

The Interviewee that Creates a Storm in a Teacup: That's Just How It is

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Editorial

Episode One

The study was designed to capture sex workers' realities, including information on their lifestyles, beliefs, values, and culture. Ethnographic research can be portrayed as detailing an insider's outlook from the horse's mouth. This approach entails abandoning one's position and adopting another. Doro Manekia of the Piazza area displays an array of butchers' shops famous for their uniquely Ethiopian dish of tire siga-raw meat. The competition is expressed by their cajoling gesture to the passerby and showing off the quality of layers of chopped raw meat from beef, lamb, and goat's meat served on plates. The famous shanty corner of Doro Manekia is known not only for its delicious meat but also for its sexual feat. A few meters down the butchers' shops and curbing to the left is a colony of impoverished residential bed-sitters rented by female sex workers. While the sex workers' single rooms are open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, visits to them thrive more at night than day, and at weekends than weekdays.

One Saturday night, I appeared at a place called Doro Manekia in Addis Ababa to interview for my research work with one of the sex workers. When I arrived at her residential enclave, it was about 10:30 p.m. In the meantime, I approached a rather young sex worker who stood at the door of her babysitter. To

get her consent, I showed her my identification card and told her that I was a teacher at Addis Ababa University. For her time during the interview, I told her that I would pay her 50 Ethiopian birr for a mobile card. Then after I got her consent, she told me that I could interview her as long as a client did not show up. I agreed to the condition and after about 10 minutes interview with her, she started telling me about an amazing encounter she had with a client.

Unfortunately, in the middle of our conversation, an intoxicated man zoomed into the room and leaped into the bed. I then quickly got out of the room. Outside on the street, I shared with the two friends who accompanied me the incident I encountered. The story she told me was quite unheard of and because of this, I preferred to stay till the man vacated her brothel. After 20 minutes or so, her client got done and left the room. Then I went back to the sex worker and interviewed her for another 15 minutes. Thereafter, I finished my interview and left here brothel.

Episode Two

In another encounter, on one of my data collection nights, I went to a shanty corner in the Merkato area called Kuchura Sefer to make an interview with one of the workers. Just turning left into the curve, I saw my wristwatch reading 11:15 p.m. I realized the time was invited for the interview.

From experience, I have recognized that after 11:00 p.m. the serenity of the night becomes a motive to interview compared with the daytime in Kuchra Sefer. Then my friends and I went a little deeper into the alley that divides the row

of sex workers' flimsy bed-sitters. Most of the rooms were closed and the sex-workers in waiting were, saving for a few, virtually absent.

I asked one of the sex workers on the street why the rooms were closed. She replied that a particular time was when they hung around looking for men and they closed their doors as no one was in. So, I had to get deeper into the sex workers' residential-cum-business neighbourhood zigzagging into the alley. At last one of my friends spotted a woman standing at her half-open door. I then made my way to the spotted woman leaving my friends in the dark and promising them that I would be back in a moment. Arriving at her door, I found a thin and seemingly unwell young woman yet with a disarming smile. Looking at me, she gave me a pleasant welcome with a wide grin and almost reflexively grabbed my hand and walked me into her room. All of a sudden, she asked me to lie down on the bed but I told her politely that I was

here for an interview. That rather shocked her very much. It was a bombshell for the expectation and she shouted at me with a hell lot of profanity and threatened to throw at me a hardwood lump charcoal oven.

But struggling to be as polite as I could, I begged her to calm down and apologized for wasting her time. I showed her my identification card and told her that I was a teacher at Addis Ababa University. At this juncture, the woman cooled down but with her discontent still deep-rooted. However, I told her that the interview would take not more than 10 minutes and added that it was to be used for a gender study to understand the realities surrounding female sex workers. I promised I would give her 50 Ethiopian birr for a mobile cad for her time. Telling her that the information she would provide was to be kept anonymous, I asked for her consent for the interview. She agreed with a smile and we got into the interview.