. Rose was a 38-year-old single mother who had migrated from another town in the Great Rift Valley in the late 1990s looking for work in the flower farms. She was one of the most educated migrant sex workers, having completed all of secondary school and some post-secondary education. However, she opted out of finishing college because she became pregnant and decided not to marry and raise her child alone. In order to support her daughter, who was then three years old, a female relative from Naivasha put Rose in touch with a flower farm manager who offered
her employment in exchange for sex. This was the first time Rose slept with a manager to secure employment at a flower farm; however, she estimated that over a period of 15 years she slept with 10 managers and supervisors to gain employment or promotion at three different flower farms in Naivasha. Because of her low salary, fluctuating between 4,000-4,500 KES per month depending on the farm, Rose supplemented her income with part-time sex work while working at all three flower farms, and now does sex work full-time because she feels the working conditions are more favourable in sex work than in the flower farms:

You end up sometimes [exchanging sex for a job] because you're hustling. And at every level there's a manager, a supervisor, and they all want you. You want a better job… I worked in three farms and slept with maybe 10 managers. Few used a condom. I got the better positions. Throughout that time I used to do sex work, mostly on the weekends… Now I feel like I don't want to work anymore at the farms, I just do the other job [sex work].

Rose’s story is exemplary of the continuum of sexual commerce that occurred at the cut flower industry in Naivasha, that often began with exchanging sometimes high-risk sex for work and ended in entering sex work full-time.

4.7 Exchanging Sex for Work in Flower Farms

4.7.1 Employment Related Transactional Sex

Exchanging sex for work is a unique form of transactional sex because it recognizes women’s desire to enter into the formal economy and become economically independent. In this type of exchange women are indeed thinking of subsistence needs and consumption wants like much of the transactional sex literature in African studies (cf. Hunter 2002; Leclerc-Madlala 2004); however, they are strategically exchanging sex for a form of livelihood so that they can be able to provide such needs and wants for themselves and most often, their children. Because women in Kenya face a number of patriarchal challenges to gaining employment, exchanging sex for employment has become widespread and exists well beyond the cut flower industry, especially in unskilled jobs. For example Faith, a migrant sex worker who travelled frequently along
the corridors and whose narrative will figure prominently in chapter five, replied in disbelief that this was not presumed when I asked if she had ever exchanged sex for employment:

Are you asking? Many times. It’s uncountable! There was a time I wanted a job at a hotel. The brother to the woman who was employing people, it was a must he fuck me to give me work there. From there, I was working at a farm, the person who was employing people also had to fuck me. It reached a time I said I don’t want jobs. I wanted work as a cleaner at [a resort], that person who is a manager he used to come fuck you. Even as a house girl it happened. [I’ve exchanged sex for a job] almost four or five times, the ones I can remember.

From the perspective of female labour migrants, exchanging sex for work was a normalized aspect of acquiring employment in the cut flower industry, often even anticipated and expected. For example Jamila, a fifty-year-old sex worker and second-generation migrant, had worked at three of the largest flower farms in Naivasha and exchanged sex for work at each one: “You have to do it [have sex with a manager] so you can get the job. You can’t get without… you have to have sex with them.” Jamila explained further that this kind of sexual-economic exchange was a given and was widely used as a strategy among female labour migrants to ensure employment.

Many female labour migrants told of how exchanging sex for work was a necessary part of the employment process and that they were willing to engage in these relationships. Alice, a 36-year-old labour migrant from Central Kenya and single mother of three, actually compared exchanging sex for work to an interview process because exchanging sex for employment is such a firmly entrenched practice at flower farms:

You must be fucked to get employment there. That’s a must. You go talk to the big men there, he gives you a date he might fuck you for two or three times to give you a job. We call him farm manager. We talked through the phone. He told me to find him in town. I found him. There wasn’t an interview. The fucking was the interview. He told me to go with my identity card the next day and I’d find a job. He fucks you then he stops, he starts fucking the ones who need a job.
While Alice noted the manager stopped his relationship with her and moved on to other female labour migrants in search of work, for many women they had already engaged in risky sexual-economic transactions in order to secure employment.

4.7.2 Risk and HIV Vulnerability at the Cut Flower Industry

Despite the widely documented connection among economies of production, labour migration, and HIV transmission in Kenya, as well as growing public awareness and rumours surrounding risky sexual behaviour at the flower farms, HIV vulnerability is only now gaining policy attention. In 2002, when Dolan et al. conducted their study of gender and workers’ rights at Naivasha’s flower farms, they found in fact that HIV/AIDS had not yet been recognized as a significant issue for companies (50). In that study, management at one farm did state they had an anti-discrimination policy in place and was aware of one employee who had AIDS. Across all farms in the same study, workers expressed that they did not think HIV/AIDS was a problem in the cut flower industry (ibid.). Exactly ten years later at the time of this research, HIV transmission had significantly impacted the everyday experiences of migrant female flower farm workers and community development initiatives were also recognizing high rates of HIV prevalence there.

In response, a grassroots community development organization developed in the mid-2000s with the goal of mitigating the spread of HIV in the cut flower industry and the surrounding settlements housing flower farm workers. Even though most flower farms actually have resident nurses and in some cases fully equipped clinics and hospitals, most flower farm workers would never use these health services for HIV testing, to acquire ARVs, or for the treatment of AIDS related illnesses. A representative from this community development organization explained this was mostly a result of the persistence of stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS:

There are some farms where people won’t go to the nurse even for medication because they think the nurse will tell everybody, that lack of confidentiality, and people are very particular about their private lives being discussed. Stigma is still
there. We still have people looking at other people saying this one looks sick and HIV is still feared, we still have a long way to go.

In addition to stigma being present within healthcare services at flower farms, this community worker also went on to explain how different jobs within the industry led to varying degrees of stigma. For example, especially female flower farm labourers working as a group grading flowers led to a stigmatizing environment if another woman’s status was somehow known or suspected. However, if an HIV positive woman was able to work in a more individualistic task, for example harvesting flowers, she might not experience such high levels of stigma being somewhat secluded from other women workers. This community worker noted how women in these group environments would reinforce stigma and false stereotypes, including if a fellow worker was thin she must be HIV positive or if by using the same working tools HIV could somehow be transmitted:

The other place that has a lot of stigma is like grading, because you know grading you work on a table so there are people on that side and people on this side and you know people will talk. Especially women. If they think you’re HIV positive they won’t even touch your scissors they will just talk about you, they’ll be whispering, talking in parables, you know they will talk about HIV in a negative way. So some of the ladies they come and tell us once they’re HIV positive they won’t work in grading only in harvesting, because harvesting you’re basically given your own plot and working alone. But when you’re working with other people and people are talking and laughing about HIV in a negative way stigma is still there.

For this community organization, battling everyday stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS through outreach and education was an important part of their mandate. This representative talked extensively about how frustrating it was to see stigmatization being reproduced within the wider community, but also how this was related to condom use. Persistent stigma surrounding condoms and condom use collectively contributes to secrecy and silence regarding HIV transmission. She told a story of how, after working one day in the flower farms talking about condom use, she alighted from a matatu at a
settlement housing flower farm workers to a crowd of people listening to an individual preaching that condoms are not good and do not work. This organization also experienced a number of other challenges, including low rates of HIV testing among male management and supervisory staff:

Most of the top managers and supervisors, they assume HIV services are meant for the general workers; they don’t think they can also be infected. They actually imagine HIV is for junior workers and they don’t come for the services. Hardly do we test a manger or supervisor.

It is impossible to tell what the rates of HIV prevalence are at the flower farms; however, there was widespread belief among migrant female flower farm workers that male managers were contributing to the spread of HIV through low condom use in sex for work transactions. For example Theresa, a 37-year-old sex worker who had migrated from Central Kenya to find flower farm work, explained in her narrative how the manager she slept with to get the job did not use a condom:

I went to his place, he was married, I went. I asked for job he told me to come back in the evening, he told me where to meet him. I went in the evening he had said he would give me the feedback in the evening. When I went to where he had told me to meet, it was near a pub and there were lodgings in the back. He told me to enter there, I found it was in a lodging. I went in. He told me if I was in need of work I must do it. You help me if you want me to help you. I was forced because I needed work. I did not like it because it was not for will and he was not paying. Because he wanted to fuck me for job. I just worked there for one month, when we were approaching the second month he told me he wanted to meet with me in town. Because it was not in my heart and I knew he wanted to use me, I stopped. When I refused to go meet him in town the following day he came and sacked me. He didn’t use a condom.

Similarly, Jamila went on to talk about low condom use in sex for flower farm work transactions and explicitly stated that this was contributing to HIV transmission at the cut flower industry:
It’s not every man who can use condoms. Let me tell you it’s not every man who can use condom. They really hate to use condoms. Maybe they see you with a lot of problems. Maybe that’s why. Because if you have problems, you can do anything. If you have problems and you have kids in the house you can even be killed because of them… The managers don’t use condoms and that’s where the HIV is coming from.

The HIV/AIDS community development organization was also aware some labour migrants exchange sex for work there; however, because this was so hidden and not often talked about or revealed, the main drivers they recognized in the spread of HIV transmission at flower farms were transactional sex relationships among workers after securing employment.

4.8 Transactional Sex in the Flower Farms

For many female flower farm workers who exchanged sex for employment at flower farms, this marked the beginning of a prolonged transactional sex arrangement in order to secure more favourable working conditions and supplement their incomes. The HIV/AIDS community worker explained this kind of sexual-economic exchange as a unique form of sex work:

You want to subsidize what you’re earning with sex. You might not think of it as sex work like you go to the streets, but it’s still sex work because you have to give sex for you to be supported by whoever man whether you’re working like I’m working but I find that I can’t meet my needs so I need to have an affair with someone for sex, not necessarily for any emotional reason, so that he can support me. So I’ve seen a lot of that in Naivasha. Not necessarily going to the street and selling, but you’re selling in a way.

Such transactional sex relationships among flower farm workers, most often between female labourers and male managers, could result in promotion or access to better positions that required less arduous work and fewer hours. Many women were able to secure job security through transactional sex, but sometimes also continued relationships
because of economic gains such as house rent, food, or other basic needs. Rose had experienced both of these types of transactional sex relationships many times, as she explained further:

I slept with so many managers and I got the better positions, the last one he furnished my house he paid everything. I even went to school… Now I feel like I don't want to work anymore at the farms [I just want to do sex work]. Throughout that time I used to do sex work mostly on the weekends.

The more preferable positions that could result from transactional sex were those in the grading hall or pack house and women often cited time off, shorter shifts, preferable treatment, promotion, increased wages, and job security as the advantages of having a sexual relationship with a flower farm manager. However, refusing to engage in transactional sex for any reason often resulted in being fired as there were no fixed terms to these arrangements.

Theresa’s narrative clearly illustrates the pressure to engage in transactional sex relationships with managers from her experience working in flower farms since the late 1980s. Theresa worked at a number of different flower farms from 1989-1992 and then married in 1993. After divorcing her husband in 1998, she worked again in the flower farms until 2005 and experienced high turnovers and transactional sex expectations:

I was finding myself today I’m employed in this farm, after one month I’m sacked, I go to another one, because the managers wanted to fuck us…There were so many who forced me to be sacked from the work because I knew they only wanted to fuck me.

For most women this was a key factor in deciding whether or not to do sex work either on a part-time or full-time basis. Many women saw the rewards of transactional sex and formal employment at the cut flower industry very low in comparison to the monetary gains from sex work. Female labour migrants repeatedly used the logic that since the managers were “fucking them for free,” it would be much more economical to do sex work and be paid directly in cash for their sexual-economic transactions.
4.9 Sex Work and the Flower Farms

The need to supplement low flower farm incomes was one of the main reasons female migrant workers cited for entering part-time sex work. The average salary for an unskilled worker at the cut flower industry is approximately 4,500 KES per month, following the minimum wage set by the Kenyan government for agricultural and horticultural workers countrywide. These wages are considerably higher than other informal economic alternatives for unskilled women workers, such as domestic work or selling goods at market. And so while employment in floriculture is often preferable when weighed against their other local employment options for female labour migrants, flower farm wages still needed to be supplemented with other income sources in order for women to make a living wage.

Many women workers noted when budgeting for house rent, food, clothing, school-related fees for children, and other unexpected expenses such as healthcare, it was very difficult to meet their basic needs solely on a flower farm salary. Agnes was a 25-year-old second-generation migrant who was married at the age of 15 and three years later discovered her husband had infected her with HIV. She left him and sought work in the flower farms, where she slept with a male human resources employee to secure work and then entered part-time sex work:

The one who got me that job fucked me before getting that job. Not a manager, a human resources worker. I came to know him through another Mama down there. He asked me to give him my phone number, he called me. He asked me to meet at [a local pub] and when I went he told me if I wanted the job I must sleep with him to get employment. So when I slept with him, I stayed for one week then I got work. We slept like three times during that week... I feel good to have the job but you know that money is not enough [4,000 KES]. It forces me to go and sell myself... When I’m broke I go to town from work to sell sex then I wake up to work again.

Women workers who supplemented their incomes with part-time sex work considered themselves working two jobs, often referring to sex work at night as the “other job.”
While several women sold sex from employee housing, offices, social halls, and pubs within the flower farms, most women preferred to sell at the street level from other settlements surrounding the lake, like Karagita, or even along little K-Street in Naivasha Town. Doing part-time sex work away from the flower farms allowed women workers to maintain distinctions between these two jobs as well as anonymity. When working in the flower farms and also doing sex work in the same space, a woman ran the risk of working alongside her client from the previous night. When these two jobs – that of the flower farm work and sex work – came face to face in the greenhouses women risked intense stigmatization. Wairimu, a 25-year-old labour migrant from Central Kenya explained this:

Yea, I’ve worked [from the flower farms]. And there you get so many men. I’ve also been working from hotels. When you’re working in hotels you have a very big chance of meeting different people. With the flower farms what we hate is today you’ll see me, tomorrow you’ll see me. We’ll still be working together. You don’t want to spoil your name. That’s why we want to work in a hotel because today I see you, tomorrow you’re gone. We’re not working together.

Because sex work is so highly stigmatized in Kenya, separating these two types of paid work were extremely important to women working in the flower farms and helped them avoid the stigma associated with sex work. For some women who were able to separate these two jobs, employment in the cut flower industry actually helped to conceal the fact that they were supplementing their income with part-time sex work. Rose explained the importance of having the two jobs: “It's good if you have something else you're doing. They know I work in the flower farms [my family]. So even if you meet someone in a bar they think you're just having fun.”

Even with the risk of stigmatization, for many female labour migrants it was an easy and calculated choice to enter full-time sex work because they could earn significantly more income than in the cut flower industry. Theresa explained her choice to quit flower farm work altogether and instead of just supplementing her income with part-time sex work, become a sex worker full-time:
I used to find myself even when I was working in flower farms in the evening I used to go to the street because the salary was small… In the morning instead of coming from home I used to come from sex work to the other work [in the flower farms]. I did that for almost four years. It was very hard. I made calculations and found that instead of the salary I get from the farms I’d rather go to the street. At the flower farms the salary was 4,000 KES per month. And if I go to town, I can even get the 4,000 KES in two or three days.

In addition to better economic opportunities such as the increased income Theresa described, street level sex work provided other benefits over flower farm work according to many migrant women. These included access to peer education programmes provided by local NGOs, especially Kenya’s highly successful peer education programs. This was clear in Veronica’s narrative, a 45-year-old sex worker since 1996 and divorced, single mother of four. She talked about the positive impact these programs had when they were first rolled out in the early 2000s and she had decided to enter street level sex work over flower farm work:

By that time I was stupid. When you hear about condoms you fear. Because it's something you've never used. Around 2002 I first learned about condoms. We were taught by another project how to protect ourselves with condoms. I felt good.

In addition to peer education and HIV/AIDS prevention programs, the street also allowed sex workers to become aware of social services and government assistance, and access to sex worker networks and social support in Naivasha Town. Most importantly, many single mothers felt street sex work actually allowed them to be better mothers by being able to provide more financially for their children.

4.10 Unpaid Labour and Sexual Commerce at the Cut Flower Industry

Most female labour migrants who engage in sexual commerce at the cut flower industry were all weighing their employment options and sex work practices against unpaid labour
and single mothering responsibilities. For many of these women, single motherhood was the most important push factor for female labour migrants seeking employment at the cut flower industry. And for those younger girls without children who migrated to Naivasha looking for work, they often became single mothers from transactional sex or other relationships. As a result of complex changing cultural values, gender roles, and family relations in Kenya, more women than ever before are choosing single motherhood and there has been a recent explosion of female headed households everywhere (Meda 2013). However, because migrant flower farm workers did not make a high enough wage and did not have extended family relations in Naivasha to help care for children, the ability to provide better for their children and afford childcare factored significantly in women’s choices to do sex work over flower farm work. This is ultimately because women prioritized their children over labour markets, while single motherhood simultaneously dictated how they were able to participate in these different labour markets.

Many women workers stated that supporting their children was the main reason they were seeking employment in flower farms in the first place, and how they could best manage unpaid and paid labour figured prominently in their daily choices and experiences. For example, in Monica’s migration story, which first appeared in chapter two at the street level, she talked about how she moved to Naivasha to work in the flower farms in order to support her children:

> The best thing about kids is bringing them up. The hardest thing is still bringing them up. Life is too hard. What can I really want? Just money to make my life… It was a must I go to work at the flower farm because of the kids, I want to bring them up with a good life. I fucked someone to get the job. I told him to get me a job, it was when he told me it was a must I sleep with him to get a job. We slept. It didn't even take two weeks he got me a job.

After securing employment, women’s stories became focused on how they could supplement their flower farm incomes to maximize their abilities to provide for their children. How to carefully manage flower farm work, part-time sex work, and unpaid labour was a reality for women who were doing street level sex work at night. Theresa
told of how she would go to work in the flower farms, then cook for her children and leave them alone overnight, saying: “I used to cook for my kids in the evening then leave them alone. I used to lie to them that I was going to a certain place. I did not stay for long. I would go and come back in the morning.” Similarly, Veronica also talked about working two jobs and managing her responsibilities as a single mother:

After work there are so many bars around here, so I go there. I close work, I come cook for the kids, I go to the other work around eight or nine… I’m happy about my work because it feeds my kids. I later got two more kids from customers. I used to close them in the house when I went to work at night. Now I tell them to close the door [because they are older].

The issue of childcare became critical for migrant female flower farm workers supplementing their incomes with part-time sex work. This was not only because they were working triple shifts, but also because of their lack of access to affordable childcare. Female labour migrants did not have social systems in place or extended family relations in Naivasha who could provide childcare, and their low wages hardly afforded them the means to hire house help. These limited childcare options meant women sometimes resorted to locking their children in their homes while they went to work in the flower farms. This issue of childcare was also evident among the women flower farm workers in Dolan et al.’s 2002 study, wherein they found that:

Many women prioritized childcare ahead of wages, signalling the importance of women’s labour constraints, and the difficulties they face in taking proper care of their children while working in the industry. A number of female workers (whose children had accompanied them) said they were obliged to leave younger children with their older siblings or neighbours while they worked as they could not afford to employ household help. Alternatively, children were left unsupervised and out of school (51).

While many women admitted to leaving their children unattended when they were working in the flower farms, they also expressed that this was a critical moment in considering to do sex work full-time. With the high rates of gender based violence,
incidences of child molestation, and even tragic cases such as one child who was left alone and fell into a pit latrine, drowning in human waste, these women were not comfortable leaving their kids unsupervised during the day. However, when they entered sex work full-time, while they were able to supervise their children during the day, they faced similar challenges to providing overnight childcare. As a result, a retired female sex worker recognized this lack of childcare options and started an overnight childcare service specifically for sex workers in Naivasha.

Mumbi, who was introduced in chapter two at the street level, was 45 years old and had been operating a childcare for sex workers since 2006 after establishing a demand through caring for her own grandchildren: “I was one of the sex workers from the 1980s and then in 2006 I saw I had aged, and my children had children and were doing that [sex work], so I decided to stop now and start caring for their babies.” Mumbi stated that she was unable to go to the street as a sex worker and risk meeting her children there, also selling sex, and soon discovered that many sex workers were looking for overnight childcare services:

I have a daughter who has children, those children are the grandchildren. Even them there are going out there. So let me leave them to do that, I take care of the children. I can’t go to the street and meet my children. There are 10 kids at night and three during the day. All of them are single mothers, they are all sex workers. The way I have brought up my grandchildren, the ones who have seen me bringing up my grandchildren have brought their children. After the good service they go telling the other sex workers.

The ages of the children Mumbi cared for were between four months and seven years old, and most of them were dropped off in the evening and picked up again in the morning, between five and eight o’clock. Mumbi also explained how she sometimes cared for a child for several days if the sex worker went to another town, or if one of the mothers was arrested she could agree to care for the child until other accommodations were made, because she herself was all-too familiar with work-related opportunities and risks. Mumbi held this overnight childcare in her own 12 X 12 home in the settlements surrounding
Naivasha Town; lining the floor with foam mattresses at night she would charge just 30 KES per child:

Even if I charge 30, there are those ones who go and come back with nothing in the morning, what can you do? I care for them alone. The mothers have to bring with them what that child needs – the milk, napkins, food. I spread the mattresses and they sleep… The going out of these girls or mothers is to get food for their children, that they don’t have alternative. And when they go there it’s not easy, they get raped even themselves. Sometimes they go even for a week without getting anything. So even these mothers when they come back they have nothing to give to those children. So sometimes if those children are brought here and they have no food and I’ve cooked my food, I’ll be forced to share my food with the children.

This, according to Mumbi, was her way of giving back to her sex worker community by being able to provide non-stigmatizing childcare services and helping women better manage both their paid and unpaid labour; as she simply put it: “I feel I support sex workers because I take care of their kids.”

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter has made visible the different types of sexual-economic exchange and labour migration patterns that have emerged alongside the cut flower industry in Naivasha. A working environment of institutionalized gender discrimination but also women’s personal projects to enter the formal economy and support female headed households sometimes leads to labour migrants exchanging high-risk sex for work in flower farms. This complex entanglement of structural constraints and individual agency is further exemplified in women’s decisions to engage in transactional sex relationships with their male supervisors, supplement their low incomes with part-time sex work, and enter street level sex work full-time. K-Street in Naivasha Town certainly comes with its own set of risks and challenges, for example being more visible to state criminalization and society level stigmatization. However, for migrant female flower farm workers entering street level sex work, in comparison to working at the cut flower industry, this
resulted in improved working conditions, higher incomes, and most importantly, the ability to better provide for their children.

For many women, when weighed against the available services and circumstances in flower farm workplaces, the street actually became an empowering place that could offer social support and access to community development initiatives. Through Kenya’s highly successful peer education programs sex workers from the flower farms, once they became more visible and reachable at the street level, benefited from information especially on protective practices, condom use, reproductive and sexual health, and STI and HIV transmission and prevention. Therefore, it has also been demonstrated how at the same scale migrant female sex workers can experience disempowerment, as women become more vulnerable to state regulation and police abuse, but also may experience empowerment by gaining access to state-run peer education programs once they enter the street. At all stages of the continuum of sexual commerce in connection to the cut flower industry in Naivasha, from the exchange of sex for work to the street level entry, it is exemplary how women labour migrants experience different types of international development agendas across multiple scales.

Flower farm work itself represents the restructuring of Kenya’s economy under SAPs and export diversification, illustrating the complicity of powerful institutions like the IMF and World Bank in creating development paradigms that have drastically impacted everyday life in Naivasha. Moving up the Kenya-UK cut flower commodity chain reveals further development projects and power dynamics. These include western-based human rights reports and advocacy for better working conditions in flower farms and the advent of fair trade campaigns that both privilege the western consumer and consumption in development. Multi-scalar development agendas also include tensions between the private sector and the state in the implementation of social codes to improve industry labour standards while remaining within competitive profit margins. And at the very bottom of the supply chain, there has also been the emergence of grassroots, community, and multi-lateral development responses to the gendered social impacts of the flower farms in Naivasha. Finally, this chapter has also demonstrated how public perceptions and media speculation feed into notions of development, in international human rights
campaigns and fair trade pressure but also in the challenges local community development initiatives face in battling everyday stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, condom use, single motherhood, and sex work. As the intended recipients of these multi-scalar development agendas, the moment labour migrants choose to enter street-based sex work over flower farm work, all of these different scales, processes, and power dynamics become entangled with migrant female sex workers’ subjectivities at the street level in Naivasha.
Chapter 5

5 The Corridor

Map 6: The corridors through Naivasha

This chapter maps out intra-regional and internal circular mobility patterns and the sexual-economic exchanges occurring along East African highways and roadways. Beginning with a literary description that elucidates how critical public passenger travel is to everyday life across Africa, the importance of transit systems to itinerant female sex workers is emphasized. The two trajectories travelled are examined, including selling sex to truck drivers along their long-distance routes as well as seasonal mobility for cash crops and tourism. Drawing predominantly from the 20 migration stories collected from itinerant female sex workers transiting through Naivasha, along highways and roadways
throughout Kenya, and also while traveling in public passenger vehicles, this chapter explores their various motivations for moving. These include economic reasons, such as clientele mobility and increasing client base; however, the ways in which itinerant female sex workers use high mobility to pursue personal projects are also highlighted. In particular, this chapter focuses on how highly mobile sex work results in commercializing the sex worker-client transaction, HIV/AIDS awareness and activism, and cosmopolitan ideals. How itinerant sex work impacts local sex work practices becomes clear, as does the complex interplay between empowerment and risk throughout circular mobility patterns.

5.1 Highways, Roadways, and Transit in Mobility

For itinerant female sex workers who move from place to place to sell sex across Africa, transit is a critical moment throughout their circular mobility and being in transit is a central part of their everyday lives. Transit along African highways and roadways has been important in both academic and other literature. For example, scholars have examined regional migratory systems (Brachet 2012), long distance truck driving, and the widespread use of public passenger vehicles (Mutongi 2006; wa Mungai and Samper 2006). Recently, highways and roadways have also attracted policy attention as the yearly average of fatalities from traffic accidents in Africa are among the highest, and are predicted to surpass HIV/AIDS deaths worldwide by the year 2030 (Eshbaugh, et al. 2012). Highways and roadways have therefore been important features in Africa’s literary postcolonial landscape, as Adeline Masquelier (2002) has noted, evoking death, mysticism, the spirit world, and danger. Ben Okri (1991) has written that, “The road swallows people and sometimes at night you can hear them calling for help, begging to be free from inside its stomach” (121), and Wole Soyinka (1973) has likened the road to a serpentine funeral shroud stretching across the African topography. In the excerpt below from his work of ethnographic fiction, anthropologist Peter Chilson (1999:3-13) describes traveling in bush taxis across West Africa perfectly as, “riding the demon.”
5.1.1 Riding the Demon

For hundreds of miles I sat braced against the open air, without a seat belt to restrain me, my left arm thrown across the seat’s shoulder so I could grasp the top, my right hand tightly holding the seat in front of me. I had to guess at the driver’s speed – always very high – because none of the dashboard gauges worked. And the engine hood would not close. The driver had looped rope through the under latch and tied the hood down to the front fender.

A bush taxi...

We sat together, passengers and driver, grim-faced and silent, not uttering a word to one another. Occasionally I heard a soft exclamation, “Allah!” or a gasp. Much of the time I kept my eyes closed to protect them from the wind blasting through the door space – and because of the driving. We played chicken on blind curves in the inside lane, passing five, six cars at a time, and always seemed to regain our own lane with only a few feet to spare before we would have smashed into oncoming traffic.

Regardless of nationality, everyone who drives in Africa drives like this – with heat-inspired, desperate, pedal-to-the-floor insanity, heedless of reason, of their own or anyone else’s desire to live beyond the next turn. The driver becomes his vehicle, soaking up the power – enjoying it mentally and physically – lusting for the freedom of unregulated roads. Speed limits are not enforced. He drives as if life must be chased mercilessly to its end and finished in a bright flash...

Transport in Africa is a free-for-all system so chaotic that few travellers, even Africans, agree on a precise definition of the bush taxi... Bush taxis are dangerous, dilapidated, slow, crowded, demoralizing, and suffocating; they are also fast, intimate, exciting, equalizing, and enlightening. They are bowls of human soup, microscope slides of society, mobile windows on the raw cultural, economic, and political vitality of Africa.

Mobility from, to, and through Naivasha via both public passenger and transport vehicles including lorries, buses, matatus, cars, bush and moto- taxis, tuk-tuks, and even the occasional train, bicycle taxi, donkey cart, boat, and plane is intimately linked to itinerant
sex work. In many ways all of these different modes of transportation became, like Chilson (ibid.) says, mobile windows on the cultural, economic, and political aspects of sexual commerce as it travels from Naivasha across East Africa. However, commercial trucks in combination with public transit, especially matatus, buses, and motorcycles, were by far the most closely linked to highly mobile patterns of sexual commerce. Not only did women use these different types of transportation as a means to get to where they were going to sell sex, men in the transport sector made up a significant portion of their clientele. In some cases, highways and roadways also impacted women’s sex work practices in very particular ways. One woman decided to enter sex work after she was widowed when her husband died in a traffic accident, another similarly started selling sex to support her younger siblings when both her parents died in an accident, and another was even recruited into sex work directly from a transit stage. However, for the majority of female sex workers, high mobility was a vehicle to strategically maximize their client base while also fulfilling complex personal projects as they arrived, departed, or transited through Naivasha.

5.2 Itinerant Sex Work, Trajectories, and Mobility

Itinerant sex work across Kenya and East Africa generally falls into two distinct types of travel trajectories, although they most often overlapped throughout a highly mobile sex worker’s career. While the two trajectories of itinerant sex workers always travel some network of East African roadways, they are distinguished by the type of transportation, targeted clientele, and different sex work practices. The first followed the major trade routes along the trans-African highways targeting truck driver clientele, while the second trajectory used public transport along highways and roadways to target seasonal clientele such as farmers, fishermen, and tourists. While both varied in distance and duration, these trajectories were characterized by circular mobility and transiting along highways and roadways, and fluctuate with national and regional economic trends. When documenting their human rights violations, the Federation of Women Lawyers, or FIDA (2008), recognized female sex workers’ mobility and these two itinerant trajectories in Kenya:

The sex trade in Kenya is driven by factors that vary from place to place, and region to region. In Kenya’s coastal towns, tourists are a significant part of the
market for sex work. Long distance truck drivers and transporters as well as cross border traders make up much of the clientele of sex workers in border towns like Busia, Malaba and Namanga. In the rural market centres, sex work is shaped by the type of business that predominates in the town and patterns of seasonal payment for cash crops such as coffee, tea, and wheat (2).

Geographically, Kenya’s economy is not only critical to the rest of the region but it is also spatially demarcated within the country, which has impacted female sex workers’ mobility patterns in particular ways. First, the major port in Mombasa exports goods to Uganda, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, resulting in a trajectory along the Northern Corridor transport network. Second, within Kenya’s borders the majority of agricultural crops are concentrated in the Great Rift Valley and tourism along the Coast, the two largest sources of foreign exchange revenue for the country, resulting in a distinct internal and seasonal trajectory (see Map 7).

Map 7: Northern corridor highway network
Due to the magnitude of truckers traveling from Mombasa to Kampala, which might take two weeks there and back depending on road conditions and border delays, this trajectory provided a steady clientele for itinerant female sex workers. Because the second trajectory reflected seasonal harvests, monthly salaries from cash crops, and spikes in tourism this type of mobility was much less consistent and varied considerably throughout the year, with peak times including the end-month, April, August, and December. Occasionally women followed one mobility trajectory exclusively; however, it was most common that women engaged in both so as to maximize their incomes, sometimes continuously on the move, but always periodically visiting their home base.

5.2.1 The Corridors

As a result of female sex workers who target truckers along the Northern Corridor, this type of itinerant sex work has been termed “corridor work” by East African sex workers. The most popular corridor route among participants was from the Mombasa port through Naivasha to Kampala; however, the most highly mobile women travelled throughout East, Central, and South Africa using different transport corridors. The woman from the NGO working with sex workers, who was introduced in chapter four noting the different types of sexual commerce at the cut flower industry, described this phenomenon:

> The issue of the truckers, sex workers will be moving from one place to another looking for clients. They wouldn’t mind moving with the truck drivers from Mai Mahiu and going all the way to Rwanda and back if they’re going to get good money… Now she’s along the corridor. You know when they talk of corridor work, it means moving with the trucks along the highways.

Women doing this type of corridor work would often build up a client base of truck drivers, meeting them along their transport route and travelling to the next town, country, or further for days, weeks, or months at a time.

5.2.2 The Seasons

Female sex workers who use public transport to target clientele at Kenya’s major agricultural and tourist centres travel seasonally due to increased economic activity there.
For example, when there is a wheat harvest in a particular place sex workers will go there because of the increase in traders, farmers, and other potential clients with expendable income. Similarly, at specific times during the year coffee and tea producers will have bonuses that will also attract a number of potential clients, as does the end of the month salaries in some economies of production like the cut flower industry. The most common places and seasons itinerant sex workers targeted throughout the year included Eldoret for corn, Narok for wheat, Kericho for tea and coffee, Thika for pineapple, Kisumu for the fishing industry, Naivasha for cut flowers, and Mombasa for tourism. A community development worker who was leading a workshop and offering peer education training in Naivasha described how female sex workers engage in internal, circular mobility seasonally:

All of them [do sex in other towns]. All of them. They’re highly mobile. The cash flow…is quite fluid. Everything [makes the cash flow fluid]. The seasons in the year, if there’s a harvest. If there’s a wheat harvest in Narok it’s a low season in Mombasa; there’s a coffee bonus in Kiambu. So you’ll find they understand the economic flow better than the economists in the country.

Itinerant sex workers undergoing seasonal mobility often travelled together using buses, matatus, and bush-taxis, frequently the first to capitalize on even irregular economic activity, such as a sudden foreign military presence or an unexpected cruise ship docking.

5.2.3 Clientele Mobility

Itinerant sex work and circular mobility is, to some extent, a reflection of female sex workers’ highly mobile clientele across Kenya and East Africa. This is especially true of the mobility of truck drivers and their purchase of sex along the Northern Corridor, which has been well documented (Ferguson, et al. 2006; Morris and Ferguson 2007; Morris, et al. 2009). Some literature has recognized that truck driver clientele has also resulted in increased mobility for female sex workers. In a study that mapped sex work along the Northern Corridor, Alan Ferguson and Chester Morris (2007) found female sex workers frequently moved with truck drivers, spending at least 25% of their time away from a home base, travelling throughout East Africa but most often among the major truck stops.
in Kenya. Furthermore, Scorgie et al. (2012) have argued that, “sex workers on major highways in Africa tend to move in tandem with fluctuating accommodation and leisure preferences of truckers” (926). This is a partial account at best, discounting the migrancy of itinerant sex workers and without considering the complexities of their individual migration projects. Similar to findings from a study by Lorraine van Blerk (2007) among female sex workers in Ethiopia, wherein she found the girls to be highly mobile, moving to access a larger client base, to seek new adventures, and to avoid stigmatization (81), itinerant female sex workers in East Africa engaged in mobility for a number of complex economic and personal reasons.

5.3 The Market, Becoming New, and Mobility

While van Blerk (ibid.) found that Ethiopian sex workers used mobility as a strategy to increase their client base, in Kenya migrant female sex workers continuously expressed that they were also able to increase their clientele by using mobility to become “new.” For nearly all women it was not only that moving meant more clients in multiple places, it was that in each place a female sex worker was able to reinvent herself as new to the market, which was according to them, one of the most desirable characteristics to clients. The same community development worker and peer educator described this correlation between being new and the market for sex:

If you’re new the market is better. They always want the new catch, everyone wants a new catch. So if you operate in one place for so long you’ll find that, unless the clientele is changing, you’ll be trading on very thin ground. The newness…matters the most.

In the migration stories of the following itinerant female sex workers, this idea of becoming new through mobility is clearly demonstrated. Njeri a 27-year-old woman who had been doing sex work for nine years, since 2004, was highly mobile approximating that three times every month she was on the road selling sex. Although she did not have any children of her own, Njeri supported her nieces and nephews from two of her sisters, also sex workers, who had both died from AIDS related illnesses. Naivasha had always been her home base, growing up there after her mother had moved in the late 1970s to
work in the flower farms, combining both corridor and seasonal travel trajectories in order to be in a constant state of becoming new:

Moving around usually you have a lot of money than staying around in Naivasha. When I stay within Naivasha, maybe I’ll spend two nights in the house and the other night I go there’s no clients. My clients might call, two of them in a week. So I better travel and go and look for those fresh ones. Most of the places they like new ladies.

This perception that in nearly all places clients desire new sex workers was reiterated over and over, contributing to the notion that staying in one place would result in fewer clients and less profitability. Mercy, who sold in another town every weekend, leaving from Thursday to Monday, explained: “You know when you stay some places the customers they’re used to you, so you change the place. Everyone wants a new woman.” When she was not moving, Mercy lived with and helped support her mother in Naivasha while saving tuition money for college. However, the length of time itinerant sex workers moved for varied considerably from days to weeks to months.

Wairimu, who was introduced in chapter four as a labour migrant and former flower farm worker, was a single mother of four, and lived with her parents so that her mother could care for her children when she was travelling. She had been a sex worker since the age of 18, for about seven years, travelling extensively throughout the region during that time. Wairimu described her mobility patterns as frequent and sporadic, dependent on when clients no longer considered her new:

I prepare myself very nicely, I go for one week, two weeks, three weeks; I come back. I go again. I move. Moving, that means I go to another place. I get a house there. Now the moment they get to know me very much is the time then I go to another place. If you go to a new place the men don’t know you there. So even if you ask for a lot of money they’ll pay because they want you very much. Because you’re new… There’s a difference because if you go there you’re new, you’ll get a lot of customers.
Kelly, a 32-year-old sex worker described how she had been highly mobile since the time she started sex work, about four years ago, explaining that she moved for periods of two months at a time:

You keep changing because if you stay here for long, you’ll lose customers. I stay for about two months… I’ll get to know where there’s money then I’ll go. It’s enough time for you to know how that place is. Yes I go and change. I’ve been moving around like that ever since I’ve started prostitution. The friend who introduced me also moves around like that. I can go anywhere. The ones who know how to look for money go, the ones who don’t know how to look for money can’t go.

Like Kelly, who suggested circular mobility is simply an inherent part of sex work, some women spoke of moving from place to place indifferently, as though there was nothing good or bad about having to move but that it was merely a necessity. Joan, a 28-year-old sex worker and single mother of three migrated with the truck drivers and seasonally every three months to avoid clients getting used to her:

I’ve sold along the highway and here. After every three months I go. There’s no big difference, it’s when you stay in a single place you see there’s no business you shift to another place. There’s nothing good it’s only that you can’t stay in the same place. Because if I stay in one place for quite a long time, people will get used to me, they’ll know me very much and I won’t get money. There’s also nothing bad.

Most women described this perception that they were new as the main advantage to being mobile and moving from place to place. For example Rose, whose narrative also figured prominently in chapter four as a labour migrant and former flower farm worker, engaged in high mobility, often traveling every weekend in addition to longer trips along the corridors and with the seasons:

The advantage mostly when you go out, you change environment, you change, even they pay well. The client sees you're a new person so before they undermine
you [and] think you're a sex worker they pay well. Here people talk, they say stay away from her.

Rose alluded to the fact that it is not simply about being a new sex worker in a new place that increases your client base, but it is also about being able to reinvent yourself as a businesswoman or traveller instead of a sex worker.

Some itinerant female sex workers travelled in groups of two or more when moving in order to share the cost of transport, food, and accommodations from place to place. For example, Nduta and Winnie always travelled together. Nduta was a 27-year-old sex worker with one child who had been in sex work for ten years and Winnie was a 25-year-old sex worker and single mother of two who had been in sex work for three years. Nduta introduced Winnie to the business and taught her how she could use mobility to her advantage; now always engaging in itinerant sex work together. Winnie explained this:

They like new faces. Anywhere we feel like going we go… Today we wanted to travel. There’s no money here, we wanted to go to Salgaa. From Salgaa we’ll go to Maraba. We search there then come back.

Sarah, a 22-year-old sex worker and single mother with three children who had been selling sex for five years, explained further how she liked to travel with other sex workers:

We give each other company to go to other towns… We go to other towns a lot. Mostly end month… I choose those places because of truck drivers. I go with a lift. I sleep with them… When I travel with other sex workers, we go rent a room and stay there… Because people don’t know me there I’ll be able to sell. There’s a lot of money there, you’re on demand [because you’re new].

Whether engaging in corridor work along the highways, seasonal mobility along roadways, and individual or group mobility for sex work, the most important factor that persisted was the idea of being new in each new place.
5.4 Sex Work as Work and Mobility

For itinerant female sex workers doing corridor work and engaging in seasonal mobility, the meaning and practice of their local sex work was significantly impacted. Being exposed to sexual-economic exchange in other towns and cities resulted in migrant female sex workers shifting their work from reflecting gender norms to more strictly economic terms. For many women, their circular mobility experiences became critical to not only maximizing their own sexual-economic transactions, but also affected how local sex workers and clientele perceived sex work practices. This was clear in the migration story of Wambui, a 29-year-old sex worker whose mother and father had both died in a road accident and who had been doing sex work for about 12 years to help support her siblings. Wambui had been introduced to the business by an older sex worker who demanded all the money she made, about 500 KES per day, in exchange for knowledge and protection. Wambui scoffed reminiscing about how she let this other sex worker take advantage of her, telling of how she now makes on average five times that amount and used mobility to be more professional in her work:

I like moving. Like in Mombasa when you go, you can’t touch me here and here. You touch me on the breasts, it’s money. But here [in Naivasha] they just touch you. There, there’s no touching. It’s business. If you want to touch my breasts, it’s business. You aren’t there to find a husband you’re there for business. Naivasha it’s about other stories. He wants to buy for you a bottle [of beer], something like that, you go to the room. It takes a whole process… If you are moving, you go and take a guest, you can meet some clients some are good. When you are moving no one can tell you are a prostitute. No one knows you. You get respect because they don’t know the job you go and do outside. You’re lost for two months then you come. By the time you come you just stay with your children, eating, sleeping, drinking until the time you go again. But when you’re outside you can’t rest until you come back home. Then you rest for one week, one week is enough, then you go back.

Comparing sex worker systems outside of Naivasha especially, where street level sex work often involves ideas of dating and relationships, resulted in negotiations that
became strictly business oriented. Wanjiru also expressed this, who was first introduced in chapter two at the street level, when she went on the road for three-month periods of time and noted the differences in sex work business practices among different places:

Those ones from Mlolongo, they come purposely to fuck and leave. Here [in Naivasha], you won’t know who came to drink for fun and who came for sex. That is bad because you can’t identify a client.

Several itinerant female sex workers further suggested that mobility resulted in having an economic advantage over those women who stayed in one place, expressing that women who were successful at sex work knew how to be mobile. For example, Catherine, a 28-year-old- sex worker who had been doing sex work for three years and had always done corridor work was adamant that: “To make money you have to move.” However, some itinerant sex workers also recognized that more professional sex work business practices and the economic success resulting from mobility also extended to ideas surrounding protection and risk. Joan explained that this is one of the main things she had learned by doing sex work:

This job. The things that I’ve learned. The things I’ve learned from here it’s you stay with these people [customers] like you’re working, not like friendship. You stay like you’re in work. Because when you want friendship you can get sickness. The things I’ve learned from here is to stay being serious. I’ve learned that men are liars. They come tell you this they go and tell you that. The thing that I’ve learned is to stay and know that I’m looking for money and not for relationships. If it’s friendship you might get sick or not even get money because it’s friendship. I know those ladies who I followed, those friends of mine who I followed. I used to stay with one of them. What she liked most was not customers, she wanted friendship. I learned that friendship was not good. She came to realize later she was sick and she told me.

So while sex work practices in Naivasha often reflect gender norms and can then sometimes lead to a high-risk relationship or friendship, itinerant sex workers were able to use mobility to avoid these types of interactions where unprotected sex is expected.
Highly mobile women repeatedly stated that mobility helped them to maintain a professional, sex worker-client business relationship with consistent condom use.

Wanyiri was a 22-year-old sex worker who had been doing sex work for three years to support her five younger siblings after her mother died. Predominantly engaging in corridor work and stating her preference for truck driver clients, Wanyiri emphasized the connection between mobility, sex work practices, and condom use:

They pay. After all that’s all that matters, that they pay. People from here [Naivasha] don’t pay. Some people want a relationship and if you enter into a relationship they won’t use condom and I don’t want that.

The narrative of Wanyiri reflects findings from Ferguson and Morris’ (2007) study mapping sex work along the Northern Corridor. They found that female sex workers had a 90% rate of using condoms with new customers; however, this rate dropped down to between 50 and 60% for regular and repeat clients. Like Wanyiri, Rose succinctly explained this: “Maybe a stranger you use a condom but he comes again, you think he's like a partner so you don't use.” Nekesa, whose narrative was also introduced in chapter two at the street level and had been moving along the corridors for at least 10 years, further expressed how friendships and repeat clients could lead to high-risk sex:

There’s those who will come, they want friendship and you don’t want. And that contributes to a man telling you to screw without a condom. There’s that one who will lie to you that he wants to be your friend and immediately you fuck without a condom he leaves you.

Many itinerant sex workers explained that the longer you stay in one place, the higher your chances are of developing such a friendship and mobility was a key factor in avoiding such high-risk relationships and maintaining professional sex work practices.

5.5 Stigma, Status, HIV/AIDS, and Mobility

No matter how professional your sex work practices or how persistent your condom use as an itinerant female sex worker, ideas surrounding stigma, status, and HIV/AIDS
follow you everywhere. In Van Blerk’s (2007) study of mobility among Ethiopian sex workers, she found some HIV positive women to migrate from place to place if their status became known and they lost clientele. Van Blerk (ibid.) argues that this type of mobility has three consequences: “Increasing the risk of infection among girls, positioning them as a risk factor for the spread of AIDS and limiting their access to services” (82). Although, how circular mobility impacts female sex workers’ knowledge and experiences surrounding HIV and AIDS related illnesses in complex ways is not well known in East Africa. Despite migration patterns in general historically being associated with risk and the spread of STIs and HIV, these narratives are incomplete.

The complex nature of stigma, status, HIV/AIDS, and mobility becomes clear in the migration story of Faith. Faith was a 33-year-old, HIV positive sex worker. This is not an unusual narrative for a female sex worker anywhere across Africa; however, the often-silenced narrative is that Faith contracted HIV prior to becoming a sex worker and, in fact, her status was a decisive factor in her sex work entry. At the time her migration story was collected, she had been doing sex work for about six years, and had been living with HIV for approximately nine. She told the story of how she had contracted the virus from her former husband:

I went and got married. At the beginning he was good. I didn't leave him because he was bad. I left because the first time we met we went for testing at Polyclinic, so he had bribed those people to show that his status was negative. After some time, I discovered that we were both suffering from HIV and AIDS. It was a friend of his who told me. After much investigations I found he was tested at Kijabe hospital first, and he was told to look for support, either wife, parents or friends, because he was to start on ARVs. He did not go back. When we were staying with him I realized he was taking supplements because he was infected with HIV and he never told me. And the time we went for the VCT I was not told. After I discovered I hated him. So I left. I went and was tested the first time and was told to come back after three months. I went back and was told I was positive. I found it was because he knew and he lied, I felt bad and I left him… He said he
didn't tell me because he did not want me to go away from him. It's true because if he had told me I could not have stayed with him.

Despite the fact that married couples account for the highest rates of new HIV infections in Kenya, married women and sex workers are in two drastically different social categories and so it is not often recognized that these identities are sometimes on a continuum. Further, while HIV prevalence is often presumed to be a direct result of sex work, for some women their HIV positive status both presupposes and contributes to entering sex work. Two years after leaving her husband, Faith decided to enter sex work to support herself, her sister who also contracted HIV from her husband who had died of an AIDS related illness, and her sister’s children. Faith remembered the first night she had sold sex along little K-Street in Naivasha Town:

I was in slippers, I had been given a material trouser. I was from here, I went to town. I was hungry. I don't like to remember that day because who took me there told me I find a customer and when I get paid I give her the money. Because she had given me slippers, a trouser, and a top she charged me 100 shillings for each. And I had only been given 500 shillings for the night. I was staying at the end of this estate, I had been given food because I could not. She said instead of staying here you're already sick, there's nothing else you're looking for, let's go. I went. She showed me how to get a customer and I got a good one. By those days she didn't teach me about condoms. It's not that we didn't know. If someone insisted you could use. But by then I didn't love myself; I was infected. I didn't have a home, a place to call home. I used to go just to go, if I die I die if I live I live. I'll never hide myself. I'll tell a customer I'm sick. Some of them are okay. Some of them run away. Some of them say I've lied to them.

Faith sold for several months in Naivasha until she became familiar with the business and quickly realized that moving from place to place was more profitable, remembering the first time she engaged in circular mobility:

I can remember my first time. I was going this way, coming back this way. It was my first time to move from town to town. From Malaba to Mombasa, Mombasa to
Busia…Yes I go to other towns. It's approaching December I want to go to Uganda. Because there, there's money. Mlolongo there's money. Mombasa there's money…There's money in other towns, so long as it's not Naivasha. The other day I was in Narok. I stayed for five days, I came with a lot of money enough to even pay for my sister’s son’s circumcision.

However, what makes Faith’s migration story unique is that she drew on her experiences from corridor work to live positively herself, while also informing her HIV/AIDS activism. This mobility allowed Faith to accept her own status and advocate that other sex workers live positively:

When you are moving you meet those people you don't know. You share things. You know each other. You know about other people’s life. Like for a place I went I found sex workers from there it's like they don't understand what is going on. They don't know about becoming sick. They're not serious about life. They don't respect themselves. Like when you pass through Mombasa road, when you reach a certain place if you get those ones from that place you'll find they're very sick. Some are being used badly there, some are beaten there, some are abused there. It's like you are living in the world but you don't have any right to say or do anything… I like traveling. I remember that I'm infected when I'm moving with trucks. We go to other places we find people are doing bad things. It's like they're not human beings.

As a result of witnessing different sex worker communities and classes throughout Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, Faith became a trained peer educator and estimates that since 2004, when she discovered her own status, she has now helped approximately 300 men and women to live positively with HIV/AIDS across East Africa.

5.6 Mobility and the Sex Worker Cosmopolite

Circular mobility results in a cosmopolitan worldview of how sex work is practiced in cities across East Africa and other African sub-regions. This cosmopolitanism, for many women, then becomes both a business strategy to maximize their profits and is also part
of personal projects to pursue consumption, travel, and tourism. The sex worker cosmopolite and mobility is best captured in the migration story of Wairimu, who previously described her mobility patterns and the idea of becoming new. Wairimu talked about the many different clients she had from various different countries and ethnicities, but also about the different places she aspired to travel to:

I started 2006. 2006 I started moving. I have so many, because I move. I had one from Tanzania, I used to go to Tanzania. I used to have a Sudanese. Although I have never gone to Sudan, but I want to make it by next year to Sudan. And I want also to make it to South Africa. And I will. But in Kenya, let’s say I go to Kitale, Kisumu, Kisii, Nakuru, Nairobi, Nanyuki, I’ve been all over, Nyeri, Mombasa.

One of the most important motivators for itinerant female sex workers moving was that they wanted to travel and see Kenya, East Africa, and sometimes further, and be exposed to other places. In fact, many female sex workers referred to themselves as tourists. For example, Njeri went on to state:

Eldoret, Kisumu, Nairobi, Nakuru, Nyahururu, Nyanuki, Meru, Mombasa. I’m also a tourist in Kenya. Mostly I go to meet my clients, after meeting them maybe after they leave I spend some more nights looking for more clients there… I can go thrice in a month.

Grace, a 29-year-old sex worker whose mother died during the post-election violence and then entered sex work to support her younger siblings, travelled to a new place every two weeks in Kenya. Grace preferred not to travel with truck drivers and her mobility pattern was exclusively seasonal, and she also referred to herself as a tourist:

In August when they’re harvesting wheat I go to Narok. In November I go to Kericho, there’s money from tea there. Kitale I go in July when they’re harvesting corn. Around April they harvest pineapples in Thika. In January I go when wheat is about to get finished in Eldoret. When they are harvesting, there are policemen who are arresting people, so I go when it’s about to get finished. I only go when
they’re harvesting. I’m on my way to Mombasa. I heard there are visitors coming by a cruise ship to Mombasa. Wazungu. It’s good getting exposed and knowing how the world is… I’m a tourist [too].

While sex tourism has been well documented across sub-Saharan Africa, including along the East African coast in particular, the idea that sex workers have the capacity and ambition to be tourists themselves has not been recognized. These travels often resulted in a sense of independence, freedom, and adaptability when visiting other towns and cities. Faith, the itinerant female sex worker who used mobility in her HIV/AIDS activism, stated: “When you go to a new town you can do anything you feel like because you're free. You're not afraid.” Furthermore, Wairimu explained how this sense of freedom extended to the ability to relate to different cultures and classes:

In moving you’re so independent. You know you can live wherever. If you go to poor people you can stay there. If you go to rich people you stay like them. I can go anywhere. People there don’t know I’m moving.

Notably, for most itinerant female sex workers these travels resulted in experiencing sex work practices cross-culturally. Shiro, a 26-year-old sex worker and single mother who engaged in both corridor work from Mombasa to Kampala and seasonal mobility all over Kenya reiterated not only how clients became used to you in the same place, but also that it was beneficial to see how sex workers were selling sex in other places:

I’ve been to Kampala, Kisumu, Eldoret; I came to Naivasha, Narok, Mai Mahiu and now Mombasa. It’s good to know other towns because when you stick to one place, people will feel that you’re used to there. In fact from here I’m going to Congo. I’m going to Kampala then Congo. I stay for three to four months… Yea, I can go… You can go to another place and find there’s money. Like right now in Eldoret there’s money; it’s harvest season, there’s wheat and corn. From there I’ll go to Congo. There’s a best friend of mine, she’s from there. She’s also a prostitute. We’ll go together. Travelling is good you know places. You know how people of that place are like, the prostitutes there, the way they are behaving.
Being exposed to cultural differences in the way sex is practiced outside of Naivasha ultimately also had an impact on how itinerant female sex workers sold sex locally. In the context of mobility, these findings reflect what Susanne Hoffman (2013) has described as aesthetic labour in relation to sexual-economic exchange. Aesthetic labour refers to the visual appearance aspect of sex work, and capitalizing on this characteristic in order to attract steady clientele as a business strategy. In order to capitalize on their sexuality, female sex workers manipulate the way they look, talk, present themselves, their body parts, and the sexual acts they offer in order to meet their clientele’s commodified ideas of desire (ibid. 23). Aesthetic labour became clear in Faith’s narrative when she discussed how she discovered through her travels that in some places you should wear make up and speak a particular way, while other places you should not:

Mombasa there's money. When you go to Mombasa don't put on make up they think you're innocent. Dress smart but don't put on make ups. Don't speak their Swahili. There's money in other towns, so long as it's not Naivasha.

The performativity of aesthetic labour also manifested when, for example, female sex workers wore a hijab as though they were from the coast, wore make up in a way that is fashionable in Uganda, or learned to speak perfect English with tourists and dressed a particular way. These business strategies that they acquired from their travels allowed them to be perceived as exotic, cosmopolitan, and worldly when selling sex locally. Alternatively, Kenyan women were equally able to capitalize on being perceived as exotic and desired in other countries, especially Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan where the language and culture are markedly different compared to Tanzania, for example. For itinerant female sex workers, then, this cosmopolitanism becomes about capitalizing on aesthetic labour in a distinctly mobile way throughout Kenya and East Africa.

Female sex workers who engaged in high mobility to travel nationally and regionally also became exposed to different cultural understandings of desire and doing sex. In the literature, Joane Nagel (2006) has argued that race, ethnicity, and nationality all have sexual aspects, which are constantly reshaped by global processes like mobility, and
made visible through sexual-economic exchange. When crossing borders, Wairimu alluded to these “ethnosexual frontiers” (ibid.) she encountered throughout her travels when she said, “I’ve been having different tribes, so I know how they do their sex. I’ve had a Muslim, I know the way they taste. The way they sex.” Wairimu also described how she was exposed to particular sex acts and ideas of desirability, for example having oral sex performed on her by her Sudanese boyfriend and being told about the practice of clitoris stretching from a Rwandese migrant female sex worker.

The ways that ethnicity extended to stereotypes surrounding how clientele pay for sex was explained in Wamuyu’s migration story. Wamuyu was a 26-year-old sex worker and single mother who had been doing sex work for nine years. When she was 13 years old she was raped and became pregnant, and moved to Naivasha to look for work because she felt ashamed. Wamuyu talked about how ethnicity factored into the places she moved to:

I go to Kisumu, Nairobi, Mombasa, Nyanuki, Nyeri, Narok. I go to those places because I hear there’s money… Kisumu it’s just to go try with the Luo because the Luo are so many there. Not like Kikuyu, they pay well… In Naivasha I can meet a Kikuyu who’s very clean and he’s talking of 200 KES, 150, he can even say 100. A Luo pays well. He can never give you less than 500 KES per shot.

For most itinerant female sex workers, ideas about how you both buy and sell sex were connected to different ethnic groups, nationalities, and races. Wairimu went on to describe, for example, how particular sexual positions and other sex acts, hair removal, and both male circumcision and FGM were all different sexual aspects of race, ethnicity, and nationality that Wairimu had considered and encountered in her itinerant sex work.

5.7 Mobility, Sex Work, and Risk

As Christine Chin (2013) argues, women’s mobility for sex work in the Global South is not motivated exclusively by economic survival alone (10), ranging in East Africa from increasing one’s client base and reinventing oneself to maintaining professional sex work relationships, engaging in HIV/AIDS activism, and pursuing personal projects including
travel and tourism. However, it is also important to note that examining circular mobility for sex work is not to glorify sex work (ibid.), recognizing that female itinerant sex workers who move from place to place across Kenya and East Africa are often also at risk. This extends beyond the high rates of traffic accidents and the risk associated with riding the demon or being swallowed by the road to vulnerability to sexual and gender based violence. Often resulting from unfamiliarity with local clientele and inaccessibility to collective protection from the local sex worker community in other places, many itinerant female sex workers experienced even more violence through mobility.

In any given place, regular clientele became known among the sex worker community as good or bad clients. Good clients had a reputation of paying well, treating sex workers with respect, and practicing safe sex. Bad clients, however, were most often men who had previously committed an act of sexual and/or gender based violence against a sex worker and had a reputation for violence. These clients were usually avoided within the sex worker community or, if a sex worker agreed to sell sex to a client with a violent reputation she would notify her colleagues. One of the main dangers itinerant female sex workers faced in moving from place to place was not being familiar with who among the clientele had a reputation for being a bad client. This risk was clearly expressed in the migration story of Shico, a 27-year-old sex worker and single mother of two who had been selling sex for eight years. Shico did cross-border corridor work from Mombasa to Kampala and seasonal mobility throughout Kenya approximately every two months:

I’ve sold in so many towns. Because when you stay in a single place for a long time people will get used to you so I prefer I come stay here for two months, after that two months I get to another place I’ll get back to where I was from because of that getting used to each other. Mombasa, Mlolongo, Naivasha, Nakuru, Salgaa, Eldoret, Malaba, Kampala. Those are the places I’ve sold. I’ve also gone for harvesting season in Narok and Thika. To avoid people getting used to me in a certain place I move. Mostly I go get my sex worker friends there. It’s very hard for me to go to all those towns and maybe not get one person I know. My friends all move that way. We tell each other where to go and we meet. I can come stay here for a month or even three weeks, depends on the way I find there. I pass by
my house in Nairobi on the way. I don’t have a specific time when I go, like now I can say I feel like going and go. Mostly I go to Narok in July for wheat. I go to Thika in August or September for bonus of tea. I also go with truck drivers. Let me say that sometimes I go with them, but those ones are my clients. Like here in Mombasa I came with a truck driver, to Malaba I also went with a truck driver. I went to Kampala by bus alone. I went and stayed there for three months and it was not bad. Aside from the stress I had because I was all alone there I did not have a friend we could help each other the first month. I stayed and got used. You get many customers because they don’t know you; they feel you’re new. You can go with a customer he’ll harm you because he doesn’t know you he knows you’re new. Maybe you had agreed on 200 KES he fucks you so much for the 200 KES and before someone comes to help you he’s used you badly.

As a result of this risk in other towns when moving, many itinerant sex workers developed strategies to minimize the danger of meeting with a bad client. For example Akoth, a 27-year-old sex worker and single mother of two who had been in sex work for 11 years was adamant about not drinking alcohol excessively when moving from place to place in order to avoid sexual and gender based violence. Akoth warned that a bad client in another town could try to get you drunk and you could be raped:

Someone will buy you drinks, he's talking to you nicely you go and find he's not alone there are many. So I don't drink, I only take soda because I don't want to be taken by force.

Waringa, first introduced at the street level in chapter two, further explained how after a serial killer murdered several female sex workers across Kenya, women became much more cautious when moving for sex work, travelling together and only selling in short time:

Nowadays when you go…you don’t go alone. You go two or three. Nowadays we don’t spend the night we go for short time. Because there were so many problems here, women were being killed.
This risk associated with mobility was reiterated by Linda, whose migration story appeared in chapter two at the street and then again at the IDP camp in chapter three, when she said, “You can even go and die and not come back home,” resulting in her too being extra cautious when she travelled to sell sex.

Despite such precautions, ideas of race, nationality, and ethnicity further factored into sexual and gendered based violence and created particular vulnerabilities for itinerant female sex workers. For example, a white foreign flower farm owner in Naivasha became known for forcing female sex workers to have sex with dogs. Rumours of this occurring between white foreigners and female sex workers in other towns throughout Kenya were common within the sex worker community, and it was well known that a migrant female sex worker from Naivasha who had been forced to have sex with a dog subsequently died from her injuries. Wamuyu further explained how a group of foreign soldiers were relocated from Naivasha to Nyanuki because of several reports of sexual and gender based violence against female sex workers:

    Nyanuki I go because of white soldiers. I think they’re Americans. We call them *waJohnny* – foreign soldiers. Right now they’re there. They were banned from here. They were raping women so they were banned from here.

In addition to these racialized aspects of sexual and gender based violence, Kenyan itinerant female sex workers also faced unique vulnerabilities in other countries. Pauline, first introduced at the street level in chapter two, had travelled to South Sudan and returned to Kenya because outsider female sex workers were being murdered. She explained this in her migration story:

    I’ve sold in Nairobi, Mombasa, Juba. I heard that there was money there, that they’re paying well. I stayed for the whole year in Juba. I came back because things were not good there. Men from there, they were killing ladies. Mostly people from there don’t like the business of prostitution. Someone I knew was killed. I know two Kenyan ladies who were killed from there. Even the other day another one was killed, we were with her here. That one was killed by her boyfriend. It was there they like harassing people, men. We had gone with them at
night. That one went with a man the following day we waited for her because we were staying together. She did not turn. It was later the one who she had gone with had gone to ask and she was told the man she had gone with was a bad person. It was later when she was seen at a gravesite being killed. When I saw that I came back. I didn’t feel safe. In Nairobi it’s good, even in Mombasa it’s good. For me I can’t get a man harassing me not unless we have differences. Like in Sudan you can be waiting for customers and a man comes he wants you by force. If you refuse he can even come with a gun and shoot you. This forces you to call the police. I was not raped but there are those ones who are bad you can sleep with them, they can even say you’ve stolen from them take you to police station and you’ve not stolen. You’re forced to pay them free money because policemen there are not like police here, they don’t understand. The very first time I went to Sudan they were paying well. But when they saw the women were many, they started paying very badly. They were paying like 3,000 KES, then they were paying like in 500 Kenyan money. And there life is very expensive… I went to Sudan by bus with other sex workers, we were three. The ones I know who died it’s like four.

These narratives of risk and vulnerability clearly show how itinerant female sex workers sometimes face increased sexual and gender based violence throughout their circular mobility patterns, even having to navigate the everyday threat of death and dying in each new place.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has mapped out sexual-economic exchange as it occurs along East Africa highways and roadways transiting through, originating from, or bound for Naivasha. Both intra-regional and internal circular mobility patterns have been emphasized. These include itinerant female sex workers who sell sex to truck drivers along long-distance, cross-border routes in addition to seasonal mobility to sell sex where there is an increase in economic activity due to cash crops or tourism. This highlights the importance of public passenger travel to highly mobile female sex workers, but also how they use transit systems for sex work within complex structural constraints, economic necessity,
and to enact agency. Documenting the circular mobility of female sex workers shows how there is much entanglement not only between structure and agency, but also among risk and vulnerability and opportunity and empowerment. Most notably, while itinerant sex workers may mitigate the risk of HIV transmission by commercializing the sex worker-client relationship, they might also experience increased vulnerability to gender based violence in other cities and countries across East Africa. Furthermore, women’s complex personal projects have been revealed in these mobility trajectories, which vary from engaging in activism to aspiring to cosmopolitanism, which all in turn become entangled at the street level in Naivasha as they impact local sex work practices and sex worker values in empowering ways.
Chapter 6

6 The Mobile Phone

Map 8: Safaricom’s mobile phone coverage in Kenya

Beginning with excerpts from a Kenyan sex worker’s online blog, this chapter chronicles the recent explosion of ICTs, especially mobile phone technology, across Africa. Recent literature surveying the growing social, cultural, and economic significance of mobile phones is examined, paying particular attention to the development of the mobile phone
money transfer system in Kenya known as M-Pesa. The role of mobile phone technology in the making and unmaking of gendered, intimate relationships is emphasized in this chapter. Drawing from migration stories collected from the street level and across all migrant sex work spaces, how mobile phone use impacts migrant female sex workers’ everyday gendered roles and relationships is specifically examined. The importance of sex worker social networks, kinship, and intimate relationships and how the mobile phone is restructuring these particular gendered relationships are explored. Furthermore, how the mobile phone has become a contested tool leading to a common practice known as mobile phone snatching is also examined. This chapter demonstrates how mobile phone use and technology is changing sexual commerce in East Africa today, while also pointing to critical gendered relationships often overlooked in sex work research through the everyday experiences of migrant female sex workers in Naivasha.

6.1 Nairobi Nights: The Blog by Sex Worker Sue

6.1.1 January, 2011: Just Call Me Malaya

There have been discussions about the politically correct way to refer to prostitutes... The truth is however we don’t give quite a damn about how we are referred... We actually refer to ourselves and to each other as malaya; a name perhaps more crude than prostitute. But we are not the only malaya, very many men in their twenties and thirties refer to their girlfriends as malaya. A man saying “wacha nikaone malaya wangu” won’t be meaning he is going to see a prostitute but rather [his] girlfriend. The underlying logic is that all women in a way or another are prostitutes. Very few, if any, women would say with a straight face that they never had sex even once with the money or security component at the back of their minds. We the so-called prostitutes are the brave ones to come out in the open and stop beating about the bush; we are in it for the money, the pleasure is secondary.

Talking of names, none of us or rather few of us prostitutes use their real names when introducing ourselves to our clients... As for me I change names as need be. Many men want to sample women other than those of their tribes. So the first thing is if I am able to guess the tribe of the man from his accent or physical look then I give a name which is
from a different and not closely related tribe. The more rare or smaller the tribe the more excited the men are. If it’s a white man I will give some ‘real’ African name. My favorites are Naliaka and Pendo. I still love Claire and Marilyn. My default name among the girls is Sue, which you too know. Never mind about my real name.

6.1.2 February, 2011: Why I Became A Prostitute – An Attempt

Many times when writing I am in a soul scratching state; and when writing about why I became a prostitute I find myself not able to relate to tales of misfortune and a poor background. It’s not surprising then, a few sentences later I realize I have no explanation that is ‘acceptable’ or ‘good’. Yet society requires the choice of prostitution as a way of earning a living to be justified, and not just by anything that comes out of the mouth, but by some very specific reasons. This is unlike in other careers, for instance accounting, where a generality like, “This is something I always wanted to do” sounds rich enough to explain professional choice. In prostitution such would hold no water, what with sex work being a ‘crazy’ high risk and ‘dehumanizing’ career.

6.1.3 May, 2011: The Street Badges

When I first came to Koinange Street, I tried to be the people’s person. Trying to be nice and polite to every of the girls. It didn’t take me long to realize that was of no use in a very individualistic and competitive environment. In the eyes of the other girls I looked stupid. And yes, I saw the looks when a man picked me and later heard their scathing remarks. Who did I think I was to go round being nice to everyone?

I shed the Miss Good image, and became more acceptable. I could gossip and take sides in arguments rather than be the girl in the middle who giggles sheepishly. Most importantly I could hate. Whether my feelings of hatred were real or not mattered little; the important thing was that in my eyes and those of the other girls I was becoming street worthy.

6.1.4 October, 2011: “Meet My Girlfriend, Sue”

We are focused less in succeeding and more in preventive measures to avoid a fall. A fall is a matter of both personal and peer honor. If I am yanked off the Street because I was
jailed for stealing from a man, or since I could not sweet-talk the city council askari or
the magistrate, then that’s a fall.

And so is when a once-favorite man stops picking me in favor of another girl; it does not
matter whether the girl is less glamorous than me. If I am out for two months or so
because of sickness, not necessarily sexually transmitted, then that is a fall.

If I am sick I would rather say I had gone to chase Ugandan men in Kampala. Here on
the Street there is a very thin line between a decline and a fall. Well, here they are one
and the same thing. A fall will mean that I become part of the Street fable. And because
girls talk so much, I will be walking round the city thinking everybody knows everything
about me. What causes a fall, whether chance or choice, is seen as contagious, and girls
want to have little to do with a girl who has fallen even once. Thus girls will use all
manner of trickery to avoid being seen as fallen.

6.1.5   May, 2012: January Mind Games

The stereotype of a Street prostitute is that of a birdbrain, a girl dull enough all she could
think of to earn a living was open her legs and lower herself to the bottom of society.
Over time I have learnt there are few advantages of trying to prove otherwise to those
clients who still stick with the stereotype; to show I have more thoughts, and not only of
the vulgar, thieving kind.

So most of the time I go with the flow, displaying some ignorance and avoiding any of the
so-called serious talk. But sometimes I want to tease a man a little bit. To get to his
nerves, or remind him he is not the only one who knows. Sometimes though it's strategy,
playing mental games with a mentally weaker but financially endowed man, so that his
ego is crushed and he tries to make up for it in a way that will benefit me.

Not long ago a man who looked in his early 30s picked me. Once in his car he muttered
“Hey” which he quickly changes to “Sasa”, supposedly a greeting in the language I
could understand and comfortably communicate in. “I am good” I replied, and not the
“Poa” he expected me to say. He didn't seem surprised, after all every street girl knows
some few English words. “Kumekauka sana”? (Aren't things tough?) he asked. He was
now acting savior and wanted me to acknowledge the big favor he had done by picking me.

“Kiasi but things are brightening up,” I said. The last phrase caught him off guard. He expected an answer in some street Swahili, in addition to acting the damsels in distress like girls on the Street sometimes cleverly do.

He sneered then stared at my thighs. I knew I was skimp but not sexy. Looking a little stylish but wearing cheap. He smiled. “A wannabe” he must have said to himself.

We hit one of the roads recently constructed by the Chinese. It was slightly past 1am, the road empty. He accelerated to about 100 km/hr then slowed down abruptly to 30 km/hr or so. “Hawa wa Chinese kweli wanafanya kazi” (These Chinese are really working) he said. Its the common ice breaking phrase in the city. I grunted in acknowledgment.

“Ukiwa naa gari kama hii ndio una appreciate better” (When you are driving a car like this you appreciate better). His was a Toyota Avensis or one of those new big Toyota models. I decided to up the game by ignoring some of what he had said and gently go beyond the pedestrian.

“Why do people seem to trust the quality of Chinese roads but not most of the other products?” I asked in English.

“You can’t appreciate a good road unless you own a car,” he said. He was right that I don’t own a car but wrong assuming I will never own one. Owning a car is one of my distant dreams. But that was besides the point, he had subdued my kimbelembele, and he loved it.

“FYI China is the next super power,” I grunted because I didn't have a clever quip to reply to that. After some seconds I remembered something. Something I had heard on BBC, the station I prefer listening to because most of the local stations will in one way or another end up reminding me of my work. And I don’t want to be reminded so much of it.
“Isn't interesting the Chinese don't seem interested in pushing for the dominance of the Yuan like they are pushing everything else?” I asked a little curt.

“It doesn't matter” he said and accelerated once more. I was not sure my question made sense, but it didn't matter, I had gotten him and now wanted to yap more.

“I think it does. Anyway what role do you think the euro crisis had in the battering the shilling got last year?” I asked. Another sweet collage of a question from BBC snippets. His face tightened and he accelerated more.

“If you know so much about the economy why don't you become the minister for finance?” he said, “Instead of parading your ass in the cold!” I laughed out loud. I had got him where I wanted. I didn't want to push him so hard lest he dropped me or something. I rested my hand on his fly.

In the room he was rough. He twisted and pressed me hard. His ego was hurt and that was his way of subduing me, of redeeming it. I didn't struggle and looked physically and mentally humbled. He loved it. But there was one final thing, just to be sure. He paid me an extra Ksh.500. I thought that was his way of saying “It doesn't matter what you think you know or pretend to. You are still a prostitute and I have more money and respect than you do. That's what matters.”

I didn't care. The money is what mattered to me.

This anonymous sex worker blog called “Nairobi Nights by Sue: The Kenyan Prostitute Building a Brand” (2011), caused an uproar throughout Kenya and was the topic of conversation across all social and political circles. In her “About Me” section, Sue succinctly described the purpose of the blog:

My name is Sue. I practice along Koinange Street, Nairobi. These are thoughts, observations and experiences from my prostitution world. Nothing of the soft, sympathy seeking topsy turvy kind. But straight talk, hard facts and real anecdotes. They are worth something.
As the entire country deliberated what exactly Sue’s sex worker perspectives were worth, rushing to read her latest post on their mobile phones, the “Nairobi Nights” blog alludes to how dramatically ICTs are impacting sex work in East Africa today.

6.2 Mobile Phone Use in Africa

The new ICTs boom in Africa over the last decade, especially the mobile telephone revolution, cannot be overstated (Etzo and Collender 2010): in the year 2000 one in 50 people living in Africa were using a mobile phone, with this figure rising exponentially to one in three by the year 2008 (de Bruijn, et al. 2009a:11). Cell phone coverage has at the same time grown from only 10 percent of the continent able to get signal in 1999 to, by 2008, 60 percent of the African population accessing mobile phone coverage (Aker and Mbiti 2010:208). Today, even the most rural areas in the majority of African countries are able to get at least minimal signal somewhere within their villages. This reflects the spike in mobile phone subscriptions continent-wide, which have rapidly grown from 16 million subscribers in 2000 to 376 million in 2008, approximately one-third of sub-Saharan Africa’s population. And while the initial mobile phone subscribers tended to be male, young, educated, and middle or upper class living in urban city-centres, by 2009 with the rollout of low cost phones and lower airtime values phone ownership now spans gender, class, and age across Africa (ibid.).

Mirjam de Bruijn’s et al. (2009b) collection, Mobile Phones: The New Talking Drums of Everyday Africa, has most thoroughly examined the relationship between technologies of communication and social realities in various African societies. Looking at Africa’s current communication landscape reveals how mobile telephony creates new forms of relating to society, culture, and the economy and how the mobile phone is appropriated throughout these processes (de Bruijn, et al. 2009a). Furthermore, Jonathan Donner (2008), in his review of mobile phone research in the developing world, emphasizes how mobile phones have become embedded within everyday life in Africa in much more significant ways than other ICTs, having implications for broader processes like development and globalization.
6.2.1 Mobile Phones and Mobile Money in Kenya

Within sub-Saharan Africa, the rapid explosion of the mobile phone has been especially prominent across East Africa. In Kenya specifically, mobile phones became widely accessible in the mid-2000s when, like the rest of the continent, network competition and signal expansion drastically decreased the costs of both handsets and airtime. Safaricom alone, Kenya’s leading network and service provider, currently has 15 million mobile phone subscribers and recent statistics show 31 percent of Kenya’s GDP is now spent on mobile phones (Ramisch 2013:25-26). What distinguishes Kenya from other African countries is that alongside the mobile phone revolution, in 2007 Safaricom developed a mobile phone money service known as M-Pesa (“M” for mobile and pesa translates as money), making Kenya the country with the highest number of mobile phone money transfers worldwide (Ndiaye 2013:18).

Building on a previous, informal process where Kenyan mobile phone users could exchange airtime for money in local markets (Ramisch 2013), M-Pesa now allows its subscribers to send money to each other inexpensively through mobile phone text messages (Kusimba, et al. 2013). The statistics surrounding M-Pesa use are so staggering in Kenya that it has been celebrated as one of the greatest ICT success stories in recent history, especially for lower income households. Oumy Ndiaye (2013) succinctly notes the correlation between M-Pesa and economic development in Kenya:

The mobile phone allows immediate money transfers from town to village and vice versa with consequence on time and money savings, rapid solutions to daily problems affecting vulnerable communities, opening up to new ways of managing the cash flows of those whose lives can be improved with very small amounts (18).

However, this mobile phone technology is widely used by nearly 70 percent of Kenya’s population, with the amount of transfers equating to more than 320 million USD per month through mobile phones; approximately one quarter of Kenya’s gross national product (ibid.). Furthermore, these statistics are only rising after, in 2011, Safaricom partnered with Western Union to allow 43 countries in the diaspora to send mobile-based
remittances to M-Pesa subscribers in Kenya and in 2015 further expanded cross-border mobile money transfers to seven African countries in East, Central, and South Africa (Kusimba, et al. 2013). Like mobile phones, mobile money has simultaneously become a part of the social fabric of every day life in Kenya, which is reflected in a growing body of literature on mobile technology and Kenyan society.

Joshua Ramisch (2013) has recently examined how in Western Kenya migrants are able to stay connected to their rural homes and pursue multilocational livelihoods through mobile phones and M-Pesa. Ramisch and others (Scott, et al. 2004) have also recognized how the use of mobile technology is not gender-neutral, with unequal access and differential usage and impacts prominent between men and women. This reflects statistics continent-wide, where among 13 African countries more men owned phones than women and in some cases, mobile phones were found to exacerbate existing gendered inequalities (Murphy and Priebe 2011). However, the gendered effects of mobile phones are complex and uneven, as M-Pesa also allows women in Kenya financial independence and the opportunity to accumulate capital (Ndiaye 2013). Furthermore, the economics of M-Pesa cannot be separated from the new social spaces that are being created through mobile technology in gendered ways (Kusimba, et al. 2013).

6.3 Mobile Phones, Relationships, and Intimacy

Both mobile phones and sending and receiving mobile money have become integral parts of social networks, kinship systems, and especially intimate relationships between and among men and women across the world. As Abu Sadat Nurullah (2009) has noted, mobile technology has “revolutionized society, redefining patterns of social contact and relationships among individuals” (19), while simultaneously changing how the mobile phone is valued and used (Khunou 2012:169). In short, mobile phones and their uses have allowed sociality, kinship, and intimacy to be mobile and through such processes mobile technology has now become a gendered tool of affect impacting local notions of friendship, family, and love (Raiti 2007).

The importance of mobile technology is reflected in the widespread use of sending free text messages to others, known as “Please call me,” and flashing another person’s phone
where someone calls and lets the phone ring once or twice, then disconnects (Khunou 2012; Porter 2012). Many scholars have noted across Africa, these mobile phone strategies enable people to maximize their airtime but also remind others of their particular set of obligations within any given relationship (Donner 2006; Porter 2012; Slater and Kwami 2005). It has also been emphasized how these mobile phone practices reproduce power relationships, as the wealthier, urban dweller, parent, husband, or boyfriend is the one expected to return the phone call, send airtime, or M-Pesa money. When intimate relationships already have a clear economic exchange element across Africa, the mobile phone and the reproduction of such gendered power dynamics have become especially prominent (Porter 2012).

Grace Khunou (2012) identifies the sociability of mobile phones in the making of intimate, gendered relationships in several vital ways, including the initiation of new relationships or their termination and as an instrument used to measure the worth of the relationship (169-170). Khunou has also remarked in an interview on how mobile phones are being appropriated in South African townships:

A cell phone is the best accessory ever. Those without disposable income find ways of owning one and having airtime… Cell phones are also very much a female accessory. For some women, having accessories such as these are a reason for having multiple boyfriends, whom they refer to as “ministers” – that is different boyfriends to provide for their different needs (Mbembe, et al. 2004:503-504).

Similarly, Julie Archambault (2013) has further emphasized how mobile phones in African societies are used in a complex politics of display and disguise within intimate relationships. For example, by showing off your expensive phone you may indicate you have a rich lover but at the same time conceal your incoming calls and text messages from suspecting boyfriends with silent mode, specific ringtones, or even multiple SIM cards (ibid.). By allowing women to maintain and conceal multiple relationships in these ways, and by even becoming a strategy for risk management, mobile technology has become a critical tool for female sex workers across East Africa.
6.4 Mobile Technology and Sex Work in East Africa

While Harcourt and Donovan (2005) argued a decade ago that using mobile phones to solicit clients was a phenomenon exclusive to sex workers in the Global North, mobile phones are now vital to sex workers worldwide. Recent research on mobile phone technology and sex workers in the Global South focuses predominantly on their health and sexual behaviour, examining specifically how mobile phone use impacts female sex workers’ HIV risk in India (Mahapatra, et al. 2012; Navani-Vazirani, et al. 2015). When used for client solicitation, mobile phone use among female sex workers results in both increased connectivity and anonymity. This potentially has a number of positive and negative consequences for sex workers. For example, while using mobile phones to solicit clients allows sex workers to sell sex independently without intermediaries, reduces the visibility of street-based sex work and its associated risks, and minimizes the possibility of being discovered by friends or family, it also decreases sex workers’ accessibility to healthcare services (Navani-Vazirani, et al. 2015:253).

In addition to these opportunities and limitations, using mobile phones for solicitation fundamentally changes the sex worker-client transaction as it occurs at the street level. Exchanging phone numbers immediately allows this interaction to become more personal and long term, which could eventually impact sex workers’ ability to negotiate for condom use resulting in higher HIV risk behaviour. However, it is important to note that the majority of female sex workers’ do not use their mobile phones exclusively to solicit clients but also continue to sell sex at the street or other levels, which suggests female sex workers’ HIV risk is predominantly context specific (Mahapatra, et al. 2012; Navani-Vazirani, et al. 2015). And while these studies have important implications for how mobile technology can be used in HIV/AIDS prevention programs for sex workers, little research has yet to examine the emerging socio-economic roles of mobile phone use and mobile money for female sex workers, particularly in Africa.

The year 2009 was a historic moment for the sex workers’ rights movement in East Africa specifically, when the first ever Sex Worker African Women’s Leadership Institute was held in Kenya as a platform for sex workers to speak out and share their perspectives on sex work, sexuality, and sexual rights. Out of this forum, a collection of
sex workers’ life stories was compiled from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania: “"When I Dare to be Powerful..." On the Road to a Sexual Rights Movement in East Africa” (Nyongo'o 2010), within which the mobile phone clearly emerges as an essential part of selling sex in East Africa. In these narratives, female sex workers stated how they used mobile phones to solicit clients, how phone conversations were important to their clientele and to themselves, and how mobile phones could be used in risk management.

For example, Daughtie, a 25-year-old female sex worker from Kenya, explained mobile phones were one of the main ways her regular clients maintained contact with her and booked appointments. For clientele who paid not only for sex but also for companionship or comfort, phone conversations also became a key component to the sex worker-client relationship, as Daughtie explained:

I also have clients who treat me very well. These are people who only call me, and if they don’t get me, they don’t pick any other girls. Sometimes we don’t even engage in intercourse. They just want the company, and enjoy talking to me. Some of them are frustrated in their marriages, have not slept with their wives for ages, and just want someone to let it out to. This is why I sometimes call myself a ‘sex therapist’. These men feel free to talk to me about the issues they have with their wives, so I listen to them and give them whatever advice I can. These relationships are beyond the sex – they are somewhat intimate, even when sex is not involved (ibid. 94-95).

For Daughtie, this level of intimacy that she was able to maintain with some of her clients through mobile phone conversations and texting also applied in her own romantic relationships. While she did not often enter into relationships with clients, she talked about how she was currently serious with one in particular and how talking on the phone factored into their level of intimacy:

I just don’t accept all clients and get into relationships with them, but right now there are three men in my life that I am having serious relationships with. My relationships become serious when I start getting intimate. I have spent a lot of time with one of these men. I have shared everything about my life with this
person. He understands me and I understand him. He is the kind of person that whatever I am going through, no matter how late in the night, I can feel free to call him, and if he can help me, he will. If he can’t help, he’ll just be there to listen to me. He is a married man, but he is there for me always. This is what intimacy means to me (103).

However, it is also important to note that mobile phone use does not always equate to intimacy for sex workers. Daughtie further explained how this technology contributed to her feeling empowered in her sex work:

These days I don’t even need to negotiate prices with my clients because I have been meeting and transacting with clients of a high social class. These men just end up paying me really well, so I don’t even have to ask for it. Some of them even give me money without me having to have sex with them. When I am in financial trouble, I can even call some of them and tell them I need money, and they don’t even have to ask me for a sexual favour because we have an understanding and they are able to offer me that financial support. So when so-called feminists say that sex workers are victims, that we are being exploited by men, and that we are not in control of our lives, I tell them some of the times I have felt most power in my life, have been when I was doing sex work (100).

The ability of mobile technology to empower female sex workers in East Africa extended further to their sense of safety, protection, and ultimately, their risk management. Kyomya, a 32-year-old female sex worker from Uganda, stressed that soliciting clients from her mobile phone was not only her preference, but also how important her mobile phone was for providing her with a degree of security:

I also have a phone with a camera, so I would take pictures of him without his knowledge, and even record his voice for evidence. This is what I do with new clients that I don’t know and trust. I make sure that I am really nice to them while I am with them, gain their trust so that they don’t suspect anything, and get as much information as I can about them. If I’m really paranoid, sometimes I even
hide my phone under the bed and leave the voice recorder on while I am working (ibid. 22-23).

These strategies Kyomya identifies are significant because, especially when across East Africa sex workers face daily human rights violations, mobile phones are potentially providing a new device for reporting instances of harassment, abuse, rape, and violence by clients and police. This is further reflected in the key recommendations and risk management tips that were developed by the sex workers who attended this meeting, at least four of which directly included mobile phone strategies:

The following risk management tips were developed by a group of sex workers from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, in June 2009:

2. Have and memorize another sex worker’s telephone number that you can call on in emergency situations.

3. Memorize number plates of your clients and text the information to your colleague.

4. Use your phone to protect yourself – camera, voice recorder, text messages, calls, etc…

11. Do not give the police money or sex to avoid arrest. Especially if you have a support network, simply accept the arrest, and then make a call to someone who can bail you out (ibid. 111-112).

As such, the mobile phone has become a highly valued, and sometimes controversial, object within the migrant female sex worker community in Kenya. Not only does it and its technology like M-Pesa further facilitate mobility, it also has a significant impact on sociality, kinship, and relationships, and has implications for how migrant female sex workers navigate through everyday hazards and experiences.
6.5 Mobile Phones and Sociality

6.5.1 Sex Worker Networks, Work, and Mobility

The importance of local sex worker communities for collective action, empowerment, and resilience cannot be overemphasized. This has been recently recognized in HIV/AIDS literature especially, arguing that community-led interventions are critical to increasing sex workers’ access to HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment (Kerrigan, et al. 2015; Kerrigan, et al. 2013; Shannon, et al. 2015). While data for community empowerment among sex workers is largely restricted to India, the success of sex worker-led outreach and advocacy there suggests community organization is increasingly important in reducing HIV risk through increased condom use (Shannon, et al. 2015:4-6). However, in places like East Africa where sex work is so highly criminalized, sex worker collectivization is often undermined by local NGOs, law enforcement, and government agencies.

The highly mobile nature of sex work in Kenya and across East Africa may also further deter sex workers from organizing here. Scorgie et al. (2013b) found this to be true in their study of human rights abuses across several African countries, including Kenya and Uganda, arguing that despite the importance of sex worker organization,

The high mobility of sex workers, however, may hamper their efforts to form sustainable groups or collectives. Several participants pointed out that while they would like such groups to form in their areas, the transient nature of sex workers lives would likely undermine the continuity and longevity of such groups (10).

Even so, for migrant female sex workers in Kenya each and every one discussed how critical their friendships, solidarity, and social support with other sex workers were to their everyday experiences. And instead of mobility hindering their social organization, mobile technology was actually maintaining and facilitating informal social networks in new and innovative ways.

At a very localized level, this social support did indeed have an impact on sex workers’ individual protective practices, including condom use and HIV prevention and treatment.
For example, Wamuyu, whose narrative was introduced in chapter five, explained how important her sex worker friends were for ensuring she always had access to condoms and a safe working environment. Not only could she borrow condoms from sex workers she had a social relationship with, and they from her, but they sometimes even shared lodgings where their sexual-economic transactions took place:

I can get a customer and I don’t have condom, I go borrow from another sex worker. She also the same can come borrow from me. I can go to town get a client who will ask me if I have a room in town and I can take him at a friend’s room and I pay her a little money.

These social relationships became critical for many women because they were often unable to make lasting friendships with married women. As single mothers or unmarried women sex workers were immediately socially excluded by other women in Kenyan society, and common experiences and shared stories of sex work often solidified sex workers’ friendships. Inevitably, such talk included the kinds of clients who treated sex workers poorly, who were cruel, violent, or suspected of being HIV positive. Within these social networks, sex workers often warned each other of bad clients. Monica, whose migration story featured in chapter two at the street level and chapter four in the flower farms, explained this:

We meet in the town and we become friends. It’s hard to make friends with married women, they call you malaya. They say that that person is not married, she’s a prostitute. Because we meet every time we become friends. Like for example, if I have two customers I can give her one. We share stories about job. Like what happened yesterday, did you get a customer. We talk. You know we interact so we can even tell you a certain person is not a good person, don’t go with him. You can even tell you heard he has HIV so don’t move with that person.

The closest sex worker social circles were also often aware of each other’s HIV status, took care of each other when they fell sick with AIDS-related illnesses, reminded each other to take their medication, and even distributed condoms to prevent HIV transmission
and reinfection. Atieno, a 44-year-old sex worker for over 25 years, succinctly explained how she was part of, and had a responsibility to, both a sex worker social network and a larger sex worker community in relation to HIV prevention:

Most of us are positive. Sometimes we remind each other to take their drugs. Sometimes like for me I have a dispensary, so I give them condoms. Sometimes I even go to the street give them condoms. People they get just few money, so they can’t even afford to buy themselves condoms. We are together. If somebody gets sick even you are sick. So we are trying to prevent each other.

In addition to support relating to the high HIV burden within the sex worker community, migrant female sex worker cohesion further extended to mental, emotional, financial, and physical wellbeing. This included offering advice or just listening to each other about common problems and challenges in everyday work and life. Nyambura, whose narrative was first introduced at the street level, explained why sex workers were the most important relationships within her social support system:

It’s because I meet with ladies who have the same, same problems. I listen to them and you feel like you don’t even have problems, some have problems even more than you. You feel you are relaxed. If they’re friendly they don’t hold grudges to each other. They defend you when you get someone who is harassing you. Such kind of things are good.

Similar to the way in which Nyambura expressed these social relationships helped to alleviate her stress and were an important part of her life, many other sex workers talked about how offering each other financial support was critical to these friendships. Damaris, a 24-year-old sex worker since 2009 with one, six-month-old child, explained how this support sometimes came in the form of basic needs, such as food, when she said: “It's usual for prostitutes to know each other. We support each other, if we go to town and I don't get money and she gets the following day she can even cook and we eat together.” However, it was not unusual for sex workers to both lend and borrow money within their networks or even contribute a small amount each month to a communal fund,
known locally as a “merry go round,” that would rotate among the sex worker membership.

Mental, emotional, financial, and physical wellbeing often overlapped within these social support systems, which became clear when Joan, introduced along the corridors in chapter five, explained:

> We help each other like maybe there is something that is too difficult for me, maybe something disturbing my heart, I discuss it with them. You have some issues with your body, you can tell your friends. If I’ve not gotten money she’ll share with me then I refund. We help each other in so many things.

Mobile technology has become integral to facilitating and maintaining such migrant sex worker networks both locally and when moving. Phone calls and text messages are predominantly used to communicate warnings, reminders, or offer advice and financial assistance can be easily sent via M-Pesa. The mobile phone then becomes even more critical for migrant female sex workers who are able to remain connected and maintain social relationships with sex workers in transit or friends they meet in other towns and neighbouring countries. Most importantly, this mobile technology coupled with a transient social network often had a positive impact on women’s sex work. Shico, who was also introduced in chapter five, explained how she and one sex worker friend in particular often alerted each other to clientele both locally and when engaging in high mobility:

> We help each other like you see now I’m here, she can be in a different place and call me and tell me there’s money there I’ll go... Sometimes you’ll find she has a different client you’ll find she calls you, I’ll call her.

Similar to the way in which Shico used mobile technology within her social circle to increase her client base, many migrant sex workers also stated they were connected to a widespread social network across East Africa that sometimes determined their mobility patterns. Wamuyu further explained how several of her friends would call or text her
when they found the business was good in other places, especially as a result of an influx of foreigners in Kenya:

There’s a friend of mine who calls me when there’s visitors. She calls me and I go to Nyanuki [because of white soldiers]… I found [another] friend of mine there in Mombasa, I was not used to there. She showed me how it was. I stayed for a month. I’ll go back. Mombasa is good when it’s season time. Tourist season.

It becomes even more emphasized how the personal, physical, and financial wellbeing of migrant female sex workers not only overlap in their social relationships with other sex workers, but is tied up in mobile technology through the narrative of Wangari. Wangari was a 19-year-old, divorced, single mother of two who had been doing sex work since 2010. She explained how her sex worker social network was the most important to her because of what they shared and how they provided support, maintained by exchanging numbers, phone calls, texts, M-Pesa transactions, and coordinating visits through their mobile phones:

Sex workers are the most important people to me… We share a lot, even if she gets you without food, she’ll give you. If she has some unga (flour) she’ll give it to you. When she gets clients she can call for you. We met in the street, maybe others I met in other towns. Maybe in pubs. Especially end month, the ones in other towns visit. They come from Nakuru, from all over they come here.

So while sex worker social relationships are clearly critical to the everyday experiences of migrant female sex workers and these experiences are facilitated through mobile technology, these relationships are also inherently gendered. This is best illustrated when Monica says, “Most of my friends are sex workers. So many. Because they don't have husbands, most of them are unemployed, and they have kids.” Monica’s statement succinctly shows how access to these social networks are premised upon particular gendered relationships, namely single motherhood, but also alludes to the fact that membership to different social sex worker networks have further requirements that cut across class, age, ethnicity, and other categories of difference.
6.6 Mobile Phone Use and Kinship

6.6.1 Mobile Technology and Sex Working Mothers

By far, the most significant gendered relationship for most female sex workers is the mother-child relationship. While studies reporting on the significance of sex work and motherhood are limited, it is estimated that more than two-thirds of female sex workers across sub-Saharan Africa have children (Scorgie, et al. 2012:925). Not only is financially supporting dependents cited as one of the most important factors for women deciding to enter sex work, but sex workers often also have additional children throughout the course of their sex working years. It has been argued in East Africa that despite the lack of recognition in the literature of these women’s roles as both mothers and workers, female sex workers do not operate outside the gendered cultural expectations of motherhood that exist across much of Africa (Beckham, et al. 2015; Zalwango, et al. 2010).

In Tanzania, Sarah Beckham et al. (2015) found that female sex workers associated motherhood with respectability and used these roles to validate their sex work; these authors argue that, “In part because society stigmatized sex workers, women negotiated their social identities as respectable mothers, doing whatever was necessary to care ‘for the children’” (170). Similar to such sex worker experiences in both Tanzania and Uganda, migrant female sex workers in Kenya also expressed that socio-cultural expectations of motherhood were intimately tied to their sex work experiences. It became clear in many narratives that having a child was one of the most important things a woman can do throughout her life course, and the main reason why she did sex work. For example, Atieno explained:

I wanted to have a family. As a woman, if you stay without children sometimes there are abuses, they call us barren, and sometimes you don’t get respect. You can’t get money just for yourself.

Joyce, a 30-year-old sex worker since 2006 and single mother also echoed the importance of having a child, emphasizing that motherhood was the main reason she was doing sex work: “It’s good to have a baby. It’s why we go to work. For what reason are we
working? It’s because you’re a mother.” This explicit connection between motherhood and doing sex work was most often explained in terms of motivation and justification for selling sex. Dorcas, a 28-year-old sex worker since 2006 and single mother to a 10 year old, stated that not only was it good to have at least one child because it gave you a reason for doing sex work, but also alluded to the fact that by having children it could somehow make a socially deviant profession good:

I wanted a baby. You cannot stay alone. It’s not good. I just wanted my kid to be keeping me busy. You know it’s good, even if you’re going to sell you know the reason as to why you’re selling rather than selling without a child.

Fatima, a 32-year-old, highly mobile sex worker who often passed through Naivasha, further suggested doing sex work without children to support was not only deviant but selfish, even stating a woman without children is useless:

If a woman does not have a child, she’s just hopeless, useless. Imagine that you are single and without a child, what money are you looking for? Just for yourself? And you’re a sex worker? I know I’m working because I have a child to look after.

The narratives of migrant female sex workers who did not have children perhaps elucidate even more poignantly the importance of motherhood among sex workers and in Kenyan society more broadly. While single mothers and sex workers both face stigmatization at the societal level, those migrant female sex workers who did not have children were most stigmatized within the sex worker community. Pauline, whose migration story was featured in chapter two at the street level and chapter five along the corridors, explained how having a child is essential and that other sex workers talked badly about her because she did not have any children yet:

A kid is a must. It’s a must because you cannot say that you live your whole life alone. Because it’s not good people will talk bad about you especially because of the work we do. They’ll talk bad about you they’ll say that you’re looking for money that doesn’t help because you don’t have a kid.
Nekesa, whose narrative was also included in chapters two and five, further explained how even though she decided not to have children, other sex workers verbally abused her and even called her barren, which is extremely insulting to women across Africa given the socio-cultural value attributed to motherhood:

I’ve never planned to give birth but those ladies who know I don’t have a kid makes me feel bad because they talk bad about me. They say they don’t know why I’m so much in work and I don’t have a kid. Some even calls me a barren woman and they don’t even know me. A barren woman is that woman who has even been told by the doctor she can’t give birth. She can’t conceive.

However, very few sex workers were without children not simply because of the importance of motherhood, but also because of inaccessibility to consistent contraception and safe medical abortions. For the majority of women, their children remained the key motivating factor to do sex work; however, they further regarded the responsibilities of motherhood, especially providing their children with higher education, as critical. It emerged in Damaris’ narrative, for example, that she felt the need to educate her children so that they could be self-sufficient in case anything were to happen to her as a result of the risks associated with sex work:

I feel good to educate my kids to live well afterwards because in this work I can even get the HIV virus. Because of our kids and I’m the person who cares for them. If I go and get AIDS and die who will be left to take care of my kids?

Similar to the way in which Damaris recognized the importance of her children going to school, which was something expressed by all sex working mothers, Atieno also talked of how education could provide her children with increased opportunities. This, she said, was crucial because her children would have more opportunities and not have to consider doing sex work:

Our kids are the most important things. I can’t raise my kids to be a sex worker like me. You know these days even boys are sex working. I wouldn’t like them to
be like me. That’s why I like them learning so they can get for themselves. Not like me. If I was learned I think I could be a very big person.

For migrant female sex workers who either lived away from their children or who were engaging in high mobility in order to maximize their incomes, mobile technology became critical to maintain their motherhood responsibilities, what I call “transient mothering practices.” This became clear in women’s migration stories in the way that they maintained contact with their children through phone conversations and texting, but most importantly, through sending their children remittances to pay for their basic needs and school fees via M-Pesa.

Mobile phones and mobile money especially have reorganized the way migrant sex work and mothering are being reproduced in Kenya today. Jamila, whose migration story was introduced at the flower farms in chapter four, had been doing sex work since the late 1980s and noted the difference before and after the introduction of M-Pesa:

One week, I come back to bring them food then I go back. That’s when I started moving, I couldn’t before because they were so young. Because there was no M-Pesa I had to come back. I couldn’t send money. Then you could move, stay there for even two months, and send money back to your children.

All migrant female sex workers who had sold sex before and after the 2007 introduction of M-Pesa recognized that this technology drastically impacted how far they could migrate and how long they could stay. With M-Pesa, sex workers could engage in high mobility more frequently and migrating further for extended periods of time was made possible. Like Jamila explained she was able to shift her mobility patterns from returning home weekly to bring her children food and money, with M-Pesa allowing her to stay in another place for months and send remittances home through her mobile phone.

Immediately after M-Pesa was widely instituted in Kenya, mobile phone remittances became a well-established, systematic practice among migrant sex workers. Most women had a set amount of money they would send to their children daily, usually around 500 KES, and the rest they would use for food, lodgings, upkeep, and savings. For example
Wangui, a 16-year-old sex worker who became pregnant from a client immediately when she started sex work at the age of 12, talked about how M-Pesa facilitated her mobility and enabled her to send money home to her child:

I became pregnant. I gave birth when I was 13 years old. I was helped by friends. The friends I met, they were sex workers. They told me not to breastfeed my kid so I could keep looking for money. That is when we started moving. We would go, rent a room, get money and share among ourselves. Pay the room, eat, and send some to my kid. I would leave him with a friend of mine. We went to Salgaa, Nakuru, Gilgil, Kitale we could even go by transit to Kisumu or Kiambu.

Shico similarly talked about the ways in which M-Pesa factored into her sex worker entry and migration story. Furthermore, she expressed how mobile money not only allowed her to strictly budget for remittances to send home to her children, but also save money for any unexpected expenses:

That time we separated with my husband, I went I was working in a bar. At that time I was working in a bar I became aware a woman could go sleep with a man and get paid. The place I was employed in a bar let’s say it was a good place because the manager was a lady. She showed me how to talk to men, when we close our bar we join with the others and go to other bars. So I knew, so I could close work go find a man sleep with him and get money. I decided not to even work in the bar. I can remember my first night, I got one customer. We slept and he gave me 300 in the morning. I found I was in front, very in front, because of the 300 KES. If I could have gotten five customers in a day I was feeling great, I could get three to five… Whatever money I got I sent back to the kids. I divide among the money some savings, the rent, food, and the kids. I send the kids 500 daily.

Mobile phone technology and these M-Pesa remittances in particular, while they certainly facilitated migrant female sex workers’ mobility and enabled transient mothering practices, they also contributed to a restructuring of gender roles within single mother, sex worker headed households. Many women talked about how when they were moving,
their oldest child often had a mobile phone of their own to receive M-Pesa transfers and was responsible for the household budgeting and in some cases cooking, cleaning, and sibling care. Joan explained how this worked within her household:

I’ve never stayed for more than three months in one place. They [my kids] stay with a house girl because they’re not very little. They have their own phone and I send them money. I send them 400 KES per day. My firstborn is in charge of budgeting their money when I’m not there.

However for migrant female sex workers with younger children and no extended family members to help care for them, they often left their children in a baby care and sent money daily or weekly to the babysitter via M-Pesa. This too suggests that the age of migrant sex workers’ children in part determined how often and how far they could migrate even with mobile technology. For example, Linda, who has appeared in chapters two, three, and five at the street level, the IDP camp, and along the corridors, explained:

I've gone to Mai Mahiu, like for the other day I was in Narok. I went past Masai Mara to Thalik I stayed there. I can stay for two weeks or a month if you have someone to leave your kids with. You can leave them in a baby care [and] you'll be sending money to her.

Many women who had younger children expressed that leaving them in someone else’s care was one of the most stressful aspects of migrant sex work. For example Waringa, whose narrative previously appeared both at the street level in chapter two and along the corridors in chapter five, said: “Because you have kids, leaving the kids is stress,” and Damaris similarly stated: “The way I leave my baby with someone else [makes me stressed], I don't sleep with my baby the way it's supposed to be.” However, migrant female sex workers felt the incomes they were able to get from selling sex and the ability to provide for their children financially, especially school fees, far outweighed the mental and emotional difficulties they faced leaving their children behind.
6.7 Mobile Phones, Sex Workers, and Relationships

6.7.1 Clientele

As a result of the intense stigmatization and criminalization of sex work across Africa, literature on the sex worker-client relationship in Kenya focuses predominantly on quantifying the associated and gendered risks of sex work (cf. Elmore-Meegan, et al. 2004; Hong 2008; Okal, et al. 2011). Mobile phone technology, specifically its impact on the sex worker-client interaction, is mentioned in few instances. Willis Odek et al. (2014) in their study estimating the size of the female sex worker population in Kenya do recognize that their use of geographic mapping approach under-represents the number of sex workers who solicit clients through mobile phones (13). And in a behavioural and serological survey among immigrant female sex workers in Kenya, this study found over 60 percent of respondents used their mobile phones predominantly to make appointments with their clients (Kritmaa 2011:49).

It quickly materialized that mobile phones were not only critical to client solicitation among all migrant female sex workers in Naivasha, but also that mobile technology was having an impact on the sex worker-client transaction in gendered ways. A mobile phone was an easy and convenient way female sex workers could highly organize their clientele and phone numbers by name, profession, location, or even rate. Using multiple SIM cards further allowed women to have more than one phone number, switching among them, and also have separate SIM cards for neighbouring countries. While clients often called sex workers to make appointments, women could also solicit clients with ease from anywhere if they had already exchanged numbers.

Faith, whose migration story was first introduced in chapter four and also featured prominently in chapter five, explained how when she first entered sex work her mobile phone was her most important tool for contacting clients and building up a client base:

I wanted to meet another man in Mombasa road, so I went to the highway. I was given so many phone numbers on the way. From the highway the truck driver who gave me a lift gave me his phone number. Because I was going to meet someone else we exchanged contacts and he told me we would meet on my way
back. When I was going to meet him on my way back, I got a lift from another lorry and was given another number. It continued like that, when they are passing through they give me a call or I even call and ask them, where are you going, and we go together.

Being called by clients or soliciting clients with their mobile phones often resulted in indeterminate migration patterns dependent on this client connectivity. For example, Njeri, a labour migrant and former flower farm worker who was introduced in chapter five, stated she used a combination of both mobile phone solicitation and client connectivity: “Most of the times they do call me, but sometimes I also go there I call them when I’m already there,” which for many migrant female sex workers meant their mobility was unpredictable. Diana, a 27-year-old sex worker since 2004 who in 2007 migrated to Naivasha then started engaging in high mobility, elaborated further on how migrant sex work, mobile phones, and the sex worker-client relationship were interconnected:

I go severally, since you called me I haven’t slept in my house. I went to Salgaa Monday. In this month I’ve been to Nakuru, mostly Salgaa. Most customers are truck drivers and they like sleeping there. I can even go for a whole month. Like for today I came from Gilgil, in the evening I’m going to Nakuru I have a date there. I’ve been to Mlolongo, business there is not good. There they pay 150. Even in Salgaa if you go like you’re going to look for money, not like you’re going for a date, it’s not good because they pay 100 or 150 per shot. I go for a date, the truck driver continues, I can stay there to sell or call someone else.

In addition to client solicitation, connectivity, and mobility, mobile phone technology also affects sex worker practices and transactions in other ways. Increasingly, M-Pesa is causing the mobile phone to be a highly contested device between migrant female sex workers and their clients. Clients would sometimes promise payment for sex via M-Pesa, and then cancel the transaction later so that sex workers were not able to withdraw the money. However, migrant female sex workers could also use M-Pesa transactions from clients to their advantage. For example, clients could send a female sex worker money via
M-Pesa to pay for her transport to meet him in another town, and instead she might use the money for basic needs like food or rent.

### 6.7.2 Boyfriends

Mobile phone technology is equally impacting the way migrant female sex workers interact with their emotional partners and boyfriends. While the majority of sex workers expressed they were not interested in marrying or remarrying, many of them did have one or more boyfriends who were frequently already married. This is analogous to dominant studies measuring the risk of HIV transmission among sex workers in Kenya, which argue sex workers often have a number of regular partners and boyfriends, significantly increasing HIV risk because of low condom use within these relationships (Elmore-Meegan, et al. 2004; Luchters, et al. 2013; Voeten, et al. 2007). Mobile phones and mobile money facilitate these relationships, and phone conversations, texting, sending airtime, and M-Pesa transactions are critical to maintaining these sex worker-boyfriend interactions.

Many migrant female sex workers explained that regular phone contact was one of the factors that distinguished their emotional partners and boyfriends from other clients. Damaris for example, in her migration story, talked about how her boyfriends were distinct partly because they called regularly and also sent her money through M-Pesa when she needed extra financial support:

> For us prostitutes I wouldn’t like to go with that person who slept with my friend. There are people we cannot share like for those you've exchanged numbers with, he can be calling you he's so regular to you I cannot share that one with you. These ones they can give you money when you're broke. One of them is married, the other one tells to marry him but you cannot rush into things. Now I see how he buys [sex], so even if he marries me he'll be going out to buy.

The element of distrust many migrant sex workers felt towards men, both because of past failed marriages and because many of their clients were married (Zalwango, et al. 2010), also extended to mobile phone use. Nekesa talked about a boyfriend she had while she...
was doing sex work who wanted her to stop and marry him; however, when she refused after some time she found out he was being unfaithful because of calls and text messages she saw on his mobile phone:

When we stayed like for eight months he started sleeping outside, being unfaithful. Sometimes he didn’t even want me to talk to him. So I told him to leave, I stay alone. He refused but I was not for him. So he left. I did not love that man. We used condoms the first, first times then we stopped. He knew about my work. He told me to stop and give birth for him. Wherever he was working he was being paid very little money, 150 KES per day. I thought of all the problems I’ve been through and this man is asking me to stop working, I decided not to. He was telling me I was causing him not to be faithful to me. Me what I think, he had gotten another woman. I asked him but he was denying but I could tell from the phone.

Migrant female sex workers with varying degrees of success employed such elements of disguise and secrecy through their mobile phones. Often women kept separate SIM cards or even more than one mobile phone so that their boyfriends would not become suspicious of incoming phone calls or texts when they were together. Sometimes they turned their mobile phones off altogether, so that when clients called they would get the all too familiar, “the person you are calling is unavailable, please try again later.” This was a tactic Theresa, whose migration story featured prominently at the flower farms in chapter four, stated she often used with her boyfriend:

I have a boyfriend. He’s different. We went to VCT, with him we don’t use condom. He supports me and my children. He doesn’t know my work because when he’s here I even switch off my phone. To him, he wants me to stay like a wife. He works in different places, you might find he’s in Kisumu like that.

However, despite these strategies migrant female sex workers could not always hide their work within their relationships. Helen, a 29-year-old sex worker for 10 years and a single mother of three explained that even though she used her mobile phone to help hide that she was doing sex work, her boyfriend found out and left her:
I had a boyfriend. I loved him so much. He later came to know I was doing that and he left me. So I felt, I felt bad. Because I tried so much to hide from him but he was told by his friends. So he left me and I felt very bad. Because I’m also a human being, I need to love. When you’re heartbroken you feel so bad. He called me a prostitute. You know even if you are one, you don’t like being called that.

Helen’s narrative further emphasizes how even though women are restructuring gender roles by opting for single mother headed households and resisting marriage, they at the same time seek out romantic relationships that are being impacted today by mobile phone technology.

6.8 Mobile Phones, Mobility, and Other Sex Workers

6.8.1 Being New, Harassment, and Mobile Phone Snatching

Perhaps because of the current trend in HIV/AIDS programming to focus on community-led interventions, and indeed because of the social support system sex workers often have in place among themselves, the literature has failed to fully grasp existing divisions within this community. While it is true that migrant female sex workers face sexual and gender based violence, harassment, and stigmatization wherever they move to, one of the greatest threats they face in a new town is in fact other female sex workers. Migrant sex workers in another town will be perceived as new and more desirable to clients than pre-existing sex workers, and so they are almost never welcomed by the sex worker community there. Instead, migrant sex workers face harassment, stigmatization, violence, and their mobile phones, their most important tool, being stolen by other female sex workers.

While charging new sex workers a penalty for selling sex is a common, widespread practice within the sex worker community, migrant female sex workers commonly faced higher penalties and verbal abuse in new towns and cities. Waithira, who was introduced at the street level in chapter two, clearly expressed this within her migration story when she said:
In new places the sex workers are against you because you came to snatch their customers. You’ll be penalized, others will abuse you. They even snatched me the man I was with. They were calling me you prostitute, you come from another town to snatch our customers. Yea most of us move around like that. Because when you stay in the same place customers get used to you. But when you go for like one week here one week there, they’ll be happy about you.

While highly mobile female sex workers experienced this across East Africa, even female sex workers who normally sold at a different migrant sex work spaces had similar experiences when they went to sell at the street level as close as Naivasha. For example, this was illustrated in chapter three when displaced sex workers sold between the IDP camp and the street and were sometimes excluded from the sex workers at the street level. Furthermore, Rose, a labour migrant and flower farm worker featured in chapter four, talked about how even going from selling at the farms to little K-Street she felt stigmatized by other female sex workers:

Still going to town you're in stress because the girls in town, they'll deny you chance. Clients will see you as a visitor and want you. So we stigmatize ourselves as well. They can even abuse you calling you saying you come from the village. They'll demand like a penalty, you buy them a soda or something.

Many women had further experienced sex worker-sex worker stigmatization through spreading rumours about another sex workers’ HIV status. For Faith, experiencing harassment by sex workers in other towns was a main challenge in her migration experiences, and she explained how stigma associated with HIV played a significant role in this:

The challenges are you being chased away by other sex workers [in new towns]. If you meet with one who knows your status, she'll tell people. They start telling people so you lose customers.

These instances of harassment and discrimination against migrants in the sex worker community like those faced by Waithira, Rose, and Faith extended to physical abuse and
threats of violence, sometimes involving third parties. For example, in reference to
female sex workers in other towns, an 18-year-old sex worker since 2011 named Sharon
explained: “They’re very jealous, if you get money more than they’re getting they feel
bad some will not talk to you and others will hire people to beat you.” Furthermore, in
Chemutai’s migration story she expressed that she often felt threatened by other sex
workers in new towns and cities. Chemutai was a 27-year-old sex worker who supported
her sister’s four children with her earnings from circular mobility. Chemutai narrated
how she felt other sex workers could even have you killed for being a migrant in a new
town:

Kisumu I didn’t take long because if they realize you’re a visitor and you don’t
take good care of yourself, you’ll be killed. If the rest of the sex workers know
you’re getting more money than them they’ll hire someone to kill you. I went
there, they were asking me why have you come to Kisumu why are you so smart.
So I told them I came for a visit and to see someone. She told me to leave the
following day. I stayed in the room and did not come out.

However, for most migrant female sex workers the biggest threat was having their mobile
phones stolen in a new town. Because mobile phone technology is now recognized within
the sex worker community as being such a critical tool to selling sex, snatching mobile
phones has become one of the most commonly used strategies to chase migrant sex
workers out of town. This is especially devastating when a sex worker is on the move, not
only because she will lose her colleagues’ contacts and her client list, but also because
her main way of communicating with and sending remittances to her children will be lost.
Fatima expressed that the worst thing that can happen in a new town is your mobile
phone being stolen, narrating her own experience:

Mombasa, Mombasa road I have been moving around. Mlolongo. From Mlolongo
Naivasha, Salgaa to Malaba. I’ve been to Uganda. I go with truck drivers. I just
go with a lift. Mombasa road is not bad; those places have a lot of clients. The
business wasn’t good [in Mlolongo]. There were some guys harassing women at
night. They can even take your phone, your money, they can beat you.
Similarly, Wamuyu explained in her migration story how her mobile phone was snatched on her first night in a new city, forcing her to leave the very next day:

You’ll be harassed; other sex workers will ask you for penalty. They snatched my phone… Sex workers came to me and saw I had given out my phone and they wanted money. So I went back to my room. I only stayed one day.

These narratives of hostile sex worker-sex worker interactions and mobile phone snatching suggest this gendered relationship is one of the most critical throughout a female sex worker’s migration trajectory, whether internal displacement, labour migration, or circular mobility, often dictating whether or not she experiences harm or is able to gain access to social protection at the street level.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has documented the recent explosion of ICTs across Africa, focusing specifically on Kenya. The growing social, cultural, and economic significance of mobile phone technology, as well as the development of M-Pesa in Kenya, have been illustrated paying particular attention to the gendered effects of mobile phone use. The role of mobile phone technology in shaping migrant female sex workers’ everyday gendered roles and relationships and their sex work practices have been especially emphasized. This chapter, then, has demonstrated that the mobile phone is able to illuminate these particular gendered phenomena by tracing sociality, kinship, intimacy, and risk through phone calls, text messages, SIM cards, money transfers, and mobile phone snatching.

Through the mobile phone and M-Pesa technology, innovative narratives show changing gender norms such as the increase in female headed households. Most notably, the mobile phone has been used as a tool to better locate the relevance of the gender-concept in Kenya today, understanding the migrant sex worker as a colleague, community member, mother, sister, daughter, girlfriend, ex-wife, and as a worker. This displaces western-centric ideas of gender and what is normally thought of as the most significant gendered relationship to a sex worker, the one where she is the most vulnerable to harm: the sex worker-client relationship. In doing so, this recognizes female sex workers’ roles
and relationships as multi-faceted, privileging emotionality and affect to reveal contradictory, hierarchical, and meaningful relationships within migrant female sex workers’ everyday experiences, entangled also with empowerment and disempowerment across time, space, place, and scale in Naivasha’s geography of sexual commerce.
Chapter 7

7 Sexual-Economic Entanglement

7.1 Locating the Sex Worker Migrant and the Street Level in the Global Political Economy

Coming full circle across the topography of migrant sex work spaces, from the IDP camp to the flower farms, along highways and roadways, interconnected through mobile phone technology and to and from the street level, this ethnography has documented the everyday experiences of migrant female sex workers in Naivasha. It has been emphasized not only how the sex worker migrant herself exists, but how the street too is reconstituted, across a sexual-economic entanglement of time, space, place, and scale in the current global political economy. By moving geographically among the street level and migrant sex work spaces, each chapter has reproduced different histories and migration patterns that female sex workers experience in gendered and complex ways, as both victims and agents, and across multiple scales from the local to the global.

The ways in which each chapter overlaps at the street level illustrates how the street persists as an important space of sexual-economic exchange, but also how globalization is fundamentally and forever changing the street corner as both a space and idea in contemporary Naivasha. In fiction, scholarly work, and policy discussions, the street, street corners, and red light districts remain at the very heart of the imaginary of where sex work takes place and who female sex workers are. Despite this, these chapters show how street level transactions are inextricably linked to broader local, regional, and global processes and the street has also become a theoretical reference point from which to rescale discussions of sex work beyond the street level. Within these chapters, an examination of distinct migrant sex work spaces as part of Naivasha’s geography of sexual commerce has demanded sexual-economic exchange be thought of, similar to what Shah (2014) has argued, as “something other than a discrete or autonomous space” (152).
From the earliest encounters of conquest and colonization, sex work has evolved alongside industrialization and urbanization in Kenya resulting in a spatial illusion that sex work is not only limited to urban city-centres like Nairobi, but that its transactions are also only occurring at the street level. The literary narrative of Rika, a journalist who walks Koinange Street among the sex workers and comes to the conclusion that the street is Kenya (Ikonya 2010), reminds us that red light districts exist beyond Nairobi in a conglomeration of rural and urban locations, its inhabitants cutting across class, race, ethnicity, age, and other differences. Juxtaposing historical and contemporary sex work practices at the street level also forms the foundation for a rich understanding of the everyday hazards migrant sex workers navigate, including gender norms and inequality, social hierarchies, stigmatization, criminalization, and risk and vulnerability.

Inasmuch as Naivasha’s geography of sexual commerce is characterized as a transnational place of local, in-between, and global flows across migrant sex worker spaces in order to move beyond street-based analyses, the street level has been shown to also be its historical foundation and ethnographic nexus. Migrant female sex workers continuously encounter the street throughout their migration trajectories, which all overlap in gendered ways as the street level itself is reorganized amid multi-scalar processes. Just as the sex worker IDP could be excluded from street level sex work by other sex workers, the migrant flower farm labourer might access empowerment at the street through peer education programs, itinerant sex workers pursuing personal projects could be at the greatest risk of gender based violence from street-based clients, and mobile phone technology serves as a highly contested tool to navigate through these different scales and power dynamics across time, space, and place.

From this street level foundation, it has been documented how migration processes and patterns shape sexual-economic exchange and migrant female sex workers’ everyday experiences. At the IDP camp in Naivasha survival sex, transactional sex, and sex work all overlap throughout sex worker IDPs’ experiences of the 2007/2008 post-election violence, internal displacement, encampment, and resettlement. The short story excerpt from “Waiting” (Osondu 2008) humanizes the camp environment and also emphasizes the imaginaries that occur across scales, from encounters with host communities, to
multi-lateral camp regulators, humanitarian aid, and resettlement abroad. For displaced sex workers at this IDP camp in Naivasha, their migration stories illuminate how Kenya’s violent transition to multi-party politics has impacted sex work practices and created new sex work spaces.

An examination of the cut flower industry similarly documents how Kenya’s restructured economy under SAPs has also led to the creation of new sex work types and spaces for female labour migrants at Naivasha’s flower farms. The exchange of high-risk sex for work, transactional sex with managers and supervisors, and supplementing low incomes with part-time sex work has been expressed in narratives. Women flower farm labourers and female heads of household who choose to do sex work over flower farm work especially elucidates how local labour markets and conditions as well as unpaid labour factor significantly in women’s choices to do different types of sexual commerce here. Media headlines as well as interviews with local stakeholders also emphasize how migrant female sex workers at flower farms encounter development paradigms at multiple levels, from the individual and grassroots, to community initiatives, state-led, the private sector, multi-lateral, the fair trade movement, as well as international institutions and policies that perpetuate global inequalities.

The migration stories and travel narratives of itinerant female sex workers who engage in circular mobility have mapped sexual-economic exchange across East African highways and roadways. A passage from *Riding the Demon* (Chilson 1999) provides an everyday description of how critical transit and infrastructure are to sustaining everyday mobility across Kenya and East Africa, and this is especially true for highly mobile sex workers. Women travelling long distances with truck drivers across borders as well as those who engage in seasonal mobility to target farmers, fishermen, tourists, and soldiers selling sex simultaneously illustrates the spatial dimensions to economic trends internally and intra-regionally. How itinerant sex work impacts local sex work labour forms and values has also been demonstrated, specifically through HIV/AIDS activism, commercializing sexual-economic transactions, and circulating cosmopolitan ideals.
By tracing the ICT revolution across Africa, the impact of mobile phone technology on everyday social, economic, and cultural life has been emphasized. Premised with excerpts from an online blog authored by a Nairobi sex worker (Sue 2011), it has been argued that mobile phone technology in particular has impacted everyday life for migrant female sex workers in gender specific ways. In fact, the mobile phone itself has become a gendered, contested, and highly valued tool in the establishment and maintenance of sociality, kinship, and intimacy for migrant female sex workers across all sex worker spaces in Naivasha and most places throughout East Africa. Furthermore, all of these sex worker spaces and non-places, as is the case of the mobile phone, are characterized by circulations, flows, choices, and constraints that are contradictory and multi-scalar.

Rescaling the imaginary of sex work research beyond the street level equally demands rethinking of the imagined street walker prostitute as other than inherently immoral, static, or immobile. Such rethinking does not involve glorifying or celebrating the migrant sex worker as overly heroic, but instead recognizes her “complex personhood” (Gordon 1997). Understanding that migrant female sex workers’ lived experiences are complicated reminds us, as Avery Gordon (ibid.) argues, “that even those who live in the most dire circumstances possess a complex and oftentimes contradictory humanity and subjectivity that is never adequately glimpsed by viewing them as victims or, on the other hand, as superhuman agents” (4). Therefore, these chapters have also demonstrated how as women engage in different kinds of sexual-economic exchange within multiple scales of power dynamics and processes, they inhabit the full spectrum of humanity, resulting in suffering but also agency, and indeed myriad other in-between states of being.

In sum, through the framework of sexual-economic entanglement, this ethnography has examined how the most excluded female sex worker – the displaced, labour migrant, or sex worker in transit – exists within her everyday experience in the global political economy. In doing so, the four-fold research goals of this ethnography have been achieved: first, to document the everyday experiences of migrant female sex workers in Naivasha; second, to examine how street level sex work in Naivasha has been reorganized across time, space, place, and scale; thirdly, to better understand the everyday realities of migration patterns and trajectories across Kenya and East Africa;
and, fourthly, to explore the gendered roles and relationships that are being restructured within Naivasha’s geography of sexual commerce.

7.2 Rescaling African Sex Work Research and Policy

7.2.1 Scholarly Knowledge

This research contributes to scholarly knowledge in a number of ways. Most notably it complicates the essential category of the “Third World prostitute” and contributes to empirical research that counters the western, hegemonic “canon” in prostitution studies that has been identified by Kempadoo (1998) (cf. Wardlow 2004). In documenting the migration stories of female sex workers from Kenya, this ethnography makes a substantive contribution to non-western sex work experiences and spaces. This research also argues that in the context of sub-Saharan Africa in particular, sexual commerce is best understood through an analysis of migration patterns and migrant spaces that move beyond solely street level analyses. This is similar to Shah’s (2014) recent call to place migration at the forefront of sex work research in India, wherein she examines different forms and spaces of sex work, resulting in, “the possibility of crafting an analysis of sexual labour that accounts for the complexities of how poor migrants negotiate different kinds of labour in everyday life” (423). While there have been some studies that examine migrant sex work in sub-Saharan Africa (Kritmaa 2011; Nyanzi 2013; van Blerk 2007; 2008), as a result of the rescue industry, moral panic surrounding prostitution, and the medicalization of HIV/AIDS, this largely remains an understudied phenomena across Africa.

This research also contributes to a better understanding of the so-often excluded migrant female sex worker as a complete, engendered person by recognizing her complex lived realities, relationships, and risks. As Shah (2014) similarly argues, there is a way to talk about migrant sex workers who live within a multitude of constraints and vulnerabilities in the Global South without reducing them completely to victimization. This is comparable to contributions arguably made by presenting female sex workers’ life histories in their own words and through multiple stories, sometimes referred to as “herstories” (Nyongo'o 2010). By emphasizing that migrant female sex workers’ lived
experiences are complicated, this also makes a contribution to Dewey’s (2011) argument that female sex workers’ complex personhoods must be better recognized in sex work research.

By portraying a more complex picture of the composite realities of migrant female sex workers in particular, this ethnography further contributes to a better understanding of everyday migration patterns and trajectories in Africa. As Nyamnjoh (2012a) has argued, mainstream scholarship has largely understood Africans as immobile and failed to grasp the reality of everyday, accelerated, and fluid intra-African migrations. Tracing migrant female sex workers’ movements reveals variable migration patterns, trajectories that are not fixed, overlap, and are reversible, as well as multidirectional mobilities, contributing to Nyamnjoh’s call for “conceptual flexibility and ethnographic substantiation” (13) in understanding intra-African migrations. Because grasping such movements and interconnectedness has been theorized as critical to countering essential and homogenous misrepresentations of Africa as a place and idea, this ethnography’s contributions extend from migration studies to postcolonial theory. The complex geography of sexual commerce and complicated lived experiences of migrant female sex workers allows Naivasha to emerge as a place not reduced to chaos or disorder, but a worldly place; characterized by circulations, flux, multiplicity, multi-vocality, and transnational flows of such intensity it is no longer useful to talk of “Africa” and elsewhere as though they are separate ways of being in the world.

By reimagining time, space, place, and scale in Naivasha’s geography of sexual-economic exchange, this research also documents new socio-cultural understandings of sex work in gendered ways. Sex work labour forms varying from “come we stay” at the street level, survival sex at IDP camps, exchanging sex for work at flower farms, commercialized sex work along corridors, and mobile phone transactions make novel contributions to the diversity of sexual commerce in rapidly changing, contemporary Kenya. In addition, critically applying the gender-concept to Kenyan social organization displaces the sex worker-client relationship as the most privileged, gendered relationship in sex work research. This brings to the fore understudied roles and relationships that are revealed as critical to migrant female sex workers in Naivasha, including motherhood and
the recent explosion of female headed households, but also extended family and kinship, sex worker-sex worker dynamics, and intimate relationships. Finally, how migrant female sex workers navigate internal displacement, labour migration, and circular mobility in gendered ways ultimately reveals new nodes of both empowerment and victimization, implying that different migration patterns result in certain vulnerabilities, while others are used to mitigate particular risks (Goldenberg, et al. 2014).

7.2.2 Public Anthropology, Policy, and Practice

This research also makes a significant contribution to public anthropology. Historically, sex work has always been an inherently public issue. Sex work challenges notions of public order and public decency and has also been framed as a public health concern. Whether conceived of as prostitute, whore, sex worker, or malaya, these “public women” challenge the traditional anthropological demarcations between the public and private spheres (Day 2007:4). For many today and throughout history, sexual commerce results in a number of public anxieties, and how female sex workers are presented to the public is representative of broader gender, class, and racial hierarchies (Bernstein 2007b:8). In addition to being a public issue, this research contributes to public anthropology by being interdisciplinary across anthropology, feminist geography, gender and women’s studies, and African studies and blurring the lines between ethnography and fiction to be more critically relevant to the public sphere (Fassin 2014).

Obscuring the categories among academia, policy, and practice further allows this research to contribute to public anthropology. As Agustín (2005) argues, “Although public and academic theory on commercial sex abound, few participants are familiar with the wide variety of forms and sites involved; most are dealing with stereotypes and interested solely in street prostitution” (619). This makes relevant research on migrant sex work spaces in Naivasha beyond academic theory, where few sex work policies and programs have considered variable migration patterns or integrated migrant populations. The implications from this research include the need to expand Kenya’s highly successful peer education and outreach programs beyond the street level, to include migrant spaces like IDP camps and flower farms, and also consider mobile phone technology as a risk management tool for migrant sex workers.
7.3 Migrant Sex Worker Voices, Silences, and Limitations

This ethnography is limited in a number of ways. First, as a result of the focus only on female sex workers and female-male sexual-economic transactions, this research reconstructs heteronormativity in African sex work research and silences the experiences of migrant male and transgendered sex workers. While there were two to three suspected male sex workers in Naivasha, because homosexuality is illegal in Kenya and mob justice was often instituted in Naivasha, conducting ethnographic research and oral life histories with these men, if indeed they were sex workers, raised a number of ethical issues. Because of the privileging of female sex workers’ voices and the lack of male perspectives as clients, boyfriends, ex-husbands, brothers, relatives, and fathers, ideas of male African promiscuity were reconstructed and patriarchy imagined problematically as one-sided and unchanging. While this research did initially include male clients and relatives in its research design, because of alcohol consumption and the nature of client solicitation at the street level this created security issues and talking to sex workers’ relatives compromised their confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, this research has lacked practical applications with any immediate or visible benefits to migrant sex worker research participants. Migrant female sex workers were aware of the power dynamics present in researching their community, as Jamila powerfully stated referring specifically to publications by an NGO worker:

Most of these people they’re after themselves, to use sex workers. It’s so painful. Picking your stories, writing books, selling books and they don’t even want you to touch the book. They are earning from me. It is so painful.

This narrative emphasizes the importance of striving to conduct better, more participatory, and collaborative research with sex workers at all levels of research design and dissemination, as well as the need for problematizing development organizations and initiatives targeting sex worker communities.
7.4 Future Geographies of Sexual-Economic Entanglement

The contributions and limitations of this ethnography point to future research directions focusing on other migrant sex work spaces as they are developing in Naivasha and across Kenya within the current global political economy. These could include mobile female strippers, who travel from Nairobi working in recently established strip clubs to rural areas across Kenya, including Naivasha, sometimes engaging in sexual-economic exchange. The evolution of other forms of ICTs as they are being introduced in Kenya and impacting sex worker practices and mobility in new ways may be examined, especially the growth of internet solicitation and online escort services. This ethnography has also pointed to the need for a better understanding of how changing narratives of HIV/AIDS among sex workers play out in migrant spaces and how HIV positive mobile sex workers experience continuum of healthcare throughout their migration trajectories. Therefore, future research will continue to theorize sexual-economic entanglement, seeking to better understand migrant sex workers’ complex, everyday experiences across time, space, place, and scale, locating different geographies of sexual commerce as they are emerging in Kenya today in gendered and globalized ways.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Migrant Sex Worker Oral Life History Guide

Background and Origin:
What year were you born? On what date?
Where were you born? What ethnic group do you identify with?
Who lived with you? Your mother, father, extended family?
Tell me about your mother and father. Where were they born? When were they born? What memories do you have of them?
Did your parents have a good marriage?
How did your family earn money? How did your family compare to others in the neighbourhood – richer, poorer, the same?
How many brothers and sisters do you have? When were they born? What memories do you have of each of them from when you were growing up?
Did you have grandparents? Where were they born? When were they born? What do you remember about them? When did they die?

Childhood and Growing Up:
What were you like as a child?
What’s your happiest memory growing up?
What responsibilities did you have at home when you were young?
Did you go to school? Up until what level? Why or why not?
What kind of school did you go to? Were you a good student?
Did you have any role models when you were a child? Who did you go to for advice?
What did you want to be when you grew up? What did you dream about doing with your life?
Did you experience any coming of age ceremony or rite of passage, like FGM?
Do you remember any big events from when you were growing up?
What’s different about growing up today from when you were growing up?
When you became a teenager, did your responsibilities change?
What did you do for fun?
Do you remember your first boyfriend?
How old were you when you had your first sexual experience?
What was it like? Did you want to have sex?
What did you learn about sex growing up?

Adulthood:
Do you wish you could have gone to university or college?
How do you think this could have changed your life?
As an adult, what challenges did you face trying to find a job?
What was your first job? What did you like or not like about it?
Have you ever worked in the flower farms?
Had you ever exchanged sex for employment, job security, or promotion before you started sex work?
Are you married? Have you ever been married?
Why did you want to get married?
When did you get married? How old were you? Where did you get married? What was your wedding like?
What was/is the best part about being married? What was/is the worst part?
Why did you get divorced?
How many children do you have? Biological and adopted? When were they born?
How did you decide what to name each?
Why did you want to be a mother?
What is the best thing about being a mother? What is the hardest thing?
How are you like your mother? Unlike her? How are you like your father? Unlike him?
What was most important to your parents?
Do you feel you’re like any of your grandparents? In what ways?
How are your children like you? Unlike you?
What do you think are your three best qualities? Your three worst?
What’s the best compliment you ever received?
What kinds of things bring you the most pleasure now? When you were a younger adult? A child?
What things frighten you now? What frightened you when you were a younger adult? A child?
What’s the one thing you’ve always wanted but still don’t have?
Do you feel differently about yourself now from how you felt when you were younger? How?
What do you think has stayed the same about you throughout life? What do you think has changed?

Sex Worker Entry and Daily Life:
How did you get into sex work? What was going on in your life? What made you decide to start?
When was the first time you exchanged sex for money? Describe the experience.
How did you feel?
Did someone help you? Did they demand payment?
How long have you been in sex work? How many clients do you have per day? Week? Estimate how many clients you’ve had.
Does sex work make you feel differently about having sex? How has your feeling about sex changed since the first time you sold sex?
Do you enjoy sex with clients? Are you able to have an orgasm?
What makes a “good” or “bad” sex worker? What type of person do you have to be to succeed as a sex worker?
What makes a “good” or “bad” client?
What do you have in common with other sex workers? What makes you unique?
Describe your typical workday. Where do you work from? When do you work?
Where do you live? When do you bring clients home? When do you not bring clients home?
How do you get ready for a client? How much do you charge?
How do you meet clients? What are your strategies? Does anyone help you?
Who are your typical clients? Only men? Are there types of clients you want more than others?
How much do you earn in a typical day? What do you do with this money?
How many clients do you have per day? Week? Month?
What kind of skills have you learned as a sex worker?
What things do you like to do when you’re not working?

Sex Worker Relationships:
Do you have regular clients? How are they different from other clients? How do they contact you?
Do they pay you differently or give you gifts?
Do you have boyfriends? How are they different from clients? Do they know you’re a sex worker? How do they feel about it?
Does your husband know what you do for work? How does he feel about it?
Do you feel differently when you have sex with a client or sex with someone you care about?
Do your friends know you’re a sex worker? How do they feel about it?
Does your family know you’re a sex worker? How do they feel about it?
Generally, what do people think about sex workers?
Tell me about a time someone in your life made you feel bad because of your work. Tell me about a time someone in your life made you feel good about your work.
Do most of the people in your community know you’re a sex worker?
How does being a sex worker affect your relationships?
Who are the most important people in your life? Who do you trust most? Love most? Are most of your friends also sex workers?
Do you still have relationships with people or family from where you were born?
What do you tell them you do for work?
Do you know the father(s) of your children?
Do you receive any support from him?
Do your children know what you do for work?
How would you feel if they knew? How would they feel?
How would you feel if your children became sex workers?
Who takes care of your children while you’re with clients?
Does your family know what you do for work?
Are there any other sex workers in your family?

Sex Worker Mobility:
Did you come to Naivasha for sex work? Why do you think there are a lot of sex workers here? Do most of them stay or are they passing through?
Have you done sex work in other towns?
Why did you choose that particular town(s)?
How did you get from here to there?
Have you ever travelled with a truck driver? Where did you go?
Did you stop along the way?
Describe the journey.
Have you ever done sex work in another town during a harvesting season?
Tourism season? Where, when, why?
Who do you leave your kids with?
Is it hard leaving them?
What are the good things about changing towns? Bad things?
Where do you stay in a new town?
What challenges does a sex worker face in a new town?
What challenges have you faced in a new town?
What’s different about clients there compared to here?
What’s different about sex workers there compared to here?
Do sex workers move around a lot? Do you like moving around? Would you like to move around? Why or why not?
Are there any places you avoid?
Are sex workers mostly Kikuyu? Why? Do sex workers from different ethnic groups get along? What conflicts might arise? Is it hard to survive as a sex worker if she’s not Kikuyu?
Do you send money to your children? Anyone else? How do you send it?
How has Naivasha changed since you’ve lived here?
Did you ever move growing up?

Sex Worker Challenges:
Have you ever been tested for HIV? Where?
Have you ever had an STI? Where did you get treatment?
Have you ever had an abortion? Where was the operation performed?
How often do you use a condom? Night? Week? Month? When do you not use a condom?
Where do you go when you are sick or have a health problem?
Have you ever had any negative experiences at a hospital because of your sex work?
Describe any physical dangers from your job.
How many times in the last week? Month? Year?
Did you report this? Did you get help from anyone? Who?
Have you ever been abused by a police officer? Another sex worker?
Do you feel safe? What would make you feel safer?
Do you get protection from anyone? Police, street boys, boyfriend? Do they demand payment for protection?
What things do clients pay extra for? Do they make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe? How often are you requested to do things you don’t want to do?
Have you ever been arrested? Why?
Are there parts of sex work that are stressful? How do you cope?
How does sex work make you feel emotionally? How do you cope with any negative feelings?
Have you ever tried getting out of sex work?
What do you like most about sex work? Hate most?

Life Lessons and Legacies:
What things are most important to you now? Why?
How have your dreams and goals changed through your life?
If you could go back to any age, which age would it be and why?
How do you feel now about growing old? What’s the hardest thing about growing older? The best thing?
Do you think about the future and make plans? Is there anything about the future that scares you?
If you live another 20-30 years, what will you do?
What have you liked best about your life so far? What’s your happiest or proudest moment?
What do you feel have been the important successes in your life? The frustrations?
What’s the most difficult thing that ever happened to you? How did you deal with it?
Describe a person or situation from your childhood that had a profound effect on the way you look at life.
What, if anything, would you have done differently in your life?
Over time, how have you changed the way you look at life/people?
Do you have a philosophy of life? What’s your best piece of advice for living? If a young person came to you asking what’s the most important thing for living a good life, what would you say?
How do you define a “good life” or a “successful life”?
What in your life makes you most happy? Sad?
What do you see as your place or purpose in life?

Services, Interview, and Research:
What organizations do you know of that provide services to sex workers?
Do you participate in any of their programs? Why are they good or bad?
What services from the community do you use the most?
What service(s) do you think is the most important for you and other sex workers to have access to?
Why did you agree to participate in this interview?
Are you interested in the results of this research?
What do you think should be done with research on sex workers in Naivasha?
Appendix B: Verbal Consent Script

My name is Megan Lowthers and I am a PhD student at the University of Western Ontario studying Anthropology.

I am doing research for my thesis on women’s experiences of commercial sex work and transactional sex in Naivasha. I am especially interested in their everyday gender relationships and their migration patterns. To help me with this research, I would like to ask you some questions. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. This conversation may take one to two hours, although you may decide how long to discuss these topics with me.

You may experience minimal social or psychological risks from participating in this study. You may feel embarrassed or worried that community members will be suspicious of your involvement in this study. You may be worried about your job security, what the community will think about you, or who this information will be shared with. I assure you that your responses are anonymous and will be kept confidential.

If you wish to contact my project supervisor I would be happy to provide you with their contact information. If you have concerns about this project, I also have the contact information for the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Western Ontario, all provided on this card.

[If I will be recording the conversation, I will also state the following:]

With your permission, I would like to record this conversation so that I can refer to it later. If I do record this, no one but me will listen to it. If I use your words in something that I write and you wish to remain anonymous, I will ensure that no one will be able to know who you are from what you say. I will keep the recordings I make in a safe place and will ensure that no one but me has access to them.

If at any point in our conversation you would like to stop or ask me a question, you are encouraged to do so.

Do you understand what I have said? Do I have your informed consent?
Appendix C: Ethics Approval

Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Regina Darnell
Review Number: 175628
Review Level: Full Board
Approved Local Adult Participants: 0
Approved Local Minor Participants: 0
Protocol Title: Gender, Migration, and Everyday Experiences within the Kenyan Flower Farm Community
Department & Institution: Anthropology, University of Western Ontario
Sponsor: International Development Research Centre

Ethics Approval Date: May 05, 2011  Expiry Date: May 21, 2013

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

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<th>Document Name</th>
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<td>UWO Protocol</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter of Information &amp; Consent</td>
<td>Verbal Script - Letter of Information Only</td>
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</table>

This is to notify you that the University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB’s periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The UWO NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.
# Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Megan Lowthers

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:**

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<th>Degree</th>
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<th>Location</th>
<th>Field</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>The University of Western Ontario</td>
<td>London, Ontario, Canada</td>
<td>Anthropology and Migration and Ethnic Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>York University</td>
<td>Toronto, Ontario, Canada</td>
<td>Public Issues Anthropology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.A. First Class Combined Honours</td>
<td>Dalhousie University</td>
<td>Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada</td>
<td>Social Anthropology and International Development Studies</td>
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**Honours and Awards:**

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<th>Institution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social Science and Humanities Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship, 2016-2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canadian Anthropology Society Women’s Network Award for Student Paper in Feminist Anthropology, 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Science and Humanities Research Council Doctoral Fellowship, 2012-2014</td>
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<td>Department of Anthropology Travel Scholarship, 2013</td>
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<td>Africa Institute Student Mobility Award, 2012</td>
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<td>Province of Ontario Graduate Scholarship, 2011-2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Migration and Ethnic Relations Entrance Scholarship, 2011</td>
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**Related Work Experience:**

- Teaching Assistant<br>  The University of Western Ontario<br>  2010-2013
- Teaching Assistant<br>  University of Guelph<br>  2008-2010
Publications:

Henley, Phaedra, Megan Lowthers, Gideon Koren, Pamela Fedha, Evan Russell, Stan VanUum, Sumedha Arya, Regna Darnell, Irena Creed, Charles Trick, and John Bend

Conference Papers:


2014 Mapping Uncertain Mobility: Migrant Female Sex Workers, Gender, and Mobile Phone Use in Kenya. Paper read at The Annual Meeting of the Canadian Anthropological Association, April 30-May 3, at York University.


2011 Gendered Transnationalisms and the Migrant Market Diaspora in Sub-Saharan West Africa. Paper read at The Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies Annual Graduate Student Conference, March 25-26, at University of Toronto.

Invited Talks:

2015 Feminist Ethnography for the Study of Gender, Migration, and Sexual Commerce in East Africa. Invited talk to the Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research Graduate Seminar: Researching Lived Experience, March 31, at The University of Western Ontario.

2015 The Gendered Geography of Street Level Sex Work: Policy, Development, and Inequality among Migrant Female Sex Workers in Kenya. Invited talk to the Department of Gender Studies, March 26, at Central European University.

2014 Sexual-Economic Entanglement and the Realities of Everyday Mobility in East Africa. Invited talk to the Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, December 8, at The University of Kansas.

Associations and Affiliations:

Canadian Anthropological Association
American Anthropological Association
Society for Applied Anthropology
International Association for the Study of Forced Migration

Languages:

English, French, and Swahili