

Becoming a transgender/intersex internal migrant in Urban Gauteng: Challenges and Experiences of Transition while Seeking Access to Medical Services

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Die Masterarbeit „Becoming a transgender/intersex internal migrant in Urban Gauteng: Challenges and Experiences of Transition while Seeking Access to Medical Services“ von Nadzeya Husakouskaya wurde von der Fakultät III (Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaften) ausgezeichnet.

Migration studies in South Africa are shaped by policy development and policy responses to cross-border migration in its different forms and its implications (with focus on HIV/AIDS responses and urbanization) (Landau, 2008, 2007, 2011; Misago, 2009, 2011; Polzer and Segatti, 2011; Amit, 2012, 2011a, 2010; Vearey et al, 2009, 2010, 2011). Gender within South African migration research is represented predominantly as a woman-oriented approach (Jinnah, 2012; Vearey et al, 2011a, 2011b; Nunez et al, 2011) with a gradually emerging area of research on migrant sex workers (Richter and Chakvinga, 2012; Oliveira, 2011; Richter et al, 2010). In the current South African context, migration studies fail to include non-heteronormative sexualities and in particular lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) related issues on the agenda. At the same time, neither LGBT(I)¹

activism nor sexuality studies in South Africa address migration as a crucial variable (Husakouskaya, 2012; Tamale, 2011). Health needs within LGBT(I) activism, sexuality studies, migration studies and policy responses in South Africa are largely shaped by HIV/AIDS concerns which overshadow other health-related issues and narrows 'health needs' to the anxiety about HIV/AIDS pandemic. Transgender and intersex concerns remain deeply marginalized within broader discourses on migration and sexuality and within debates around LGBTI issues: they receive little attention if any. This Master thesis has been built on the internship that I undertook from 1st of August

bisexual, transgender and intersex. I put "I" for "intersex" in brackets to highlight persistent absence of intersex people among target groups of the South African LGBT(I) organizations. More detailed analysis of the South African LGBT(I) movement can be found in my internship report (Husakouskaya, 2012).

¹ LGBT(I) acronym stands for lesbian, gay,

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till 1st of December 2012 at the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of Witwatersrand. The internship was located within the project “Urban health, HIV and migration in Southern Africa: developing pro-poor policy responses to urban vulnerabilities” run by Dr. Joanna Vearey and aimed to explore the intersection between sexuality and migration (with focus on LGBTI migrants) at national, local and community levels in South African cities taking Johannesburg as an example (Husakouskaya, 2012).

This Master research explores the challenges experienced by transgender and intersex internal migrants in urban Gauteng (Johannesburg and Pretoria) and their experiences of ‘transition’ (both gendered and spatial) while seeking access to medical services. The research also explores how challenges in accessing medical services by transgender and intersex internal migrants in urban Gauteng play out in the intersection of their gender/sexual and migrant subjectivities, and how, in turn, a set of particular challenges and experiences are shaped by understanding of their ‘health needs’ and fixed ‘identities’ as transgender/intersex individuals and as migrants constructed in their own narratives and in discourses and practices of policymakers, LGBT(I) NGOs and medical service providers. Special attention on the research receive (self) reflection on metho-

dological challenges and role of the researcher in the research.

Therefore, the key research question is to investigate how the constructed understandings of the ‘health needs’ and fixed ‘identities’ of transgender and intersex internal migrants in urban Gauteng contribute to their experiences of ‘transition’, and challenges in accessing medical services. The key objectives aim (1) to unpack the challenges experienced by transgender and intersex internal migrants in urban Gauteng in accessing medical services; (2) to discuss how particular challenges in the experiences of ‘transition’ (both gendered and spatial) emerge at the intersection of their gender/sexual and migrant identities/subjectivities; (3) to highlight how the ‘health needs’ and fixed ‘identities’ of transgender and intersex internal migrants are constructed in discourses and practices of policymakers, LGBT(I) activists and medical service providers and in their own narratives; and (4) to reflect on methodological challenges of the research and role of the researcher.

The research focuses on black transgender and intersex internal migrants accessing medical services in the public health sector in urban Gauteng (Johannesburg and Pretoria). Access to medical services in the research implies, primarily, hormone therapy and gender reassignment surgery,

but other related health services like mental health care and access to medical tests are also addressed.

Field data analysis suggests that challenges and experiences of transgender and intersex internal migrants in urban Gauteng are tightly linked and intertwined: experiences contribute to challenges; challenges (re)form and (re)structure experiences. In the analysis of the field data, I give a space for voices of the transgender and intersex individuals who shared their stories with me.

Key findings reflect on (1) alternatives to fixed understandings of (trans)gender and (inter)sexuality within binary logic and hetero- as well as homo-normativity; (2) the possibility to look at health needs of transgender and intersexual internal movers in South Africa beyond HIV/AIDS discourse (e.g. mental and reproductive health); (3) the constructed and complex nature of internal mobility in the case of transgender and intersex individuals (fluid self-identification; travelling pattern); (4) challenges and experiences of transition while accessing medical service in urban Gauteng (issues around availability, accessibility, affordability of medical services, discrimination within health sector, differences in experiences/challenges between transgender and intersex individuals interlinked with differences in mobility patterns); and (5) the need to address methodological

and epistemological challenges (methodological thinking (Loseke, 2013), choice of methods, sensitivity of terminology, advocacy vs. post-structuralist approach).

In sum, the research reveals the constructed and complex nature of the 'health needs', fixed 'identities' and diverse internal mobility patterns of transgender and intersex individuals in the current South African contexts of migration studies, LGBTI activism and medical discourse. In the light of critical investigation of those constructed meanings/identities the research unpacks experiences and challenges of transgender and intersex internal migrants in urban Gauteng in accessing medical services. Moreover, it shows that critical analysis of methodology and epistemologies which underpin the research have to be an indispensable part of the investigation, advocacy efforts and reflexive political practices.

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