Chapter 23

Researching Sex Work: Doing Decolonial, Intersectional Narrative Analysis

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Introduction

Contexts of deepening global and local inequalities require research approaches that not only humanise those who continue to exist and survive on the margins, but that explicitly advance social justice. This chapter takes a narrative criminological approach to the study of violence in the lives of sex workers in South Africa, arguing that it has much to offer for our understanding of how individual lives and experiences are shaped by broader categories of power and privilege. Specifically, decolonial, intersectional narrative analysis counteracts the marginalising tendencies of some approaches to research. The approach offered here also speaks back to the ways in which those on the margins (especially poor, black and marginalised women) continue to be (mis)represented in the knowledge-making machinery. The chapter begins by pointing to the ways in which research has been implicated in further marginalising oppressed groups and doing little to advance social justice. Next, I make a case for decolonial, intersectional, black and African feminist approaches to narrative criminological research. The third section of the chapter provides an analytic example of a decolonial, intersectional approach to narrative criminology using data from interviews with sex workers. The conclusion considers the contributions decolonial, intersectional feminist work can make to advancing narrative criminology, especially work with victims that might advance social justice.

Decolonising/Rehumanising Research

Contexts of increasing inequality, violence against and marginalisation of particular sectors of society call for research that can offer visibility to those marginalised and recognise the ways in which power intersects to shape the experiences of those who live precarious lives on the margins. Research that opens opportunities for shifting the status quo is more urgent than ever. Furthermore, we must recognise the ways in which the knowledge economy continues to

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exclude and disempower particular groups of people. Research, as a means of knowledge production that occurs mostly in academic institutions, has been recognised as being a dehumanising endeavour. As Walker (1981) states: 'Rarely do people emerge from our studies as people with their dignity intact. Worse still the report may read as though the evaluator was the most intelligent person present' (p. 148). Some social science research approaches have been implicated in perpetuating marginalisation, doing little more than collecting, repackaging and recirculating stories of pain, oppression and damage without explicitly addressing questions of social justice (Tuck & Wayne Yang, 2014). As well, the academy may be considered a colonising endeavour in the ways in which it utilises research participants in the service of the careers of individual academics (Paris & Winn, 2014; Tuck & Wayne Yang, 2014). A range of disciplines, including criminology, have been recognised as rooted in long colonial histories (Agozino, 2003). Recognising these histories and their continuing problematics is especially important when we are working with those whose lives have been shaped by colonial patriarchy and apartheid and its epistemic and material violence (Irwin & Umemoto, 2016).

In this chapter I argue for a decolonial, intersectional approach to research in narrative criminology and to the emerging field of narrative victimology (Walklate, Maher, McCulloch, Fitz-Gibbon, & Beavis, 2018) that goes beyond just the analysis of the data – although this aspect is foregrounded in the chapter. This approach builds on feminist research principles and practices that recognise the ways in which power and politics play out in knowledge production, and that centres the experiences of those who have been traditionally excluded, especially women (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006). At the same time, the approach I articulate centres decolonial, black and African feminist theory and praxis. The term intersectionality emerged from Black US-based feminists (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991) to call attention to the ways in which social identities and experiences intersect to produce different outcomes for individuals and how these identities and experiences are shaped by power and socio-structural oppressions. African feminist approaches have also always been concerned with questions of intersectionality – even though not explicitly identified as such. African feminism has been described as involving ongoing debates about identity and culture (Msimang, 2002), has been 'mindful of the nexi of power relations at play in black women's lives whilst acknowledging the agency with which we engage with them' (Gqola, 2001, p. 12) and centred on the experiences of African women. The approach has additionally foregrounded an understanding of African women's experiences within African contexts of colonisation and imperialism that have so fundamentally shaped the history and politics on the continent. It considers the political, economic, historical and cultural contexts to be important for understanding gender and women's experiences (Kiguwa, 2004). Along the same lines, decolonial feminist approaches recognise the continuation of coloniality in contemporary times, as well as the important ways in which the process of colonisation involved racialisation and the simultaneous process of gendered subordination (Lugones, 2007, 2010).

Advancing a Decolonial, Intersectional Agenda for Narrative Criminology

At the same time that intersectional and African feminist approaches are important for challenging the ways in which oppressed groups are presented, the decolonising potential of narrative research has been acknowledged for its ability to highlight the multiplicity of contexts, the complexity of human existence and for disrupting power relationships (Sonn, Stevens, & Duncan, 2013). Historically marginalised groups, for example, often gain visibility and political traction through crafting public narratives about their oppression. It is often personal stories about everyday challenges or oppressions that capture the public imagination and that can advance social and policy change. This point was powerfully made in Walklate et al.'s (2018) analysis of how the narrative of Rosy Batty, whose son had been killed by his father, had significantly shaped Australian policy on family violence.

Narrative research, including narrative criminology, like feminist approaches has the potential to make visible previously silenced experiences and for these to be represented on narrators' own terms. As Banister et al. (2011) argue, 'The presentation of the self in narrative can be a source of enormous pride for narrators, particularly people whose stories have been ignored or stifled' (p. 138). Riessman (2008) further argues that narratives may be strategic, functional and purposeful, allowing narrators to rewrite past events that may have been painful, present a particular argument from their perspective, or advance an argument for political or social change. In these ways, narratives are understood to restore agency to the tellers (Parker, 2005; Sonn et al., 2013), while at the same time advancing feminist research and political agency.

Narratives have also been argued to be closely linked to the construction of identity, in narrative psychology, for example (Murray, 2003), as well as in narrative criminology (Fleetwood, 2015; McNay, 1999). The stories we tell about ourselves and our experiences in the world construct particular versions of ourselves, whether as coherent or consistent narratives, or as those deployed for strategic and functional purposes, for example to position ourselves as particular kinds of people in particular situations. The links between narratives and the construction of identity hold the potential for advancing an intersectional, decolonial, feminist research agenda. It is understood that the self is revealed and constructed through the narration of personal stories (Murray, 2003). These personal stories thus hold the potential to disrupt hegemonic scripts and discourses and so hold transformative power for the ways in which people come to see themselves and others (see Boonzaier, 2014b). These are especially important for black, poor women and other groups in society that continue to be oppressed, not only by the dire material circumstances that mark their lives but also by the circulating, stigmatising scripts about them and their lives. A feminist, decolonial, intersectional agenda for narrative criminology can thus be advanced through acknowledgement of the transformative power of narratives to challenge hegemony and, through so doing, to build community (Rappaport, 1995) – explicitly linking the personal and the political.

Narrative criminology has much to offer for our understanding of how individual lives and experiences are shaped by broader categories of power, privilege and subordination that may resonate with and emerge from histories of imperialism, colonialism and institutionalised racism. Narrative criminological approaches are important for showing not only how individual lives, behaviours and histories are recounted and accounted for, but also for illustrating how these link to subjective identities and possible action (Presser, 2009). The potential for articulating which particular narratives advance which actions and foreclose others offers productive ground for narrative criminologists and scholars concerned with theorising violence. On the one hand, taking an intersectional narrative criminological approach to understanding the experiences of women in sex work is important, given that sex work is considered 'criminal' behaviour. On the other hand, the research overwhelmingly shows that women involved in sex work are frequently poor women struggling to survive (Phoenix, 2000) and are often victims of multiple forms of oppression (Gould & Fick, 2008; Huysamen, 2011; Wojcicki & Malala, 2001), making it especially important to take an intersectional narrative approach to their experiences of victimisation. In addition, a decolonial approach is important because it allows us to see the historical roots of the contemporary oppressions faced by poor women sex workers that might otherwise be erased. What kinds of stories, for example, do women tell about why/how they came to be involved in sex work? How do they 'talk themselves into' (Presser, 2012, p. 9) and 'out of' engaging in sex work? And how are their identities, as women, mothers, partners and sex workers, implicated in and achieved via their narratives? The latter question brings to the fore the ways in which gender is implicated in narratives told. As Miller, Carbone-Lopez, and Gunderman (2015) illustrated in their work with women methamphetamine users in prison, narratives convey important messages around gender and gender is also 'accomplished' through narrative. Following from West and Zimmerman, Miller et al. see gender as a situated accomplishment, performed through narrative. Indeed, the performance of gender through narrative has been illustrated in work with offenders of serious crimes in prison (Presser, 2005), with perpetrators of intimate partner violence (Boonzaier, 2014a) and with men who buy sex (Huysamen, 2015).

Narrative criminology offers an understanding of the 'social nature' of stories, of 'when, why, and how stories come to be told, heard, and which resources speakers can draw upon' (Fleetwood, 2015, p. 372). In addition, it pays attention to structure and agency, illuminating how women subjectively make meaning of their experiences while showing how these are shaped and produced by social–structural systems and circumstances (Fleetwood, 2015). This issue of structure and agency has also been taken up in Phoenix's (2000) work on what she calls 'prostitute identities' (p. 37) – challenging the false dualism set up in sex work research (and criminological research more broadly) between agency (suggesting that sex work is women's choice) and structure (suggesting that women's choices are constrained by social–structural factors). As Fleetwood (2015) has argued: 'Narrative criminology offers tools for conceptualizing and researching the complex ways in which gender (as both a material and discursive structure) shapes women's lawbreaking' (p. 383). Phoenix (2000) similarly argues that it is through the creative exploration of discourses of meaning that we can work with the complex interplay between 'material and social conditions' and the 'symbolic landscape' (p. 53) to understand the ways in which women's sustained involvement in sex work are shaped by agency (and a lack thereof) and social–structural constraints (and facilitators). In this chapter a decolonial, intersectional narrative criminological approach is taken to understand the experiences of women who have chosen to break the law but also situating these choices within histories of oppression and growing contexts of inequality, shaped by gender, race, class and other intersecting factors – 'connecting (women's) personal agency and social structure through attention to personal narratives, and public discourses about gender and crime' (Fleetwood, 2015, p. 384).

Producing Knowledge in Decolonial, Intersectional Narrative Criminology

Feminist research approaches foreground the political nature of the research. They understand that research is embedded within multiple contexts and relations of power and that inquiry demands an ethically and politically reflexive stance from us as researchers (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006). This stance is one that shapes how we ask the questions that guide our research. In the construction of the research questions, for example, researchers should be aware of the racist and sexist othering of marginalised groups (see Boonzaier, 2018). The implications of asking particular research questions that continue to frame oppressed groups as damaged and dysfunctional should thus be avoided. In addition, from a narrative theoretical perspective it is useful to think about the product of our research as a/the narrative/s we produce about the work we had undertaken. What kinds of stories do researchers seek to collect or tell in their work? What kinds of assumptions are embedded in the stories we tell? Thus, a decolonial, intersectional feminist narrative perspective requires one to think carefully about how the narratives we produce as researchers may be taken up to advance particular antitransformative agendas that may further marginalise and disadvantage oppressed groups.

This politically aware and ethically reflective stance should also be centred in the ways in which we choose to collect data from our research participants and the particular kinds of interventions we make in the encounters we have with people. Are we exploiting them, being invasive, mining for data without an awareness of their material and other needs and challenges? Are we centring our questions and concerns without being mindful of what kinds of stories participants are interested telling? What will our research encounters do for the participants we work with? Will it leave them feeling further disempowered? What promises have we made to participants? How will we honour these? These are some of the questions that must be addressed when attempting to produce knowledge from a perspective that centres feminist, decolonial and intersectional narrative approaches.

Doing Decolonial, Intersectional Narrative Analysis

The approach I am articulating in this chapter develops in different phases. These include: (Phase 1) An analysis of narrative content; (Phase 2) An analysis of decolonial, intersectional power; (Phase 3) Reading against the grain: Articulating resistance; and (Phase 4) Crafting a plurivocal narrative. These phases are guided by different approaches but centre a decolonial, intersectional lens. While the reader might like to follow these as 'phases' and employ them as a starting point for their analyses, it is important to acknowledge that a 'grounded', intuitive and credible analysis involves more than following a series of 'steps'. Our ways of knowing, our intuition and hunches about our research are important too for producing analyses that are situated in and would 'sit well' with our feminist politics and agendas and that would also be meaningful for the individuals and communities with whom we work.

I articulate the analytic approach I am expounding in this chapter through an analysis of interviews conducted with women engaged in sex work in Cape Town, South Africa. Specifically, the data drawn from two sets of interviews. The first (in 2011), were interviews with 11 women, recruited through a support group who considered themselves to be in the process of exiting from sex work. The support group, called Embrace Dignity, was established with the explicit purpose of facilitating women's exit from sex work and was founded with the understanding that sex work is a form of violence against women. The women ranged in age from 27 to 51 years old. These interviews were conducted by Monique Huysamen.[1] Women were asked, in unstructured interviews, about their experiences of violence in the sex industry, using the prompt: 'I would like to hear about your experiences of working in prostitution, perhaps you could begin by telling me how you started prostitution' (Huysamen, 2011, p. 12). In the second set of interviews from 2014, with 11 women (ages 31–51 years), they were asked specifically about their experiences of intimate partner violence and its intersections with their involvement in sex work, using the prompt: 'I would like you to tell me the story of your intimate relationship – how you met, how the relationship progressed, the challenges you experienced, that sort of thing' (Bartlett, 2014, p. 11). This question was followed up with: 'What connections can you draw between your experiences in the relationship and the work you do?' (Bartlett, 2014, p. 11). For the most part, these women were still involved in the sex industry and using the support of a sex worker rights organisation. These women were recruited via an agency called Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT), a group specifically established to lobby for the rights of sex workers and to provide them various forms of support during their engagement in sex work. These interviews were conducted by Elretha Bartlett.[2] Both sets of interviews progressed in relatively open-ended, unstructured formats, taking a

[1]Monique Husyamen was a postgraduate student in Psychology at the time the interviews were conducted.

[2]Elretha Bartlett was a postgraduate student in Psychology at the time the interviews were conducted.

conversational approach to allow for women to make meaning of their experiences and situations through the act of narration.

While both interviewers were young, middle-class, white women, all but one of the women interviewed were black.[3] Consistent with the sex workers generally, especially those who work on the street, the women interviewed were also all living in poverty. These race and class dynamics inevitability shaped the interviews and the kinds of stories that were told. A further contextual factor shaping the interviews would have been the agencies' divergent stances on sex work/prostitution. Both agencies take an explicitly political and firm stance on the nature of women's participation in sex work – each coming down strongly on a different side of the debate concerning sex work. In practical terms this means that they formulate their advocacy work around either women's agency and the idea that sex work is a choice (SWEAT) or the idea that women are compelled into 'prostitution' which is also a form of violence against women (Embrace Dignity).

I reanalyse these interviews here as someone who has had longstanding relationships with both agencies, and as a black feminist with a long history of feminist work on gender and sexual violence in South Africa. I had also, at the time, suggested the possibility of this work to both students and supervised the research projects they produced, with the agreement being made that the data would be available for reanalysis by any of the project participants. It is also important to note that the research questions in the original work undertaken (i.e. an exploration of the harms women encounter in prostitution (Huysamen, 2011) and an exploration of sex worker's experiences of intimate partner violence (Bartlett, 2014)) emerged at the request of the two organisations concerned (Embrace Dignity and SWEAT, respectively).

Phase One: An Analysis of Narrative Content

The thematic narrative analysis approach articulated by Riessman (2008) focuses on the content of particular narratives. As far as possible, attention is accorded to the holistic meaning of narratives and some attention is paid to time, place and historical context. The strength of thematic narrative analysis is that it foregrounds the content of participants' narratives and, in so doing, foregrounds the subjectivity and agency of participants (Riessman, 2008). A thematic narrative analysis is concerned with the meanings that stories have to narrators and the possibilities for creating social identity, group belonging and collective action. It also makes links between lifeworlds and power relations and inequalities – strengthening its synergies with feminist decolonial and intersectional approaches.

The first phase of this analysis takes Riessman's thematic narrative analysis as a starting point, exploring common narratives within and across the interview transcripts. This involves intimately familiarising oneself with the data to obtain a

[3]'Black' here is used to refer to all groups of people oppressed by and discriminated against through apartheid legislation in South Africa.

Table 23.1. Phase One: Useful Analytic Questions.

- What overall sense do I get from reading or listening to each transcript?
- What emotional reactions are evoked in reflecting on the interview interaction or afterwards?
- How does each interview start, unfold and end?
- What would I have liked to hear more about?
- What are the narratives being told? What are the themes in the transcript?
- What kind of narrative is it?
- What narratives appear common amongst participants? What are the differences?

Source: Adapted from Fraser (2004), Esterberg (2002) and Parker (2005).

sense of the different thematic areas that characterise each story. In relation to the project on sex work, the overarching questions addressed in this first phase ask: What stories do women tell about sex work and intimate relationships? (Table 23.1).

In the early stages of the first phase of this analysis the following thematic areas around women's experiences as sex work emerged. Women overwhelmingly told stories about multiple forms of violence in their lives. These included stories of physical violence; of economic abuse; of verbal violence; of psychological violence; and of sexual violence. As women narrated these experiences of violence they also showed how these multiple experiences overlapped. Women also articulated experiences of violence from the different men they encountered in their lives, namely clients, partners, the police and others.

Intersecting violence: partners and clients

This section briefly presents women's narratives about violence to give a flavour of their complexity; the following section discusses methodological issues. Women's narrations of their experiences as women who sell sex and as women in intimate relationships illuminate the overwhelming presence of violence in their lives. This violence was experienced from intimate partners, clients and sometimes from the police or others. Across the interviews, there were numerous stories told about being subjected to violence, in multiple forms. In addition to countless recollections of physical violence, participants also recounted many events that involved economic exploitation from clients, including refusing to pay at all or refusing to pay the agreed upon payment, and sometimes theft or robbery.

> *But in this business sometimes you (just) give up, especially when the men hurt you. I wasn't only hurt once. I was hurt a lot on the street. A lot! There in Rhodes they drop me there in the middle of the night. You know how dark it is? I had to find my way back to town again. Then the other one, he take your shoes and everything and leave you just there in the park. One day, I will never forget that night, he was a coloured[4] guy, he took me to Malmesbury and dropped me there. He finished sexually, have sex with me and just said, 'Let me go take your money.' I thought, 'Why is he leaving me here and take the money? I must go with him.' When I go with him to the car, he was showing me the gun and just drive off. My shoes, my bag, everything… I had to walk from Malmesbury and Malmesbury is FAR! I got a lift (from) an OLD man. Even this old man is a Xhosa […] So this Xhosa man still wants business. I didn't have (any) other option. I (had) to make business with him just to get out of that place. But at least he (gave) me money.* (Jamiela).[5]

Jamiela begins her story by talking about the many instances of her being 'hurt' by men 'on the street', placing emphasis on the frequency of the harm ('A lot!'). She quickly moves to a description that complicates our understanding of harm to include harm beyond the physical; by choosing to talk about being robbed and left in deserted locations, compounding her risk of potentially experiencing further violence on the street. Many women narrated their experiences of being robbed by clients and/or being dropped off in isolated locations. Jamiela's story illustrates how multiple types of violence can intersect in one scenario. The economic violence that Jamiela experienced increased her vulnerability to sexual violence, as she felt she had 'no other option' but to 'do business' with a second man in order to obtain a lift back to Cape Town.

In women's descriptions of being subjected to violence and humiliation, they centre their identities as sex workers. The violence they experience, whether it is being subjected to psychological abuse or physical beatings by a partner, rape by a client or police officer, being robbed and dropped off in deserted places, being forced to perform degrading acts by a client, or being ostracised and humiliated by members of their communities, are constructed as misogynistic forms of punishment for their involvement in sex work, and simultaneously for their transgression of 'acceptable' notions of femininity, powerfully illustrated in Lindi's narrative below.

> Lindi: *And the guys like that they don't care, because what they do they first drug you. You must get drunk so that you mustn't know what is where, what is where, what is where. So I don't know. There are guys that are evil outside here. Other guys, they don't like this prostitution life. That is why they punish girls like that, they don't like it.*
>
> Interviewer: *So you think some guys pick up prostitutes because they against it?*

[4]The term 'coloured' is a racial term still commonly used to describe an apartheid-invented 'category' of oppressed people commonly understood to be of 'mixed ancestry'.

[5]Women who were interviewed are identified through the use of pseudonyms.

> Lindi: *They against that. In that very same time the other one experienced that from his wife.* [Interviewer: *Okay?*]
>
> Lindi: *The wife was a prostitute. The wife end up dead being a prostitute. Now he tell himself, 'you know, I hate somebody that is a prostitute. I hate a prostitute.' […]*

Lindi's narrative above constructs an 'evil male predator', making little distinction between the man as a partner or the man as a client. She also powerfully conveys the misogyny in the violence perpetrated by 'the man' through repetition and emphasis on the word 'hate'. The significance of Lindi's narration of 'a life' in sex work is that she tells the listener that the extreme and frequent violence women are subjected to in sex work is not 'random' – it is intentional and explicitly gendered, directed at women, not only because they are women but because they are women who work on the streets.

Going against popular understandings of the safety and sanctuary that should be provided in intimate relationships, Faith below talks about the inability of women sex workers to negotiate condom use and sexual activity with intimate partners.

> Interviewer: *[after Faith talks about her lack of power in negotiation with her partner] So with clients you can negotiate condom use, but with your private relationship you can't?*
>
> Faith: *You can't negotiate much because he'd be like 'Who else are you sleeping with?' So the long-term relationships are more dangerous than sleeping with a client, because the client knows you're getting it for the money. But the long-term would not pay you as much and they'll wake up anytime and just open your legs. And you can't really stop them and say, 'Stop it.' Because I needed the shelter and I couldn't really fight or speak with him […]*

In Faith's narration above there is an implicit message that one can expect to be subjected to violence from a client ('long-term relationships are more dangerous than sleeping with a client'). This construction was consistent with how other women in the research narrated their involvement in sex work – as dangerous and risky. It is also consistent with the 'men-as-expense symbolic landscape' (p. 48) crafted by the participants in Phoenix's research (2000), positioning any engagement with men as encompassing 'hidden costs' and risks.

Faith further amplifies several issues sex workers experience regarding health, safety and intimate relationships. Firstly, that insisting on condom use with an intimate partner can be complex if one's partner does not know about the sex work. Secondly, negotiating condom use and consent with a client is constructed as easier because there is a definitive limit on the interaction, whereas intimate partners, who spend time with the women on a daily basis, demand women's sexual availability. Making the same links between men and money that Phoenix (2000) found in her work, Faith constructs the intimate relationship as transactional too, like sex work but in the former she is unable to negotiate the timing of sexual activity as her partner likely views their relationship as him having 'ownership' of her body.

In their narrations women blur the boundaries between the violences 'at work' and 'at home'. This blurred boundary was evident in women's talk about being subjected to different kinds of violence. The example of verbal abuse is used below. The verbal abuse women pointed to in their narratives included being screamed, shouted, or sworn at, as well as being humiliated and degraded through the use of words.

> Interviewer: *[…] I'd like to know how your work influenced your relationship.*
>
> Camilla: *It actually made it a bit worse. Being a sex worker and being in a relationship, it doesn't … it doesn't go hand-in-hand. It you have a partner and you stand on the road … at the end of the day he doesn't have respect for you (because) he knows you're selling your body and because you have to sell your body. You sleep with different guys and when you come home your partner wants to sleep with you. And because your partner knows you're a prostitute, he treats you worse.*

Camilla's narrative above recalls the 'punishment' articulated by Lindi earlier, though she describes the violence as a result of the absence of 'respect'. Camilla, like other women in sex work (Phoenix, 2000), constructs her body as a commodity and as a result sex work is constructed as a job that lowers a woman's social value. The idea that women who sell sex have a 'lower' social value further perpetuates ideas that place sexuality at the centre of women's identities. When women's supposed and expected 'sexual purity' is 'violated' through her availability for sex work she is seen as having lost some of her worth as a woman, justifying violence against her.

Women's narrations about the links between their identities as sex workers and the violence they experience also suggests that, despite the multiple, intersecting and overlapping forms of violence they experience from a range of different men they encounter, an 'ideal victim' status may not be readily available to them. It has been established that ideas of victim worthiness are shaped by racialized, gendered and classed constructions, making the 'ideal' and 'innocent' victim someone identified as a white woman who is also heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied and likely attractive (Jewkes, 2004). Women who more closely approximate the status of 'ideal victim' become more 'deserving' of public sympathy and also less likely to be blamed for their own victimisation. The status of an 'ideal victim' remains out of reach for the women interviewed, not only because of their involvement in sex work but also because, as poor black women, they wouldn't be deserving of sympathy anyway.

Thus far, paying close attention to the thematic content in women's narratives of violence allows for a reading of how (patriarchal and other forms of) power manifests in women's lives. Taking an inductive approach to the reading of women's narratives, simply answering the question – What is there? – allows us to see the overwhelming presence of violence in women's lives, as well as to see this as an aspect women themselves choose to foreground in their narrations.

Analysing intersecting 'violences'

Women's narrations of violence elucidate the entanglement between different types of violence. The women whose narratives we consider here, as in previous work, point to how violence of one 'type' cannot be considered in isolation of other 'types' (Boonzaier, 2014b), presenting a more complex understanding of what it means to be a victim of men's violence for the listener. Women's narratives also amplify how the larger issue of gendered oppression manifests in their lived experiences and their encounters with men.

In this first phase of the analysis we looked within and across the interview transcripts to assess the kinds of narratives told about violence. We read each woman's interview transcript multiple times to obtain a sense of what kinds of stories she told. These stories were coded and grouped to reflect different thematic areas that emerged from her interview. Once a strong sense of each individual transcript was obtained, we looked across interviews by paying attention to how these different stories about violence occurred in across women's transcripts.

These narratives of violence position women squarely in the role of gendered vulnerability to victimhood (like the participants in Phoenix's (2000) study), although women through their narrations had to work hard[6] to position themselves as 'victims', given that they were not automatically positioned as 'ideal' or 'worthy', by virtue of their sex worker identities, their race and their class. In addition, women's narrations about violence, in its different forms, construct themselves as being at 'risk' from men, whether they are clients, partners or the police. In this first phase of the analysis we stay close to the content of women's stories – attending to how they talk about the interconnectedness of violence. In their stories women blur the boundaries between the types of crime/violence, typically considered to be separate.

In narrative research, including narrative criminology, this lived reality, especially the realities of violence and oppression, is often bracketed off at the

[6]I suggest that women worked hard to position themselves as victims because of the countless stories of extreme and horrific violence they told about. I am certain that the interview extracts I have chosen to represent women's stories do not convey the extent of their suffering, nor do they convey how prevalent stories of violence and suffering were in the interviews. The days and weeks I spent working with the data were very difficult and amplified for me the personal costs of researching gendered violence – an issue not often dealt with in the literature but powerfully considered in the work of Rebecca Campbell (2002).

expense of a focus on the discursive. Although a focus on how realities (e.g. psychological and criminological) are constructed through language is important, this focus on the discursive is often privileged at the expense of other ways of theorising experience. In this choice to bracket off 'reality', the risk for obscuring women's material and embodied experiences, its intrapsychic dimensions and the ways in which social and political power shape their lives is real (Ussher, 2010). Taking an approach that attempts to bring in ways of seeing that might acknowledge dimensions of experience that have been negated or ignored allows us as decolonial, intersectional researchers to make the links between the larger oppressions faced by women and other marginalised groups and the lived, embodied experiences of victimisation revealed in their stories.

Phase Two: Analysing Decolonial, Intersectional Power

Whilst women's narratives reveal complex and intersecting forms of violence, we must also ask what these narratives obscure or exclude. At this point in the analysis the intersectional lens is more explicitly attentive to how participants' identities and experiences accord with power and social–structural oppressions. It engages questions of how the narratives of experiences are shaped by discourses on race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ability, religion, body size, occupation, marital status and age, amongst other identities and what this means in relation to the dynamics of power. At the same time, the analysis also centres questions of coloniality and an understanding of how these oppressive conditions, that may be considered 'contemporary', have long historical roots that demand analysis.

The aim thus, is not only to interpret findings 'within the sociohistorical context of structural inequality for groups positioned in social hierarchies of unequal power' (Bowleg, 2008, p. 320) but also to analyse how the enmeshed and co-constructed social divisions relate to 'political and subjective constructions of identities' (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 205). The guiding questions that are useful during this phase of analysis are included in Table 23.2 below.

In pointing to the overwhelming presence of violence in their lives, women also position themselves in the socially scripted role of 'victim', sometimes 'survivor'. To a large degree they position themselves as acted upon; as the subjects of men's violence. Narrative analysis leads us to question how women may take up the narrative category/identity of 'victim' and the purpose of such narrative positioning, but it should also bring in the tensions and struggle as women attempt to counteract this passive positioning of themselves. Asking analytic questions about what lived experiences are implicated in their narratives, about how the social contexts and structures and circulating public scripts are implicated in the stories, reveals two further narratives in the research on sex work and violence. These are: Stigmatised/Shameful Identities and Narratives of Struggle, discussed below.

Stigmatised/Shameful identities

A close reading of women's interviews illuminates the ways in which their lives are shaped by mainstream moral discourses about sex work. The ways in which their

Table 23.2. Phase Two: Useful Analytic Questions.

- What meanings do the narratives hold for the tellers?
- What kinds of identities are being constructed?
- Beyond the manifest meanings in the narratives, what else might participants be calling attention to in their narratives? What are its meanings?
- How do the stories implicate the lived, intersectional experiences of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, disability, location, religion, occupation, nationality, etc.
- Whose perspectives are privileged in the story? Whose are left out?
- What is the social context in which the story is being told? What kinds of social and cultural resources might the storyteller have access to? How does this frame the telling?
- Are there aspects of the narratives that highlight intrapersonal, interpersonal experiences? Are there aspects of the stories that highlight cultural conventions and social structures?

Source: Adapted from Fraser (2004), Esterberg (2002) and Parker (2005).

experiences of violence from clients, partners and others are shaped, facilitated and enabled by the stigma attached to sex work and the stigmatized identities imposed on them. Women narrate about how sex work is constructed as a degrading kind of work and the implications of the 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963) this manufactures for them. The stigma attached to sex work is entangled, not only with the physical and other types of violence women experienced from their partners, but also with humiliation and shame.

> Interviewer: *Can you tell me a bit more about the relationship?*
>
> Daphne: *Every day, I was being beaten up every day, because he was using drugs and if he get too high, I'm always the problem. Every night. I was abused every night. I couldn't go to my family, because I got bruises, blue eyes. And then he locked me up. I had to stay a few days inside, because, if I go to my family maybe for one day then he come and pick me up again.*
>
> Interviewer: *He cut you off from all other relationships by locking you up in the house.*
>
> Daphne: *Yes. So that I could be his punching bag. Every time. Every day.*
>
> Interviewer: *Was he emotionally abusive towards you, by putting you down?*
>
> Daphne: *Yes he was.*
>
> Interviewer: *What did he say to you?*

> Daphne: *I'm a bitch. I'm a whore. Why couldn't he just treat me as the whore he met, though I was his wife that time too. I told him, 'Why didn't you just pass this whore or this prostitute or this hotnot*[7] *as you say?' Because he was a white man, a German. So his family didn't want him, because he was with me. The culture mustn't be mixed. So he became, treated me also as they treated him. 'Why do you want this (black) woman? ... tell us you picked her up on the street, this prostitute who put her family in shame.' So he became aggressive.*

Above, Daphne articulates an interconnectedness between her experiences of physical abuse, control and isolation and verbal abuse. Daphne works hard to amplify the frequency of the violence she was subjected to 'every day' and 'every night'. Daphne also constructs the physical evidence her partner's abuse leaves on her body as shameful – resulting in her avoidance of contact with her family. Like other abused women, Daphne carries the burden of shame for the violence, the physical evidence thereof (bruises and blue eyes) marking her as a woman who is 'unloved' (Boonzaier, 2014b). The narration from Daphne above also powerfully intersects with the gendered shame she carries (as a woman sex worker) with a history of racialised shame (cf. Wicomb, 1998). For her, the abuse from her partner manifests as a result of his own internalisation of his family's racism and sexism – resulting in the packaging together of the shameful identities of being a black woman and a sex worker.

From women's narrations of their experiences it is clear that sex work is discursively constructed as something that is dirty and shameful. The degradation, humiliation and stigma of sex work emerged in many of the stories women told about how they were humiliated by their partners, by their clients (through language, violence and degrading sexual acts), by the police, as well as by family or the general public. In their narratives women clearly show that the stigma of sex work shapes their experiences as women, as partners, family and community members. They also show how the stigma of sex work intersects with misogyny and manifests as deep contempt for them as women. This, women illustrate through reference to the language of contempt used against them by men, especially repetitive uses of the words 'bitch', 'prostitute' and 'whore'. These words recurred in women's talk about their lives as women sex workers.

It is clear that women's experiences are shaped by stigmatising discourses about sex work – that powerfully intersect with their identities as women who are also black and poor. The prevailing ways in which women are 'marked' by the stigma on sex work provide few opportunities for resistance, although women, through their narrations in this research, point to the ways in which this stigma (that might be invisible to those of us who are not involved in sex work) is damaging to them and their ability to engage in dignified ways of 'making a living'. The ways in which women's narrations about sex work and stigma reveal

[7] A racially denigrating term.

small acts of resistance are also illustrated below through their stories on what it means to 'survive'.

Narratives of struggle: 'Life Is Hard'

This analysis reveals that women articulate the difficulties of what it means to be a poor black woman trying to make their way in the world – in a racist, sexist, neoliberal, capitalist environment that provides few forms of protection and dignity for them and their families. Like other poor women on the margins who experience intimate partner violence, they speak against dominance to counter the individualising, pathologizing narratives of them as somehow being responsible for their continuing victimisations (Boonzaier, 2014b) by pointing to systemic issues that shape their lives. Across almost all of the interviews, women described their entry into sex work as a result of an unfortunate life event (such as the death of a partner or breadwinner) that propelled them into poverty or else was a result of poverty and the need for survival.

> *It's hard, but I want to change. I want to change. And then what I'm struggling too it's like, now this year I pray to God that I must get a job, because I want any job. Any! I don't mind.* (Busisiwe)

Pointing to the ways in which neoliberal economies and other forces push those already on the margins further away, women narrate the difficulties of their existences in how they shift between different kinds of precarious work such as sex work, domestic work or employment as cleaners. In their narratives of struggle women articulate the difficulties of survival by pointing to the need for formal employment, for social support from family and the state. They counter notions of individual failure or success by showing how their current conditions are a manifestation of their positioning on the social hierarchy and as a result of oppressive structural forces shaping their lives. Women's narratives provide evidence of structural forms of violence.

Beyond being propelled into poverty and sex work as a means of survival, structural violence also took other forms. Given the ways in which women constructed themselves as at risk of constant violence from men, safety and security were key features of their narratives of life on the streets. Women pointed to the failures of the police in helping to keep them safe from harm, sometimes naming the police as the perpetrators of violence against them.

> *And the police also, they they are supposed to be our protectors; but some of the police when they they pretend that they are arresting us they also rape us and we don't lay the charges because we are afraid to be locked up, and they told us that if you go you won't have evidence because they throw the condoms when they finished what they doing.* (Gina)

Some women also point to how they were not protected from further abuse from partners, being failed by the criminal justice system, despite their efforts to assert their legal rights through obtaining protection or restraining orders for example.

This second phase of the analysis was concerned with attending to the complexity of women's narrations of their experience – asking how the lived intersectional experiences of race, class and gender emerged in their narratives. It also asked about the social and cultural resources they drew upon in the telling and the implications for the subjective construction of their identities.

In this phase of the analysis we see how the violence women are subjected to intersects with the stigmatisation of sex work. Women's narrative choices to attend to the ways in which the stigma of sex work intersects with misogyny and violence provide powerful evidence of how the 'symbolic landscape' (Phoenix, 2000) or the realm of representation has 'real' effects in their lives. They clearly show these effects by narrating about what it means to live and survive as a 'stigmatised woman'.

We also see that women call attention to the ways in which they are positioned on the structural hierarchy as poor, black women engaged in sex work. Through 'narratives of struggle' they call attention to the ways in which they are oppressed by social structures that provide little to no support to enable them to live dignified lives. Women's narratives of struggle may be interpreted as one way in which they counteract the stigma associated with being poor and being involved in sex work. Calling attention to systemic issues that make their lives hard as women means that they are asking their audiences to look beyond individualised notions of success and failure – rather to read their stories as evidence of systemic failures and as a challenge to the normalisation of neoliberal ways of being.

Phase Three: Reading Against the Grain: Articulating Resistance

In the context of this overwhelming violence, stigmatisation and degradation a feminist decolonial, intersectional narrative reading also needs to listen carefully to the ways in which women talk against dominance (Boonzaier, 2014b) in order to recognise how they counteract their imposed positionalities and the ways in which they are represented as poor black women on the periphery. It involves attention to how women navigate the tightrope, what McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2011) call 'tightrope talk' to refer to the ways in which they negotiate dominant discourses on femininity while at the same time giving voice to their own resistance.

Collins (2000) argues that intersectional work must involve changing consciousness and producing social change. She argues that foregrounding new ways of knowing, new knowledges that centre the realities of marginalised groups, will advance these aims. This latter point is also applicable to decolonial work. At the same time, Lugones (2010) argues that feminist decolonial work involves an attempt to not only study the coloniality of gender, which includes an analysis of racialisation, colonisation, capitalist exploitation and gendered oppression, but also involves attempts to overcome it. In this regard, phase three of the analysis asks the analyst to look to the ways in which women's narratives articulate resistance (Table 23.3).

Table 23.3. Phase Three: Useful Analytic Questions.

- What possibilities do the narratives create for social identity, group belonging and collective action (Riessman, 2008)
- In which ways do the narratives 'speak back' to hegemonic, 'othering' discourses about the particular group of participants being researched?
- Where are the possibilities for collective identification and resistance? What feminist narratives can be identified?

Talking against dominance

Although the women interviewed take up the discursive position of 'victim' in their narratives about violence, they also counteract this positioning in a number of ways. A feminist decolonial, intersectional narrative analysis is decidedly political and allows us to point to the ways in which consciousness about oppression might be shifted to produce social change. Along these lines it is important to consider how women's narratives 'produce' resistance. Firstly, they point to gendered inequalities and oppression as the root of men's violence against them. In some women's narratives this manifests as a deep scepticism, hatred or distrust of men more generally. The various violent partners, clients, or police are described fundamentally as men, who benefit from the control and violence against them, as women. Secondly, women in this research also make links with other women, especially poor, black women engaged in sex work. They recognise their collective struggles as women in sex work, poor black women on the margins attempting to survive in increasingly constraining contexts that make it difficult to do so. Thirdly, the women counteract the 'spoiled identity' constructed for sex workers by positioning themselves as fully responsible citizens who take active ownership of their health. The concern with health appears most visibly in women's narrations about condom use to prevent contracting HIV.

> *In this sex business you must go for your tests regularly, 'cause if the condom breaks, I run immediately ... I run to the first hospital that I can get hold of. I (just) run into the emergency room and I tell the doctor, 'Doctor the condom (broke). Maybe I'm gonna get AIDS. Please, just do something please.' Yeah I go straight. I don't go and sit and keep myself shy like a virgin.* (Elmarie)

Above Elmarie draws on the same discourse of femininity (the Madonna/Whore dichotomoy, Macdonald, 1995) that positions sex workers as shameful to situate herself as fully responsible and active by seeking medical assistance when a condom breaks during sexual intercourse. By not being 'shy like a virgin', and incidentally not taking up the gendered role that society and others construct for her, she is able to play this active role.

Other ways in which women similarly construct health and well-being within the context of sex work is through talk about working at their own pace, reducing

the number of clients they have – a discourse that simultaneously works to counteract the idea of sex work as a 'dirty job'.

> *... But I don't overwork myself. I maybe go out three times a week and I'll maybe do two clients a night. So I will make sure that it's not like a constant uhm... not that it's always busy either. But if it's a busy night, I'll do two clients and I'll finish and I'll go home. It's more than enough for me, 'cause I do take care of myself, my body, my emotions, my physical and mental state.* (Gail)

The narratives of self-care and 'being healthy' are constructed in opposition to mainstream discourses of ill health and lack of care. The ability to 'take care' of the self, particularly through the reduction of the number of clients one accommodates is of course dependent on one's socioeconomic circumstances and the obvious issue of financial need.

Finally, women speak against dominance by narrating about survival against all odds and telling stories about motherhood, another readily available discourse for women (Phoenix, 2000). Sex work is work in a context of deepening gender inequities, of the feminisation of poverty and the normalisation of the neoliberal economy. Without exception, women constructed narratives of entry into sex work as a consequence of socioeconomic struggles or dire financial need – often in response to crisis situations. Sex work is described as a choice within constraining contexts in which the choices available to some women are limited. Through their stories of sex work therefore, women take up a form of active socioeconomic citizenship in the face of a broader context in which their choices for survival are limited. This active citizenship is most pertinently foregrounded when women discuss their responsibilities as mothers.

> *So just focused on my kids. So I get the second pregnancy of him. The last pregnancy I thought no, I don't care what my family is going to think or say about me. I'm just going to focus on being a healthy mother, being a stable mother, just trying to get my kids out of this life, being abused, so I split my kids.* (Daphne)

Daphne's construction of herself as a 'healthy mother' involves making difficult decisions to protect her children from her partner's abuse. She sent her children to live with different family members but she continues to support them through her earnings from sex work.

> *How am I supposed to get an income? My children need to go to school. I have four mouths to feed. And I can't go begging and asking every day. How many meals can you give me when I need three meals a day? So I'm not asking like, 'Oh, give me stuff'. I can work it myself. And if I can sell sex and make money, I think you should respect my choices and a human being because at least I'm trying to make a better life for my children.* (Faith)

Within hegemonic notions of femininity, the identity of sex worker is constructed as shameful for women; however, many participants counter this by positioning themselves within a discourse of good motherhood, one that positions them as proud and restores a 'respectable' version of femininity, as illustrated by both Daphne and Faith above. Positioning themselves as active socioeconomic citizens within the context of responsible mothering works to counteract the widespread stigma surrounding sex work and presents a source of pride for women, some who revealed that they had been able to afford to sustain their children through their school careers and some into university. Because the notion of being a 'good woman', like an 'ideal victim', is coloured by race and class, it is not readily available to all women. These women on the margins therefore (re)construct ideas about what it means to be a good woman, drawing upon their identities as mothers and as breadwinners, taking care of their families. Aulette-Root-Toyer, Boonzaier, and Aulette (2014) found a similar discourse on 'good womanhood' in the narratives of HIV-positive women in South Africa. These women drew on notions of conventional femininity to foreground the care work they do for men, children and others in their lives to counteract the stigma associated with living with HIV. These women, like other socially marginalised women (Fleetwood, 2014), draw on a 'safe' discourse of respectable personhood, womanhood in particular that involves notions of care for others, being good mothers and homemakers.

In this penultimate 'phase' of the analysis we attempted to look closely at the broader significance of women's narratives on their lives as sex workers. Given women's marginalised positions on the social hierarchy and the associated stigmas imposed on them, we asked specifically how women's narratives reflected and resisted these. In recognition that resistance may not always be easily articulated in language, especially for the oppressed, we attended very closely to women's narrations and attempted an understanding of the significance thereof given their various social identities, contexts and locations – both discursive and material. This process involved further reading and listening to women's narrations beyond an attempt to find themes. It also involved 'staying close' to women's narrations and deep reflection on the significance thereof.

Phase Four: Crafting a Plurivocal Narrative

For now, the story I want to craft about the experiences of the women involved in this research ends here. I have not yet written the larger story I would like to tell about the lives and experiences of the women, although this work has appeared in different formats elsewhere (see Bartlett, 2014; Huysamen, 2011; Kessi, Kaminer, Boonzaier, & Learmonth, 2018). In writing up my feminist decolonial, intersectional narrative analysis based on the research with women sex workers I, like you, will have to ask myself the following questions:

- What are your research questions? How will your analysis address these?
- What narrative will you craft about the lives and realities of those you engaged with? Why are you electing to tell this particular story? Are there any other stories to tell?

- Who are you writing this narrative for?
- Where are you in this narrative? How has your own identity, history, politics and context been implicated, not only in the interviews but throughout the research and especially in the crafting of the narrative?
- What commitments have you made to your participants and your politics? How will you keep these? Who will benefit from this research?

In our crafting of the narrative, we must attempt to honestly address these questions and hold in the balance our commitment telling the story demanded of us (through our respective disciplinary, work and other demands) and using the research to advance social justice for those with whom we work. The writing will attempt to weave together multiple, situated stories bringing together our reading of participants' worlds, our analyses of existing scholarship in the field as well as bringing in our awareness and attention to the sociopolitical and historical contexts in which we work.

Conclusion

In this chapter I articulated a decolonial, intersectional narrative analysis, working with the data generated in interviews with women sex workers on their experiences of violence from men, sometimes clients, sometimes intimate partners. The chapter outlines how a decolonial, intersectional narrative analysis may be accomplished, taking Riessman's articulation of a thematic narrative analysis as the starting point and building thereon to analyse the intersections of power at material, representational and structural levels. The chapter illustrates the importance of a decolonial, intersectional feminist lens for clarifying the complexity of women sex workers' experiences of gendered violence and for understanding the multiple forms of material, symbolic and institutionalised subordination they experience in increasingly unequal and oppressive contexts.

Sex work has long been an arena that is highly stigmatised, suffering from moral scrutiny and conservative attitudes around sex, although this paradoxically occurs as public and other contexts have become increasingly sexualised. For a large proportion of women who make up the sex work industry, this stigma is intersected with their identities as women who are also poor and black. Women who work on the streets selling sex may arguably be of the most marginalised in South Africa (with South Africa being just one geographical example but by far not the only one). In this regard it is important that we understand these women's encounters with 'crime' and deviance from a decolonial, intersectional perspective – ensuring that our methodologies, approaches to asking questions and ways of working with them don't further contribute to their stigmatisation and marginalisation. In this regard the decolonial, intersectional narrative approach offered in this chapter is important.

In the research, women revealed the powerful ways in which their lives were shaped by the stigma attached to sex work and how this shaped their experiences of violence with partners, family and others they encountered. Their narratives also revealed how the stigma of sex work intersected with misogyny and

manifested as contempt for them as women, women who were also poor and black. Women's narrative choices to foreground the intersectional ways in which their lives are shaped by the symbolic landscape (Phoenix, 2000) shaped by stigma offers a powerful example of the effects of harmful discourse on embodied material realities – illustrating for listeners and readers what it means to live and survive as 'stigmatised women'. In addition, women's personal stories called attention to the ways in which gendered (and other forms of) structural oppressions manifested in their everyday experiences, especially experiences of violence. In so doing, the approach allowed for the linking of women's personal lives and experiences to symbolic, structural, historical and political systems that fundamentally impact them.

A decolonial, intersectional narrative perspective to criminology is important for offering space for women themselves to challenge the ways in which they are positioned as poor black women on the margins of society. This 'space' may include physical and discursive space offered in the context of the interview (Hydén, 2008), but importantly as illustrated in this chapter, it also refers to 'analytical space' and the ways in which we read and make meaning of women's narratives told to us in the context of our research. This chapter shows that this approach to narrative criminology offers a space for women to speak back to and to disrupt harmful circulating scripts about them and their lives – through countering victim-blaming discourses; through graphic illustration of the harms of stigma; through providing a challenge to the normalisation of neoliberal, individualised discourses about success and failure; and through speaking themselves into discourses of respectable personhood.

The analytical space offered through the method, however, cannot be taken for granted. It involves thinking through and listening beyond the words to the ways in which it might be possible for oppressed people to engage in what Wade (1997) has called, small acts of living and resistance, what McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2011) have called tightrope talk and what I have referred to as 'talking against dominance' (Boonzaier, 2014b). It involves listening for the ways in which the subaltern does indeed speak (Spivak, 1988). Listening beyond the words offers the opportunity for dignity in the stories we tell about our participants and guards against the recolonising potential still prevalent in much academic research endeavours.

Overall, this chapter fundamentally illuminates the potential of narrative criminological research to advance a decolonial, intersectional feminist agenda that might repoliticise research in the interests of social justice and contribute to broader aims of rehumanising those who are dehumanised and decolonising criminological research.

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