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BEYOND THE STREET:

GANG ENTRY AND EXIT ON THE CAPE FLATS

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Development Studies

2018

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ABSTRACT

This project analysed the life histories of ex-members of Cape Flats gangs, focusing on their entry into, and exit from, gang life. Their participation in gangsterism shows us how gang members embody violent street culture and reproduce a street habitus generated by the poverty, racism, and segregation that structures the lives of many Capetonians. But in leaving gangs, they also show how aspects of Bourdieusian criminology (street capital, street field, and street habitus) can be applied to move beyond typical readings of street-based social reproduction. To start, research indicates that violent virtuosos can commit extraordinary acts of aggression to master street life, destabilizing expectations, and logic by which the streets are made and remade. Further, those that can make it out of gangs are able to break down the embodied street dispositions, and build up new, non-street dispositions to transition away from the structuring power of the gang. Gang members exited street life for a normal life, which was created through compositions of non-street repertoires relating to family, work, and faith. The repertoires of normal life offered research participants important forms of social and cultural capital, amidst the disadvantage and disempowerment of township life. Research reorients street culture from an emphasis on social reproduction towards a fuller account of social transformation. Like this, the agent-structure relationship present in Bourdieusian social theory (which has so far favoured the objectifying force of structure) can be revised to restore personal agency. The struggles of the subjects of this research project are compelling examples of how the objective limitations of street life in Cape Town can be overcome.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere appreciation goes out to all that directly and indirectly participated in and supported this project. To begin with, thank you to Rotary International for so generously funding part of my studies. I also cannot but express endless gratitude to my family, without whose love I would not have pressed on. Each of you, in your unique way, was a source of strength, comfort, and motivation. This success is yours, as much as it is mine. But, above all, I would like to acknowledge those people who were selflessly and unabashedly willing to give voice to the tragedy and bravery that define life for many young men and women in Cape Town. The stories you shared stay with me as a testament to the beauty of the human spirit. I hope that I did those narratives justice, and in retelling them am able to – in some small way – contribute to our common aspiration of making a secure and fulfilling life a right enjoyed by each and every person living on the Cape Flats.

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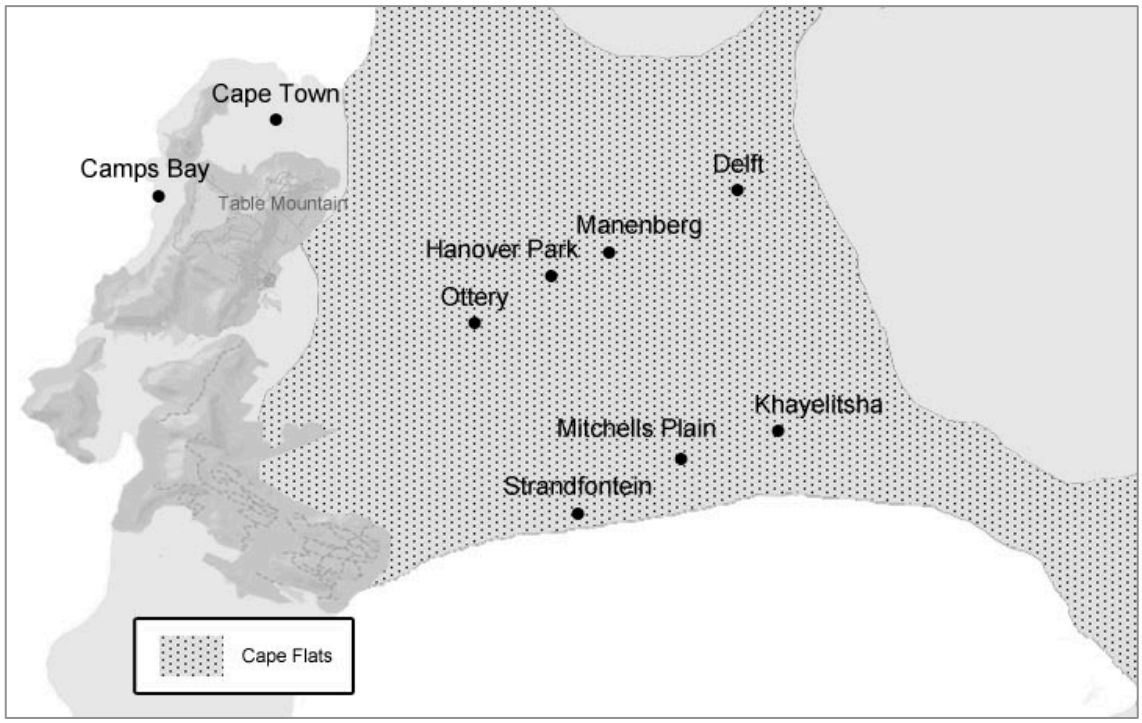
Figure 1: Map of Cape Town



1 INTRODUCTION

Violence is one of South Africa's defining features (UNODC 2013). The annual ranking done by Mexican think tank *Seguridad, Justicia y Paz* of the world's cities by homicide rates reveals that Cape Town was not only the deadliest city in South Africa, but was actually the deadliest city outside of Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2017, Cape Town was the fifteenth most deadly city in the world (CCSPJP 2017). Trends in the murder rates among South Africa's largest cities shows that murder in Cape Town has been rising solidly since the turn of the decade and is now much higher than in other major urban centres (UCT Centre of Criminology 2015). One would never guess at the violent nature of the city by visiting its central City Bowl. With its iconic panoramas of Table Mountain, it is glossy and serene. In addition to being one of the world's murder capitals, Cape Town is also consistently ranked as one of the world's top tourist destinations (Rane 2012; *The New York Times* 2014; *The Guardian* 2014). Such are the contradictions of the so-called Mother City. No more than twenty minutes away from renowned Table Mountain, fierce battles play out between rival gangs on the Cape Flats: the sprawling, sandy periphery of the urban core, where the city's townships and most of its coloured and African population are located. Communities situated on 'the Flats' are the other side of Cape Town (see Figure 1, above, for a map of the greater Cape Town area). Almost all of the communities of the Cape Flats remain, to one degree or another, affected by social problems such as drug abuse, unemployment, and violence. Indeed, Cape Town's violence is concentrated on its urban periphery. In 2014/15, ten police precincts – all located in the Cape Flats – accounted for approximately 55 per cent of the murders, but only in about 31 per cent of the population (UCT Centre of Criminology 2015).

Although gangs and violence are by no means interchangeable[1], it is not an exaggeration to say that gang violence is a serious problem in certain parts of Cape Town. Statistics on gang violence suggest that it is a key contributing force to Cape Town's high murder rates. It was reported in 2014 that 18 per cent of murders in the Western Cape were gang-related (Fisher 2014). Further, between 1 April 2012 and 21 March 2013, 309 people were murdered in gang-related incidents with gang activity accounting for 998 attempted murders – a third of all attempted murders in the province at that time (Dolley 2014).

[1] UCT Centre of Criminology (2015) found that police stations serving communities that have a high street gang presence (for example, Philippi East and Philippi police precincts) have very high murder rates; some areas with high murder rates (like Nyanga, Mfuleni, Gugulethu, Khayelitsha, and Langa) are not controlled by gangs.

According to these statistics, one person is killed nearly every day as a result of gang violence in the Western Cape. Gang violence may also be rising in prominence nationally, increasing the necessity for research on the subject. National analysis of murder dockets have suggested that an increasing proportion of murders is being linked to gang-related factors (UCT Centre of Criminology 2015). Numerous gang wars were fought intermittently in various parts of the Cape Flats throughout this study. From a personal perspective, taking stock of who was injured and killed during any given week became normal. Research focused on Cape Flats youth describes a group particularly vulnerable to participation in violent gang activities and to violent victimisation by gangs (Morojele et al. 2013, 78; Reddy et al. 2013, 107-9; Kaminer et al. 2013, 114-19).

The result is that gangs and violence loom ominously in public and political discourse in Cape Town. In particular, the news media routinely reminds the city's approximately four million residents about the abundant violence that has come to characterise their society. Media headlines depict the Cape Flats as dangerous ganglands that are either at war or infested with gangs (see for example: Maseko 2014; Swingler and Teagle 2016; ENCA 2013; SABC 2016; Dano,2016; Peterson 2015). Cape Town made international headlines in 2013 after a surge in gang violence prompted education officials in neighbouring Manenberg – facetiously referred to by some as "Murderberg" – to close sixteen schools for two days. In reaction, the provincial Premier of the Western Cape asked the national government to send in the army to help overwhelmed police (*BBC News* 2013). The army was actually deployed in 2015 "to crack down on rampant gang violence in the area as part of Operation Fiela" (Legg 2015).

As will be shown throughout this paper, gangs on the Cape Flats are undoubtedly violent. Indeed, international research points to the violence amplifying effects of gang participation. Those persons that join gangs are put at higher risk of violent offending (Thornberry et al. 2003, 145-46) and violent victimisation (Peterson et al. 2004, 806-808). Gang violence deeply affects the everyday lives of the millions of people living outside of the fortified borders of Cape Town's Central Business District (CBD), which is by far where the vast majority of the city's population reside. Given the destructive consequences of gang violence, it is important to understand its different causes. There is considerable scholarship detailing the social ecology from which violence emerges (CDC 2015). The scarcity of material and social resources facing many poor urban populations organises peoples' behaviours and guides their attempts towards personal and social empowerment; within this particular set of economic and social constraints, gangs and violence become organisational and behavioural strategies for attaining individual and collective aspirations

(J. D. Vigil 1988a; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991; E. Anderson 2000; Fraser 2015). Within gangs there are also criminogenic forces that characterise the collective and normative features of gang delinquency – retaliation, drug sales, status, and respect, and inter- and intra-group conflict – that apply to individuals with gang membership in a way that increases the likelihood of violent offending (Sweeten et al. 2013, 475). Thornberry et al. (2003) state that "[u]pon joining a gang… the normative structure and group processes of the gang are likely to bring about high rates of delinquency... Gang membership is thus viewed as a major cause of deviant behaviour" (2003, 98).

Like other deviant (or delinquent) behaviours, gang violence reflects the gang's organisational and normative structure. Such violence, especially retaliatory violence, is an outgrowth of a collective process that reflects the important symbolic purposes that violence serves within the gang, a value that members must be ready to support as a response to violence – real or perceived – against the group (Decker 1996, 257). In addition, having social and emotional ties to a gang has been found to predict violent victimisation, even amongst those that have de-identified with the gang (Pyrooz et al. 2014, 505-7). Gang violence is also said to occur in a social context that supports violent behaviour in South Africa (see: Cock 2005; Altbeker 2007; CSVR 2007; Leoschut and Bonora 2007; Burton, Leoschut and Bonora 2009; Ward, van der Merwe and Dawes 2012; Collins 2013; and Pinnock 2016). There are also those personalised idiosyncrasies that may make people act violently, through some combination of human agency (Sampson and Laub 2005), biology and genetics (DiLalla and Gottesman 1991), as well as those factors that blur the lines between nature, nurture, and personal choice (Combs-Orme 2013). Unravelling the multifarious strands of causality that connect gangs, delinquent behaviours such as violence, and the multitude of individual and societal risk factors, is a difficult endeavour.

1.1 Street Culture in Cape Town

An important idea that has emerged from the study of marginal populations such as gangs, which concurrently considers both the personal and the social in understanding violent behaviours, is street culture. Scholars conceptualise street culture in different ways, though most suggest that it should be viewed as social values and norms that have "evolved into a 'code of the street', amounting to a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behaviour, particularly violence" (E. Anderson 2000, 33). Gaining respect through belligerent act is at the heart of establishing oneself, especially in impoverished urban spaces (Anderson 1998; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991 2011; Vigil 1988).

The best analysis of this kind of street culture is connected to the social and cultural relations of society, averting an overly materialist standpoint and showing how inequities related to race, space, and gender can be reproduced in the streets. Street culture arises in an attempt to oppose oppression, but actually ends up brutally imitating and exacerbating the most maleficent aspects of economic competition and racial and spatial segregation, internalised as violence, misogyny, self-loathing, and substance abuse. Bourgois (2002) has defined it as "the complex and conflictual web of beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values, and ideologies that have emerged in opposition to… mainstream society" (2002, 8). Within street culture, conflict attaches itself to people and groups, as both an outcome and organising principle of society; gangsters clash with each other in order to not be the one that is maimed or abandoned. The violent practices they embody can be used as a form of "street capital" (Sandberg 2008, 157) that expresses an individual's mastery of criminal activity, and which can offer that criminal mastermind its own advantages, rewards, and sanctions. The usage of "capital" as an analytical tool extends Bourdieu's (1986) descriptions of upper classes' control of dominant cultural knowledge and practices. Whereas violence has little cultural value in dominant society – or in the so-called mainstream – it becomes an embodied form of cultural competency in a street field that is made up of its own "set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 16).

The rich and connected have favoured access to the dominant forms of cultural, material, and educational capital that yield social and material benefits in the open market of practices. Those left out of the mainstream must look instead to street capital, which in the long-term becomes personified through "street habitus" (Sandberg and Pedersen 2011, 34) as hypersensitive and aggressive dispositions that further tie the poor and excluded to street culture and push them farther outside of dominant society. These street-generated personas are delivered into a repressive world through the habitus: the internalised, practical expression of limits and opportunities in the street field, which is entrenched through experience and socialisation. Street scholars have used the tripartite application of street capital, street field and street habitus to advance an area of criminology inspired by Bourdieu (Ilan 2012, 18). Bourdieusian criminology effectively addresses some of the tensions in gang research around the relationships found between the personal and structural drivers of gangs and gang violence, as well as other issues related to the meeting of localised and globalised forces creating "homologies of habitus" (Fraser 2015, 44) amongst geographically distant communities.

Considerable scholarship already exists linking experiences with gangs and violence in Cape Town's townships with those found in ghettos, favelas, and slums around the world. While only some of this scholarship is explicitly Bourdieusian in nature, all of it in some way indicates how gangs, gang violence and other related street acts are produced in opposition to oppression. It has been shown, for instance, how applying the speech, fashions, and actions incumbent to gang life makes available sociocultural and material resources to those that are in other ways excluded from mainstream society. For instance, participation in gangs can also be a source of dignity for youth in marginalised communities (Jensen 2008), as well as sources of protection (Jensen 2006). Prison gangs can offer a sense of identity, order, and respect, analogous to that offered by street gangs (Steinberg 2004b). Ganging practices from inside and outside of prison have been embodied as cultural repertoires and cultural capital, that is leveraged by township residents to gain respect, security, and wealth (Lindegaard and Zimmermann 2017; Lindegaard 2018). As in other emerging cities with high levels of poverty, inequality, and insecurity, such street adaptations have evolved to counter an exclusionary experiment in neoliberal development and governance that marginalises the many, in favour of the few (Samara 2011). Gangs have filled voids left unfilled by formal economic and governance structures (Samara 2011).

These researchers, and others, have already contributed a great deal by demonstrating how gangs and violence are individual and collective responses to, and reproductions of, various forms of socioeconomic and sociocultural exclusion. This paper hopes to show, however, that this assemblage of scholarship can gain from further emphasis on the agent-driven behaviours that deviate from conventional readings of the street culture, which studies of Bourdieusian studies of gangs have tended to ignore. In fact, Bourdieu himself has been criticised, albeit unfairly, for a partiality towards the structuring aspects of social and cultural life, leaving little space for the creative and restructuring role of behaviour (Evens 1999, 13; Giroux 2001, 95-96). Showing why and how processes of domination structure large segments of society is important in intellectualising the sociocultural spaces that gangs come to inhabit. However, intervening in these spaces means also recognising how such spaces can be restructured. People's individual responses to domination hint at additional levels of complexity. In particular, it is important to account for those experiences that depart from 'the streets'. To accomplish this, this study applied the lens developed through Bourdieusian criminology to the nexus between gangs, violence, and society, in the context of gang participation and exit on the Cape Flats. It set out to answer the question: how can individuals moving in and out of gangs

and violence reproduce and contest fields of power by acquiring, applying, and innovating the sociocultural resources available to them? To find an answer, the study concentrated on the life of more than twenty ex-gang-members from two main perspectives: street life and normal life. At the end, these perspectives were personalised through the life narrative of one particular ex-gangster. Deeply personalised research can, to some extent, overcome the tendency for anthropological research to misrepresent social life, by imposing theories and rules that ignore how individuals deliberately and actively struggle to transgress, subvert, and remake the structuring forces present in their lives. It is, after all, true that “social fields are fields of forces, but also fields of struggles" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 101).

To contextualise the struggle of the streets, this study first examined how performance of street culture – through membership in gangs and participation in violence – can counter the marginalisation that many men and women experience living on Cape Town’s urban periphery. Not only does this set up the rest of the paper, it also (more systematically and specifically than has been done previously) elucidates how living the street life on the Cape Flats is bound up in a “cultural repertoire” (Hannerz 1969, 186) that defines street speech, street dress, and street action. Particular attention will be paid to the way that violent repertoires are assembled and utilised in acting street. The following analysis also appreciates that, without accounting for agentic applications and innovations of street culture, people can easily be reproduced as automatised reproducers of street culture. But it will be shown that, in living the street life, some street “virtuosos” (Bourdieu 1977, 107) can use extraordinary acts of force and uncanny criminal cunning to bend the values, norms, and rules of the street to their ambitions. Thus, they are able to exert dominion over the street field.

And some can break from the streets altogether, by abandoning gangs and violence and countering seemingly irrefutable street laws that stipulate that gang membership is a sentence to prison or death. Paying tribute to such stories of struggle – and overcoming – can offer insights into the processes by which men and women in Cape Town’s townships are able to successfully become ex-gangsters in conditions of structural deprivation, which may be particularly acute in cities of the South. It is here that this paper’s main theoretical and empirical interest is, in seeking out those sociocultural moves that are in play to help people transition out of gangs. In particular, it examines the decompositioning (or breaking down) of the internalised lived experiences in the streets, and contemporaneous dispositioning (or building up) of the domestic, workplace, and religious repertoires that research participants came to define as required for living the “normal life”. Examining

gang exit can help to move Bourdieusian criminological scholarship – and applications of the concepts of capital, field, and habitus – beyond reductive reproductions of street culture. In this paper, I hope to further demonstrate the potency that such a theoretical framework has for appreciating practical action and the historical and social process of embodied dispositions, through the complex relationship between socioeconomic constraints and human agency in gang entry and exit in the townships.

This research can also have value for the overall gang literature, which tends to study gang disengagement and violence desistence in high-income settings, especially in the United States (Decker and Lauritsen 2002; Pyrooz et al. 2013; Sweeten et al. 2013; Thornberry et al. 2003). There are prominent differences between the American ghetto and the South African townships, where structural oppression is much more severe. Examining the leaving of gangs and violence in urban environments marked by extreme levels of material and social marginalisation, which characterises the Cape Flats, is necessary. The life history method, especially, disengagement and desistance research can capture rich descriptions of how people navigate poverty and exclusion to go from gang members to developing new and durable non-street dispositions as ex-gangsters.

Gang members, both current and ‘ex’, tell us important things about social life. They demonstrate, for instance, personalised and collectivised processes via which socioeconomic and sociocultural resources emerge and are distributed. Material scarcity, racism and personal insecurity create social compositions that (over time) come to be embodied as street dispositions through a fight for income, personhood, and safety. Although participation in street practices predisposes people to street-oriented behaviours, predisposition is not predestination. Street practices do break down with time and effort. As people organise themselves and their actions away from gangs and towards family, community, jobs, and religion, new ways of being are habituated. These people need greater assistance through the determined actions of policy makers and development practitioners. The right initiative might aid the hardened gangster leave gangs. Their success is the success of others, who are similarly engaged in the struggle of restructuring their lives, and life in general, away from the many marginalisations afflicting them and their neighbours. It is in this endeavour, and in the continuing spirit of the Rainbow Nation, that this research project hopes to contribute knowledge to the continuing process of securing life, livelihoods, and citizenship for people living on the Cape Flats and, indeed, for all people struggling with violent crime in South Africa.

1.2 Defining the Gang

The point that a group becomes a gang is the subject of extensive deliberation among gang researchers (Ball and Curry 1995, 225-27). This creates of a field of scholarship about a type of collectivity for which there is no international consensus about how to define that collectivity. Certain scholars argue against a specialised differentiation of gangs, arguing that the same organisational properties and normative group processes found in gangs are also present in other groups (Sherif and Sherif 1964, 58). The amount of energy put into considering, categorising, and researching gangs suggests that "street gangs are something special, something qualitatively different from other groups and from other categories of law breakers'' (Klein 1995, 197). As a result, a good number of scholars contend that gangs are actually unique peer groups (Klein and Maxson 1989; Moore 1991). One of the earliest attempts to create a typology for gangs began with Thrasher's (1927, 5872) work, which found more than 1 300 gangs in Chicago alone, categorising these as diffuse, solidified, conventionalised, criminal, and secret society groups. Although undoubtedly significant, his early efforts are indicative of the problems associated with a dynamic and localised concept like gangs. Klein and Maxson (2006, 168), for instance, pointed out that many of the groups Thrasher observed would not meet the criteria to be considered a street gang today. Since Thrasher, others have tried to determine whether gangs behave in predictable ways that can be captured and categorised. Most gang taxonomies have been either behavioural or structural (Klein and Maxson 2006, 167-68); in some instances, gang researchers have considered a combination of these two forms of typologies simultaneously (Spindler and Bouchard 2011)[2].

Gang groups' relationship to deviant and delinquent acts, and in particular to the use of violence, was a key preoccupation of gang researchers. In an influential early behavioural definition of gangs, (Cohen and Short 1958, 25) specified that in conflict-oriented subcultures, which conflict-oriented gangs are a part of, status is largely determined by toughness and readiness to engage in physical violence, even if violent conflict occupies but a small portion of the gang's time. Also writing from a behavioural perspective, Cloward and Ohlin (1960, 24) demonstrated that gangs exhibit a conflict pattern of unpredictable and destructive assaults, which are used to secure opportunity and pleasure in underprivileged areas. This typology was based on social and cultural descriptions of

[2] Behavioural descriptions create categories of gangs based on members' involvement in specific types of behaviours; structural descriptions categorise instead according to specific organisational characteristics.

lower-class urban life, and was in different ways adopted by other scholars as a conceptual package. For instance, Spergel (1964) also identified a conflict subculture that uses gang fighting as “a response to social conditions that provide young people with extremely limited access to either legitimate and illegitimate opportunities for reaching conventional success goals” (1964, xvi).

Even here, however, conflict behaviours are not seen as inherent to gangs. Groupings of gangs are made according to a differentiated fourfold disaggregation of gangs as subcultures (that also includes racket, theft, and retreatist gangs) and which illustrates how violent and non-violent behaviour can vary across gang groupings. Gang behaviour also varies in time: Taylor’s (1990, 104) analysis of the development of gangs in Detroit indicated an evolution from scavenger gangs, to territorial gangs and to corporate gangs, along an arc of collective character which changes patterns of crime and violence. From these examples, we get a sense of the behavioural inconsistencies gangs exhibit across space and time, that violent behaviours are important to knowing how gangs behave and are subsequently organised, and that violence also is expressed variably in gang life.

Perhaps the most influential attempt to link gangs to violence was made by Yablonsky (1970, 241), who posited that sociopathic personality characteristics are determinate among youth participating in the violent gang category. In this characterisation, there appears something of the inherently violent predator. Yet, despite his preoccupation with psychotic violence, even Yablonsky (1959) allows that participation in violent activities varies in its nature and motivation across individuals, as well as over time for the same individuals (Yablonsky 1959, 114); again, violence is a present – even central – characteristic of the gang, but not one that itself is unassailable. Indeed, a large quantitative behavioural examination into the types of gangs found in the United States provides more evidence for the complex relationship between the social organisation of gangs and the perpetration of violence by their members, speaking simultaneously to the centrality and peripherality of the violent act in gang activity (Fagan 1989, 645-48). Findings indicated that violent crime occurs among a majority of the gangs, and in higher rates than among non-gang youth, but also that a small percentage of gang members are frequently violent, especially in comparison to their more prevalent participation in non-violent crime. Though structural definitions of gangs have predictably less to say about the behavioural aspects of gangs, these types of gang taxonomies often consider gang violence to some extent. For example, Klein and Maxson (2006, 172) showed that structural definitions suggested the same complex central-peripheral relationship between gang organisation and violent activities as behavioural definitions. Also, the New York City

Youth Board (1960, 22-27) identified gangs as one of four peer group types, finding that the defining characteristic of gangs was protection or aggression directed at other groups, with organisational groupings hardening vertically and horizontally in times of conflict. Sánchez-Jankowski (1991, 87-88) also noted the organisationally and socially constitutive functions of violent conflict: intra-gang frustration may be redirected at another gang for an internal problem, or a contending gang may simply be attacked to re-establish group cohesion, without *a priori* reasoning.

It can be said that both behavioural and structural takes on gangs have more or less accepted and incorporated some connection to violent street acts in explaining gang life, though determining the specific role of violence in gangs is still a hotly contested issue. According to Klein and Maxson (2006), focusing "on the most feared of the behavioural patterns has set a pattern against which almost all future behavioural gang research has had to do battle" (2006, 169). Indeed, what is (and what is not) considered violent behaviour is itself subjective[3]. How violence is defined can vary significantly, from those limited to a focus on acts of physical force, to those that also consider non-physical violations (Bufacchi 2005, 194)[4]. More expansive views of violent behaviour connect physical violence with other forms: political, structural, and symbolic oppression along a "continuum of violence" (Bourgois 2011a, 426). This perspective serves to flatten the hierarchy of violence, allowing the various permutations of violent and violation to permeate and interact with one another. Stretching how we see violence challenges the notion that killing, robbery or rape is reducible to a discrete criminal action or personality that can be removed from the societal structures it is embedded in, produced by, and itself reproduces. Seeing gang violence more broadly, then, also demands a more thorough diagnostic of the machinations that underpin gang violence and the relationship gangs and violence have to society, economy, state, etc.

Without question, the terms 'gangs' and 'violence' frequently appear together in social scientific literature, as they do in popular media and in many government documents. That researchers and politicians stress the violent nature of gangsterism is perhaps understandable. After all, violence has powerful implications for its perpetrators and its

[3] Definitions of violence vary across countries (Hauck and Peterke 2010, 413-16), as well as within them (National Gang Center 2016 and "18 United States Code § 521 – Criminal Street Gangs" 2016).

[4] Perhaps the most popular definition of violence relates the use of power to the use of physical force, affirming that violence also includes "neglect or acts of omission, in addition to the more obvious violent acts of commission" (Krug et al. 2002, 5). It has been widely cited by South African scholars (Ward 2007, 10; van der Merwe et al. 2012, 55; Sauls 2014, 7).

victims. Scrambling to ignore ‘what’ gangs are risks ignoring an arguably more important issue: ‘why’ gangs are. If you are looking to decrease violent behaviour, then the point of interest should become which forms of social organisation are determined by particular social experiences, and how to change these. Looking at gangs this way, violent acts become the products of social organisation, rather than the organisation itself. Focusing only on the violent nature of gangs reflects too narrow a view of what they are all about. According to Klein and Maxson (2006, 86-87), this preoccupation with violence promotes an inaccurate stereotype of gang members as specialised, violent offenders. In the media, especially, gangs are usually equated with violence, implying that violent behaviours are intrinsic to their organisational make-up. Conflating gangs with violence makes it more difficult to understand ways that these social groups come together and act, ignoring potentially significant analytical connections to the societies they belong to. The following section introduces the problems in defining gangs in the socioeconomic context of Cape Town and discusses a definitional model for moving forward in this paper.

1.2.1 Problematising Gangs in Cape Town

The presence of gangs varies throughout Cape Town, as do their size and power. The names of gangs such as the Americans, Hard Livings, Mongrels, Junky Funky Kids, Laughing Boys and the Ghetto Kids are marked across neighbourhoods and bodies throughout the Cape Flats. The 26s, 27s, and 28s – the three prison gangs – are probably as infamous outside of prison as they are inside. Estimates indicate as many as 130 gangs operating on the Cape Flats, with up to 100 000 members (Standing 2006, 2). Officially, police recognise twelve street gangs, tens of smaller gangs and three prison gangs (Swingler 2014). Street gangs exist largely in coloured communities and may be made up of tens of members or of a few hundred, with a turf of a single tenant building to most of an entire community (Roloff 2014, 9-11). Above these gangs are the street syndicates, or super-gangs, which have arisen as highly organised and franchised versions of gangs (Goga 2014b, 2). Towards the bottom end of Cape Town’s underworld pecking order is a network of smaller, turf-based gangs that may start out independently, though usually forced into an alliance with street gangs (Pinnock 2016a, 119). Many of these exist in Cape Town’s black townships (Sefali 2014b). Perhaps the most notorious of South African gangs are those that exist in prison. Known as “the number”, prison gangs have permeated all corners of the penal system of South Africa and have a deep history and mythology (Human Rights Watch 1994, 51). Until recently, prison and street gangs have remained separate, with the number cutting across street allegiances. But incarceration and prison gang membership now serve as a way of bolstering street credibility and

facilitating networks that transcend gang animosities outside of prison (Pinnock 2016a, 115-17).

In terms of gang violence, planned shooting is the most popularised form of violent behaviour, though fieldwork indicated that a gang 'hit' is just one of many types of gang-related violent crime. Some gang members prefer to operate individually, targeting opposing gang members opportunistically. There are also instances of gang-related violence that occur in contravention of gang rules or the directives of the gang leaders. So, violence among Cape Flats gangs has considerable fluidity and dynamism. It is almost more accurate to speak about violent processes, rather than events: for instance, a gang shooting may be related to previous threats, confrontations, attacks, and so on. This makes physical violence difficult to isolate, as behaviour possesses fluid boundaries through which actions merge into one another. Further, there are those violent acts that are indirectly gang-related. Acts of violent "delinquency", such as armed robberies and muggings, might be distinguishable from violent "warfare" (Rodgers 2009, 275). Although delinquent violence is ostensibly individualised and economically motivated, it can also have important connections to the gang: 'smoking the money out' with other gang members can elevate the violent benefactors within the gang. Finally, while other forms of violence (such as sexual violence) are less visible because street battles and armed robberies attract considerable media and community attention, these also intertwine forcefully with gang activities as weapons in gang initiations, reprisals, or intimidations (Gadeeja 2016).

Heedless, however, of many idiosyncrasies Cape Flats gangs show in their organisation and activities, South Africa's approach to the gang issue has tended towards internationalised standards based largely on American experiences. To wit, South African definitions of gangs rely on interpretations of organised crime founded on the hierarchal mafia-model typology that informed the *Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO)* in the United States (Goga 2014a, 68). The *South African Prevention of Organised Crime Act (POCA)*, of 1998, still defines a gang as on-going organisations or groups of at least three people that participate in criminal offences, can be identified by a name, sign, or symbol, and whose members engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal activity (Carlie 2002). This globalised model of addressing gangs has been further institutionalised through the transfer of American technologies, coded through hegemonic doublespeak as "international best practice" (Samara 2011, 131). Among the criticisms of *POCA* is that American experiences with gangs are an imprudent and unsuitable way of

orienting policy and programming on South African gangs[5]. Criminal networks in Southern Africa may, for example, be more flexible and fluid than those in the United States (Goga and Goredema 2014, 3). Further, though gangs in South African are subsumed under the heading of organised crime, they tend to be less formally structured than organised crime syndicates. Gangs are often territorially based, their criminal activities tend to be carried out by youth and involve less sophistication than those of organised crime (Gastrow 1998). Also problematic is that South African definitions of gangs fall into a "parasitic" conceptualisation of gang groups, which are negatively correlate with, are separated from, and are antagonistic to, a so-called "good society" (Standing 2006, 65-66). Seen in this way, gangs are the cause of social problems rather than an embedded feature of society. South Africa also looks back to *POCA* to inform its concept of gang violence (Republic of South Africa 1998, Chapter 8, ss 81). In doing so, it situates violent behaviour in the criminalised entity that is the South African gang, and also outside of society. Although legal notions of gangs are infused with an implied objectivity, they are, as anything, social constructions; categories of people can be created through the "interactions between classifications of people and the people classified" (Hacking 2004, 279). Linking people to gangs can be stigmatising, actually strengthening and criminalising non-criminal connections between gangs and individuals who may have only associative or superficial linkages to them (Katz 1997, 78-81).

The policy thinking that accompanies the parasitic model is driven by a belief that gang violence can be eradicated if gang structures are successfully removed through the implementation of criminal justice measures, such as "hard policing" (Samara 2011, 124-37). South African authorities see the criminalisation of membership in gangs as a strong legal tool to prosecute gang members for their collective crimes, and as a major deterrent for young people who consider joining gangs in the first place (Standing 2005, 6). As an extension of this model, in the 1990s and 2000s, the political establishment and police created several heavily resourced and highly publicised special policing operations aimed specifically at gang violence, in an attempt to focus attention on the problem of gangs and to communicate concerns about crime (Jensen 2010, 84). The effectiveness of such operations is debatable (Mail and Guardian 1999). Those that question the parasitic perspective suggest that its proponents give little regard to the environment in which gangs exist, seeing them instead as "social viruses" (Standing 2006, xi), the cure to which

[5] Indeed, a comparison of street gangs and organised criminal groups in the United States indicates that the characteristics of organised crime may not apply well to gang groups, which tend to be more disorganised than criminal syndicates (Decker 2012, 34-37).

requires only that sufficient resources and will are injected into the ailing parts of the social body. Placing gangs as a central concern of politics may be counter-productive, exactly because it situates social problems solely with the gangs, while the design of appropriate anti-gang policies would require disaggregation of social problems (Jensen 2006, 284). A sceptic could interpret this approach as attributing crime, violence, and other social problems to gangs as a convenient excuse for a political class that has failed to deliver the promises of a new South Africa. Combatting gangs means politicians can avoid confronting a post-apartheid reality that brought about changes for a relatively small group of non-whites, while leaving the majority in poverty and marginalisation.

The pathologisation of gangs in South Africa fits a general international shift amongst public officials and the media to a definition that emphasises the criminal and violent elements of gang memberships (Klein and Maxson 2006, 8-9). It is a more conservative social philosophy bent on enhancing the ability of law enforcement to suppress gangs and incarcerate gang members. The particular logic of mainstream American gang research has become globalised as a result of sustained efforts to unify how gangs are understood, so as to facilitate comparability between jurisdictions in managing this increasingly global phenomenon (Fraser 2015, 28). Standardisation, however, fails to reflect the considerable variation in the forms and activities of gangs, as well as the unique environmental conditions influencing the type of gangs seen in any given area (Decker et al. 1998, 401-23). Seen by themselves, behavioural and structural processes around gang organisation offer only partial explanations of gang life[6]. Further, the differing urban social ecologies gangs are found in also plays a defining role in constructing different origins and meanings for street acts found across social geographies (Fagan 1989, 634). International uses of the term ‘gang’ range from local schoolyard groups or corner boys, to neighbourhood street gangs, criminal syndicates, and narco-cartels (S. Harding and Palasinski 2016, xix). There are critical differences in characters, typologies, and interpretations of gangs that occur in dissimilar settings, and over time (Hagedorn 2008, 33-49). Even in the supposedly singular context of contemporary Cape Town there are street gangs, prison gangs and smaller crews and cliques. As Kinnes (2000) pointed out in his study of the evolution of Cape gangs, standardised definitions discount variations in age, the contextualised nature

[6] Even those scholars developing structural typologies acknowledge the connection between gang type and gang environment. Klein and Maxson (2006, 209-27), for example, devote a whole chapter to discussing how community features influence the individual experiences and group dynamics of gang membership and the nature of gang activity.

and activities of gangs, their level of organisation sophistication and the factors that bring them about.

In line with a reimagining of gang definitions that heeds the criticisms aimed at Americentric parasitic models that criminalise gang members, scholars like Fraser (2015, 8) call for a shift away from defining gangs via database to street-based understandings of gangs. This type of conceptual manoeuvre reconnects gang and society. It views the presence and persistence of gangs on the Cape Flats as an adaptation to scarce resources and opportunities (Sánchez-Jankowski 1991, 23-24). Otherwise, it becomes very easy to scapegoat gangs for many of the challenges Cape Town, and South Africa, face, viewing them in the context of alleged deviance ascribed by others, treating gangs as moral problems of criminality that are to be solved through harsher policing and tougher prison sentences (Samara 2005, 222-23). As with earlier moral problems, today's social dilemmas are defined in terms of race and deviance. Racialised scaremongering stretches back into South Africa's past, in the imagery of the *swart gevaar*[7] (Durrheim 2005, 450) and of a coloured criminality once embodied on the Cape Flats as the *skollie*[8] (Jensen 2008, 2). As a holdover of that epoch's racialised fictions, the coloured bogeyman remains in the public consciousness largely as the menacing Cape Flats gangster.

Evoking the gangster as the rationale for urban insecurity is a rhetorical flourish that defines and positions the problems of crime and violence in the Cape Flats, rather than in relationship to the Mother City's uneven socioeconomic divisions. Using street-based gang definitions reminds researchers and their readers of the creative ways of organising and behaving that street culture embodies. This reinforces the notion that, as 'social actors', "gang members are real people… reacting, sometimes destructively, to conditions of poverty, racism, and oppression" (Hagedorn 2008, xxx-xxxi). Street-based accounts of gangs can also shift gang research away from global tendencies to adopt rigid reductive strategies imported from the United States, towards a more flexible account that is attentive to the complex, and sometimes contradictory, contexts of contemporary gang geographies (Fraser 2015, 28-29). Such approaches to studying gangs can help resolve some of the many tensions still inherent to gang research. In particular, ideas of street capital, street habitus, and street field can effectively be used to conceptualise gangs in a way that captures the tension between structure and agency in studies of street culture (Sandberg 2008, 158). The concept of street habitus combines the structuring aspects of

[7] Black peril

[8] A scoundrel, colloquial

street life with individual agency to strategically choose to participate in gangs and violence in order to earn street capital, in a street field where certain types of groups and character traits are practically more successful. While the first half of the agent-structure relationship helps to explain why social actors may choose to join gangs or to act violently, it also suggests that other choices are possible. In fact, most people stay out of gangs and violence. In balancing agency and structure, street culture scholarship also tries to give a fair account of, and be accountable for, street behaviours that can be highly predatory and deadly violent.

Rather than being overwhelmed by a focus on predation and violence (as positivist parasitic approaches to conceptualising Cape Town's gang life), in seeking further clarity on the subject this project embraces the ambiguous and amorphous relationship between Cape gangs and broader Capetonian society. The key tension in this relationship is that neither the characteristics of gangs nor society are exclusive, singular, or static. Gangs are violent, though most gang members engage in many other non-violent and non-delinquent forms of behaviour[9]. Just as with acts performed as part of street brotherhoods, being a father, son or brother are expressive acts, with significance in the particular sociocultural spaces of township life; the same is true of being a good worker, or a good Christian, Muslim, etc. Just as gang members are not totally excluded from accessing the cultural capital of normal life, non-members too have access to the forms of capital that street culture provides. People who may be considered gangsters within criminal justice institutions, for example, might only associate with gangs to access drugs and social standing, or simply be copying fashion, speech, and ways of acting that are admired in their area (Standing 2006, 104).

This tells us is that gangs are not just sets of objective behavioural or organisational characteristics; they are also subjective expressions of broader social relationships that encompass, and are meaningfully present in, all other aspects of social life and social space in Cape Town. Thus, relativity is fundamental to understanding gangs. This is, in fact, true of any social phenomenon being studied. As Bourdieu (1977) argues, in adopting

[9] Although violence, drinking, drug use, and drug trafficking are common, for the most part, gang members 'hang out' and are involved in other normal adolescent social activities (OJJDP 1998). Gangs are diverse, complex, and shifting organisations whose members participate variably in criminality behaviour (Thornberry et al. 2003, 43-44). As an aside, it should also be mentioned that gang groups might also be presented alongside social groupings – such as fraternities – that may have many of the same characteristics as gangs, including a tendency towards violence, but escape the gang label (Sanday 2007, 39-43).

a purely 'objective' position, a social scientist makes certain that the social realities under study will be misinterpreted and misrepresented:

> [T]he anthropologist is condemned to adopt unwittingly for his own use the representation of action which is forced on agents or groups when they lack practical mastery of a highly valued competence and have to provide themselves with an explicit and at least semi-formalised substitute for it in the form of a *repertoire of rules* [emphasis in original]. (1977, 2)

Bearing this warning in mind, and accounting for the aforementioned admonishments of a parasitic objectification of gangs, this project views gangs through subjectively defined association with an objectifiable set of street practices related to Cape Flats gangs. In this way, participation in 'gangsterism' is more accurately described as a form of socially constituted "gang culture", or "way of life" (Standing 2005, 10)[10], rather than the list of characteristics and actions attributed through *POCA* (Republic of South Africa 1998, Chapter Four, ss 11).

It means that this study of Cape gangs contradicts official definitions that many politicians and police are likely to adhere to. Imagining gangs differently allows for an expansive and localised sense of street life, which are likely to be more congruent with how it is actually expressed in different Cape Flats neighbourhoods. In particular, applying this view through highly contextualised qualitative research practices can shed light on subjective experiences with gangsterism that do not stigmatise, and can account for those aspects of gang life that deviate from what we normally see as gangs. Using this approach, this paper considers the innovative ways that people position themselves in relationship to gangs throughout their lives. For example, it shows how street virtuosos that may not officially belong to a street gang can use extraordinary street-based acts and associations to street and prison gangs to control the streets. It also demonstrates that engaging in and disengaging from gangs are fluid processes. Through their differential positioning with gangs, the meanings that people attribute to gangs and gang practices shift; as part of the broader shift, they are moving between relationships with street life, on one hand, and mainstream society on the other. There is much to be gained from categorising the gang phenomenon in a way that obligates a consideration of the complex interrelationship between individuals, the dynamics of collective action, and their connections to larger societal forces. Defining gangs thus requires that we weave a narrative of not just 'what'

[10] According to Standing (2006), gangsterism typically pitches loyalty to a gang against loyalty to institutions of mainstream society by extolling violence, profligacy, and hedonistic behaviour.

and ‘how’ gangs are across the world, but also ‘why’ they are in the societies that we find them. The story of Cape Flats gangs should be spun locally, from the unique social fabric of Cape Town and not according to a line of thinking imposed from outside. Doing so can add insight into the story being told about Cape Flats gangs.

It can be said that gangs and stories go hand-in-hand. Politicians and police favour tales of organised crime, the parasitic elements of which dovetail with media accounts of gang members as sociopathic murderers. Gang members themselves perpetuate similarly macabre stories that either end in ghetto fame and fast money, or in prison or death. What gangs and violence mean to people in the Mother City differs and changes, as compellingly indicated by the personal narratives of the gang-leavers included in this research project. For these young people, the gang was just part of their life narrative – a chapter of their life that they managed to move beyond. The differing perspectives on gangs in Cape Town are a partial version of a more complex reality. One job that a social scientist can play is to try to make sense of these many competing narratives in a way that is representative of the large whole of how social life is organised in the city. Further investigating the charged and changing relationship between gangs, street based-practises, and society can tell us something about the ways that sociocultural resources are structured and restructured in time. Conducting our investigations in an expansive way can also enlarge the range of life possibilities available to Cape Flats residents, and contribute to a more hopeful future for all people living on the Cape Town’s urban periphery.

1.3 The Historicisation of Gang Violence

Before going forward, it is important to go back a bit and speak about how Cape gangsterism came to be. The origin story of Cape Town’s gangs begins at the end of the Second World War (Pinnock, n.d.:6). Gangs were part of many communities at this time, but they were largely contained through social controls (Samara 2011, 94). Starting in the 1960s, over tens of thousands of many coloured and black people were violently removed from central Cape Town and scattered across the city’s fringes (Jaki 2016). The ‘forced removals’ ripped apart the communities’ social fabric, resulting in psychological stresses, upset marital relationships, and gang growth (Pinnock, n.d., 13)[11]. Social disorganisation of this sort can impede the ability of a neighbourhood to express and enforce non-criminal

[11] Forced removals also increased the polarisation of wealth and power that already existed prior to apartheid’s project of social engineering, giving many white property owners access to prime real estate for a fraction of its real cost (Trotter 2009, 51).

values (Sampson et al. 1997, 922-23). Lower social controls can leave people more vulnerable to criminal influence, as the gang fulfills the needs that the larger social structures no longer can (Spergel 1990, 232-35). Lambrechts (2012, 792) argues that the destruction of the fabric of extended families in the 1960s and 1970s encouraged the formation and activities of loosely structured gangs, which provided a sense of belonging and empowerment, and a way to pass the time for youth that were otherwise socially and financially adrift. The link between disorganisation and gang formation is no doubt more complicated than typically considered[12], but it is reasonable to assume that the detrimental social effects of the loss of community associated with coloured people's experience during apartheid contributed to gang formation in the decades that followed. Despite its comparatively late start, gang culture is more prevalent on the Cape Flats than elsewhere in contemporary South Africa (Kynoch 2008, 635). It is mainly Cape coloured gangs, not the black African gangs of Cape Town, that have become institutionalised (Hagedorn 2008, 12). It is street gangs in coloured neighbourhoods dominate news headlines, and it is this gang grouping that will be the primary focus of this paper. Although, where doing so adds analytical value, references, and comparisons to other types of gangs will be made – prison gangs, as well as crews and cliques in both coloured and black communities.

Before saying anything else about coloured gangs, a few words are necessary to describe the place of Cape Town's coloured people. Much like the spatial engineering that contributed to the creation of the Cape Flats, South Africa's coloured population is itself the product of a very deliberate project of sociocultural engineering and the racial classification schemes connected to white rule in South Africa. It should not be surprising, then, that the history and usage of terms like 'coloured' and 'coloured people' are controversial. The terms are associated with violent European conquest and problematically unify into a single racial grouping a phenotypically-varied social group of highly diverse geographical and cultural origins (Adhikari 1992, 95). Although South Africa's coloured population historically had a 'higher status' than the black population (Brown 2000, 199), coloured people have also always occupied an ambiguous and marginal status. Original definitions of coloured people were noteworthy for being non-defining. The following quote from Marike de Klerk, former First Lady of South Africa, is indicative of coloureds' racial marginality. She described coloured people as "a negative group… a no-person. They are the leftovers. They are the people that were left after the nations were sorted out. They are the rest" (Adhikari 2005, 13).

[12] Even gang affiliations are uprooted and fragmented during social disorganisation, and gangs only reappear once neighbourhoods have redeveloped personal and territorial familiarity (Glaser 2000, 47-77).

As social groups of different origins were coerced into a singular racial category, the unique heritage of each group was essentially erased, disempowering these groups culturally. As one commentator put it: "if you want to know why we coloureds have gangs…the problem is that we coloureds wish we were white…we don't know who we are or where we came from" (Standing 2005, 14). The middleness of the coloured people is compounded by their lack of political and economic clout (Adhikari 2005a, 2), to reinforce the idea that coloured people were not of the same standing as other groups. So, coloured people must find ways to generate meaningful social participation. Joining gangs is one way of achieving this. While the coloured label carries considerable historical baggage, it is clear that colouredness is still a lived reality for those Capetonians that identify as such[13]. The vast majority of coloured people still self-identify with this racial and cultural category, with many Cape Town neighbourhoods taking on mono-racial classifications, both by outsiders and people living there. For this reason, this paper uses the term, while acknowledging its controversial legacy and the diversity of people that fall into this racial grouping.

1.3.1 Revolutionaries or Criminals?

Before considering the nature and motivations of Cape gangs in the present, it makes sense to look some more at their history – in particular, their emergence at the end of apartheid. Coloured gangs in the Cape gained considerable influence during the state of emergency, after street committees and other community structures were attacked and weakened by security forces (Schärf 1990, 252). There are suggestions that the state actively collaborated with Cape Town's coloured gangs as part of the counterinsurgency war during the political instability of the 1970s and 1980s (Khoisan 2001, 58). For instance, the Americans gang collaborated with South African intelligence services and even assassinated apartheid activists (Hagedorn 2008, 17).

On the other hand, coloured gangs are also said to have aided the struggle, by looting white-owned trucks as part of the wider consumer boycotts and the project of making townships ungovernable, as called for by the African National Congress (ANC). As indicated by one key informant: "[t]hey would fight the police. Or if the Coke trucks came from outside, they would tip it over and steal from it" (Hanover Park male, 35 years). There may have existed a sense in which gangsters adopted something of a 'Robin Hood' role, in this sense, playing out a very basic form of social protest (Hobsbawm 1971, 13).

[13] Official statistics still differentiate between blacks, coloureds, whites, and Asians (Statistics South Africa 2012, 17).

Gangsters, furthermore, are said to have protected their communities by patrolling the boundary between the townships and white society, arguably minimizing the apartheid state's everyday intervention (Rodgers and Jensen 2008, 227).

The revolutionary associations of gangsterism were most apparent behind bars. South Africa's prison gangs were created and sustained in direct opposition to white domination (van Blerk 2017, 26). The number was founded on the myth of a century-old anti-colonial, anti-apartheid force that claimed to advocate for prisoners' rights and better prison conditions (Steinberg 2004a). In reality, prison gangsters identified with revolutionary struggle, while conspiring to harm it; the liberation movement represented an actual embodiment of the very ideal that would always remain elusive to the gangs: transcending the reactionary cycles of violence between prison gangsters and their custodians (Kriegler 19995).

Neither politics nor predation describes the connection coloured gangs had to revolution. In some ways, the contradictory relationship gangs had with the struggle was instructive of their relationship with the neighbourhoods they inhabit today. Although many of their activities have destructive results, gangs often still have community support. Where the South African state is unable and unwilling to provide many of life's necessities, gangs often step in to offer income, community governance, and acts of philanthropy (Standing 2003, 6-12). As Salo noted, mistrust of corrupt and ineffective policing meant that residents of coloured townships "preferred the gang's kangaroo style court to a formal investigation by the police" (2005). As a result, gangsters have been able to produce thousands of supporters for a march on parliament in Cape Town in response to vigilante tactics of People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) (Braid 1997). Reports of attempted collusion between Cape Flats gangsters and those in the highest levels of the state suggest that the latter believe gangs exert considerable social influence in their communities (Reporters 2015).

In addition, interviews reveal that most gangs continue to have some rules about not targeting their communities. The notion of community protection, referred to as *die agterbuurde*[14]*,* was developed in opposition to dominant white society, and it still conjures a code of community protection. The purity of this idealised code should not be overstated. To begin with, a 'not in your own backyard' approach to crime and violence is an expedient means of not souring relations between the gangs and their neighbours. Also, the extent to which the code is followed is debatable. During fieldwork, the same individuals that

[14] Backstreets; see Jensen (2006, 276-278) for a broader discussion.

boasted about “protecting the court” during gang shootouts, also bragged about encouraging youth of 10-12 years old to steal the purses and bags of neighbours walking to work. When it came to it, *die agterbuurde* can be cheaply traded for money and for drugs, though the stigma associated with robbing one’s neighbours was still managed by delegating criminal activity to youngsters who aspired to join the gang and were eager to impress the older members.

Today’s gangs are no longer mostly characterised by youngsters who hang around the streets of local communities to defend the community, but have largely given way to criminality (Kinnes 2000). Interviews with older ex-gangsters indicate that, going back to the 1980s, community protection gave way to a more rapacious form of violence oriented around the drug trade that often hurt neighbours, friends, and even family; said one: “gangs would never bring the fighting into the streets – to the community. They would meet on a field and fight with *pangas*[15] and these big metal dustbin covers” (Hanover Park male, 35 years)[16]. As in other parts of the world, gang warfare has disappeared and gang-related violence has increased in connection with a growing turf-based drug economy (Rodgers 2006, 278). Gangs took advantage of the introduction of cocaine as a profitable commodity in the early 1970s and added this new, lucrative product to marijuana and Mandrax sales (Hagedorn 2008, 17). It is here that the threads that connected gangs to revolution begin to fray. During apartheid the gang contributed to efforts to make townships and prisons ungovernable – its members participating in the collective struggle to reshape apartheid’s twisted social order. When fighting other communities, the gang directed its violence, not vertically towards a callous and malicious state, but horizontally, at other community groups sharing their same predicament. By protecting their neighbourhoods from outside gangs or criminal elements, they were at least guarding the shared interests of those around them. Citizenship was pursued not through reconstituting racialised socioeconomic hierarchies, but by solidifying placement in it. Their struggle was still to defend the little security and meagre resources available for themselves and for their neighbours. Over the years, however, the connection to community struggle has worn thinner. The gangster’s link to the common good is tenuous to the point that it barely exists. The overriding reality is that gangsters steal from those around them, peddle drugs to their neighbours, and

[15] A machete-like cutting tool.

[16] Gang warfare used to be largely conducted with fists, blunt objects, and bladed weapons, and was often ritualised, with gang fights occurring at pre-arranged meeting points and times.

shoot innocent bystanders and each other. All the while, their internecine gang wars wreak havoc on economic and social life in the communities they claim to protect.

Does this mean that the gangster can be written off as completely anti-social, or as some amoral aberration? It is tempting to think so. Life histories have plot lines that are written with little mercy, putting their protagonists in incredibly difficult circumstances. As the next section shows, apartheid has officially ended, though the remnants of racist exclusion remain very much in place. Violent acts committed by gangs may not be revolutionary, yet they are part of a struggle. Violence in many townships is a response to structural and symbolic oppression. Unlike a gunshot in the night, unrelenting assaults of "structural violence" (Farmer et al. 2006, e449) kills slowly through the social arrangements that produce alienation, exclusion, and marginalisation. Because structural violence is part of the political-economic way that a society is organised, it is not easily observed (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009, 16). , Therefore, instead of seeing violence as being connected to economic exploitation, inadequate governance, and lack of security, the dominated themselves participate in a form of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 167-170) perpetuated against them. Unable to blame outside forces, they become complicit in compounding their own marginalisation, believing in their own cultural and racial inferiority (Bourgois 2011b, 307). The depressing irony is that as gang fights have been drawn even closer to home – targeting neighbours instead of protecting neighbourhoods – gangs are even further reinforcing a societal order that marginalises and oppresses them and those around them.

1.3.2 Apartheid by another Name

Officially, apartheid's segregationist policies were dismantled in 1994 (Seekings 2010, 4). Unofficially, the legacy of exclusion unquestionably persists throughout South Africa (Russell 2011, 45-46). The result is that Cape Town and the other major South African cities are some of the most unequal cities in the world (Mammon 2016, 142). For many Capetonians, racialised class segregation still defines much of their lives. Indeed, the Mother City has been described as the most unequal of South Africa's big urban centres (McDonald 1994). Not surprisingly, poverty is highly racialised. The proportion of poor coloured and black households are 2.5 and 4.5 times higher, respectively, than white ones (City of Cape Town 2014, 74). The provision of public services is also closely related to class and race. Haferburg states that the:

> Racialised geographies of post-apartheid Cape Town reproduce the spatial logic of capital under apartheid despite the dramatic political reforms of the

> 1990s. The black and coloured working classes remain trapped in places of extreme poverty located at a considerable distance from middle-class (mostly white) centres of commerce, tourism, and consumption. (2003, 95)

The general strategy for governing space and development focuses on fortifying capital assets in the largely white and affluent downtown centre and securing the city's brand as a tourist destination *par excellence* (Samara 2011, 26). Coloureds and blacks are pushed to Cape Town's periphery, where government continues to struggle to meet a housing, infrastructure and services backlog (Ehebrecht 2015, 94). Further, many of the poorest areas, with the highest crime rates, are those with the lowest levels of policing (O'Regan and Pikoli 2014, 449). Access to justice is also unequal. It is much easier, for example, for a middle-class victim of crime to get to a police station to report their case to the police, insist it be investigated and follow up to ensure that the case receives attention (Gould 2014).

We can see that the power of gangs in Cape Town is a failure of post-apartheid urban renewal (Samara 2011, 172). Thus, Cape Flats gangs are neither abnormal, nor inevitable but are a reaction to the structural inequities of neo-apartheid[17]. Around the world, gangs have consistently emerged from the social margins of low-income urban geographies. In his research, for example, Sánchez-Jankowski (2003) describes the relationship between society, gang violence, and gang formation and deprivation in the following way: "in essence, 'gang-member violence' is a product of both the structural conditions that permeate the scarcity of resources and the socialised manner that individuals learn to survive in such an environment" (2003, 208). Thus, violence is a powerful resource in certain types of environments, which is embedded in, and reinforced by, the gang organisation. What we have then in Cape Town is a series of developments in the rise of gangs that have embedded them in Cape Flats communities and still sustain them. The so-called 'gang problem' is in fact part of a bigger problem associated with the living legacy of the apartheid system itself, whereby intense – and even violent – social competition produces a precarious society. In such a context, the gangster takes on powerful social significance and violence becomes a valuable resource in opposing oppression, just like it was during the fight against apartheid.

[17] 'Neo-apartheid' refers to the racialised class marginalisation in contemporary South Africa. This use is distinct from the neo-apartheid initiated under apartheid, which accepted black urbanisation and economic integration in the attempt to maintain white rule (Kuperus 1999, 121).

1.4 Conclusion

This introductory chapter set out the study's research focus and problematised notions of gangs and violence, using these as a jumping off point for contextualising Cape Flats gangs and setting the stage for the remainder of this work. Gang violence today is largely the result of chronic structural and symbolic subjugation that continues in the form of neo-apartheid. It is explainable as the continued opposition to a system of racialised and spatialised socioeconomic marginalisation, which was institutionalised by the apartheid state and is still largely intact more than twenty years after the fall of apartheid.

Moving forward from this initial outline, Chapter Two introduces the theoretical components that will make up the rest of this project. It focuses on those sociocultural resources inspired by Bourdieusian criminological scholarship – street culture, street habitus, street capital, street repertoires and the like – that become adaptive responses to alienation and malaise, which are the sociocultural mechanisms by which gangs and violence are produced and reproduced in peripheral urban environments. This area of scholarship will then be integrated into existing theory and research on gang disengagement and violence desistence, to similarly understand how gang members can successfully transition from the street and street practices in circumstances of material and sociocultural scarcity. The intent is to fuse two understudied aspects of gang research: gang-related applications of the "practical dimension" (King 2000, 418) of Bourdieusian criminology that accounts for ways that street practices can be restructured[18], with understudied literature on disengagement and desistence (Sweeten et al. 2013, 470). This theoretical perspective can hopefully add meaningful insight to policy and practice aimed at gang prevention in Cape Town's townships, as well as interventions in similarly afflicted communities around the world.

Chapter Three summarises the methodological approach used to gather and analyse data. Most importantly, it outlines how life history methods were used to inform research and generate meaningful research findings. The collection of life histories collected through fieldwork offered a multi-perspective look at how people become involved in gangs, how they participated in gangs, and the processes activated as they attempted to exit gangsterism. The last perspective is of some consequence, as it firmly connects theoretical and empirical findings to processes of social change.

[18] The practical dimension of Bourdieusian thought is presented as a complementary – but contrasting – theoretical concept to habitus; the latter is associated with structured sociocultural reproduction, while the former focuses on how innovative application of agentic practices can result in sociocultural transformation.

Chapter Four steps into the Cape Flats to examine the utility of expressions of, and experiences with, violent behaviour in Cape gangs from the perspective of Bourdieusian criminology. Gang members project a model of street practice through which violence can be triggered to access personal security, material opportunities, and social empowerment for those otherwise denied these things. The chapter demonstrates the mechanisms and processes by which violent acts are given value, modelled, and embodied over time as gang practices through street repertoires. It is largely concerned with examining the cultural payoffs associated with gang membership and the ways in which the social utility of street practices helps sustain the shooting and killing in Africa's most violent city. Street virtuosos that are able to produce acts of violence and criminal cunning that are extraordinary, can gain dominion over the streets by upsetting even the shockingly brutal world of Cape gangs, collecting the material and social spoils of their criminal enterprises.

As introduced in Chapter Five, many of those that transition out of gangs do so in favour of living the "normal life". Narratives accounting for those seeking to exit gangs are often ignored in research conducted in the context of the Cape Flats, infusing gangs with an influence that appears absolute. The chapter shows the types of non-street repertoires generally available to ex-gangsters seeking normality: domestic repertoires, professional repertoires and religious repertoires. Successful performance of the repertoires of normal life reinforces transitions for gang-leavers themselves, while also indicating to former gang brothers, rival gangs, and others that might be doubtful. The dispositions of street life are decompositioned through time, while a process of dispositioning evolves through adherence to the regular application of the practices of normal life.

But it is shown in Chapter Six that exiting the streets is not straightforward and can be marked by false starts and unfinished transitions. Poverty, insecurity, and lack of opportunity continue to threaten even those men and women that have managed to leave gangs. Those that persist in moving away from gangs attempt to leverage the few cultural resources at their disposal. The chapter also shows that social capital available in some communities can be mobilised against gangs. The chapter concludes by examining those instances when gang-leavers may be forced to return to violence, showing how gangs and violence are not the same thing, demonstrating how they may be separately structured through exclusion and insecurity.

Chapter Seven explores how street life is made and remade, at the personal level. It depicts the life history of Gavin[19] (Ottery male, 30 years), a long-time member of the

[19] All names have been changed.

Mongrels and 28s. His account makes palpable the processes by which street practices are normalised and entangled in individual experiences over a lifetime. The chapter also looks at Gavin's efforts to reconstruct a life beyond gangsterism. Gavin refuses to be bound by gangs and violence, despite the barriers that impede poor coloured men like him trying to make it in Cape Town and the ever-present dangers that threaten to pull him back into gangs. Gavin's life gives character and voice to what is often characterised as a confluence of risk and resilience. After all, it is only by humanising gangsterism that one can understand how it can be addressed through interventions that are mindful of the real world struggles and successes of those they are meant to benefit.

The concluding chapter of this study synthesises the research findings. It considers how looking at gang entry and gang exit from the perspective of street culture can further inform personal and community life on the Cape Flats. In particular, it looks at how more emphasis on the practical dimensions of entry into, and exit from, street culture can be used to improve gang and violence prevention efforts. It also offers some ideas of about what this could mean for programming and policy in other disadvantaged urban spaces.

2 STREET CULTURE AND BEYOND

This chapter outlines the theoretical frames used throughout this paper, connecting research on street culture to the study of gang disengagement and violence desistance. It firstly considers gang scholarship that shows how street culture connects to societal hierarchies, and how inequities related to class, race, and space are reproduced in the streets. Street culture comes as an oppositional force that is directed against oppression, but in due course mimics and magnifies it. The chapter focuses on that aspect of street scholarship most directly inspired by Bourdieusian criminology, focusing on concepts such as street capital, street field, and street habitus to explain gang practices. Violence is an expression of social life that is reproduced by, and in turn reproduces, the power relationships and practices inherent in a particular society. This is one of the reasons that gangs and gang violence have such staying power in places like the Cape Flats. In connecting the study of street culture with research on gang disengagement and violence desistence, this study hopes to show the ways that people oppression can be opposed outside of established street practices. People can and do leave gangs. Those that do, innovate and model sociocultural resources for others, in a way that dispels the doomed dictums often associated with gang life. Not only do gang-leavers disprove that getting out of gangs is impossible, their experiences have might have important ramifications for interpreting gang entry and gang exit, in a way that is valuable in the world of the applied, as well as in the abstract. The hope is to generate theoretical knowledge that is practically applicable to policy and programming that is used to support anti-gang strategies on the Cape Flats and elsewhere in the world.

2.1 Conceptualising 'The Streets'

Much has been written about gangs in the last century. Much of peoples' fascination is probably due to the association of gangs with sensational acts of violence although, as was observed in the previous chapter, gangs behave and are conceptualised in a multitude of ways. What concerns us most is that branch of gang scholarship that focuses on street culture. The thrust of writing of this type usually tells a story of people adapting to structural domination that is brought about by "the configuration of material resources in a system of allocation that establishes various opportunity parameters for each social class" (Sánchez-Jankowski 2003, 201). Domination is most frequently characterised by a grinding capitalism machinery, particularly in its neoliberal form. Scholarship on street culture has also given considerable attention to other structural determinants, such as persistent segregation, racism and other forms of exclusion and subjugation. Take as an

example research conducted by Vigil (2003), which shows how Chicano youth from Southern California react to the multiple marginalisations of urban poverty, disempowerment, and insecurity. Youth become "*cholo"* by demonstrating badness or toughness through "a mindset of '*locura'* [emphasis added]" (Vigil 2003, 233-236).

Strongly and consistently acting *loco* builds social and personal esteem by demonstrating a crazy state of mind through unpredictable forms of destructive behaviour that conform to a gang ideal of toughness and fearlessness (Vigil 1988, 438-439). Other street scholars have expressed similar findings from a variety of settings. Anderson (1998) shows that black youth in a ghettoised community in Philadelphia turn to a street code that, much like *locura*, governs interpersonal public behaviour through a set of rules for negotiating respect and mitigating danger (E. Anderson 1998, 80–81). Absent the protective institutions of the police and the judicial system, security comes from demonstrations of belligerence aimed at gaining and keeping street credibility. Respect "is fought for and held and challenged as much as honour was in the age of chivalry. Respect becomes critical for staying out of harm's way" (E. Anderson 2000, 66). The defiant individualism associated with street culture comes to be organised through gangs as a collective adaptive response to structural deprivation (Sánchez-Jankowski 1991, 23–28). Although performing and succeeding at violence through expert fighting skills is central to the street cultured reputation, charismatic leadership, coolness, sexual prowess, fashion sense, and knowledge of criminality are all avenues to building street credibility (Horowitz 1983a, 90).

In the streets, life is pursued via behavioural modes adjusted in relation to alienation and social malaise, through a process reminiscent of Merton's (1968) strain theory; long-term behavioural choices in the long-run congealing around norms, values, or attitudes that operate much like subcultural theories of violence (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967). Street culture, however, is about more than economic strain and subcultured aggression. The most compelling portrayals of street culture do not limit themselves to economised views of the world. Rather, they offer a rich analysis of social and cultural relations, showing how inequalities related to class, race, space, and gender are all reproduced in the streets. For instance, in his ethnographic study of the drug economy in East Harlem, Bourgois (2002) recognises with poignant detail how legal, upper-class society's control over mainstream forms of cultural capital compounds the poverty, boredom, and urban decay affecting the already-marginalised. Denied access to dominant society, legal forms of income and other forms of human capital, marginal populations turn to the streets and violence. Whereas a violent assault would be deemed unacceptable in a legitimate office or work floor, its disruptive and subversive power can provide important pay-offs for a crack house lookout

trying to protect his turf (Bourgois 2011b, 303). For those living in oppositional street culture, aggressive behaviour earns respect on the street, as part of a public appearance that includes a person's clothing, demeanour, crowd, reputation, and way of moving that deters hostility against him or her. These forms of street capital are bound up together as the behavioural traits of street culture, which offer the means and agency to opposing exclusion within a street field that exists along the socioeconomic and racial margins of the mainstream (Sandberg 2008, 156). The concept captures the value that aggressive bravado and criminal bravura can have as forms of cultural resources in marginalised communities, where people's prospects are otherwise limited.

Street capital represents an adapted form of Bourdieu's (1986) notion of "cultural capital"[20], which likewise consists of those cultural assets (modes of acting, styles of speech, and dress, education, intellect, etc.) available to a person. Bourdieu's formulation defines cultural capital as an aptitude or a transposable skill acquired in the combined realms of the school system and upper-middle-class family and social networks. Because urban poor are often left out of educational opportunities and have limited contact to upper-and-middle-class settings, they are impeded in attaining formal education qualifications and a fluency in the informal skills inherent to speech, fashions, mannerisms, and cultural referents of dominant society (Bourdieu 1977, 177). Without such cultural resources, their limited access to personal and professional opportunities is even further limited, and their difficulties compounded. Cultural capital is valuable exactly because it is exclusive, and access to it marks and draws symbolic social boundaries, as an "institutionalised repertoire of high status signals" (Lamont and Lareau 1988a, 164). Opportunities to access cultural capital are protected, with cultural resources being deposited over the years into privileged social spaces and paid out only via the social networks through which those groups are connected. Acquiring it is dependent on access to another form of capital: social capital represents the value attributable to networks of relationships (Bourdieu 1986, 51)[21]. The more segregated a society, the more cut off are reserves of social capital to those near the

[20] Street capital focuses on embodied forms of cultural capital that are manifested as dispositions of thinking and acting. There are also two other forms of objectified and institutionalised cultural capital: the former refers to cultural goods, such as clothes, pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc., and the latter to educational qualifications (Bourdieu 1986, 47).

[21] The amount of social capital possessed by any one person depends not only on the size of his or her network but also on the volume of material and symbolic exchanges accessed through it (Bourdieu 19986, 51).

bottom of the social ladder[22]. In developing the concept of cultural capital[23,] Bourdieu was mostly concerned with the variation of culture that is produced by societal stratification and with how cultural variation itself reproduces stratification and inequality (Bourdieu 1977, 192–97). As a result, his analysis concentrates on valuing the high-status cultural symbols controlled by dominant social groups. By comparison, non-dominant forms of cultural capital are de-valued. Even though fighting acumen and criminal know-how may not be looked upon favourably in mainstream society, socioeconomic conditions facing the urban poor drive up the street value of these forms of capital in the particular sociocultural space they occupy.

Bourdieu uses the concept of "field" (1993, 30–31) to connect culture to the sites of relations, power, and meaning, where forms of cultural capital are produced and contested. Like other social fields, the streets are a space of relations of power between people that attempt to mobilise material, social, and cultural resources to occupy dominant positions relative to each other (Hilgers and Mangez 2014, 8)[24]. Aggressive force, criminal knowledge, slang, fashion, and other social, material, and semiotic practices are the microfoundations upon which reputations are built, through competition over cultural capital in the "street field" (Ilan 2015, 32). It is structured as a relatively circumscribed social space, with few prospects of advancement (Shammas and Sandberg 2016, 8). People compete for available resources and opportunities (capital) in a system of unequal positions where people accumulate around different forms of street practices. In such a setting, gangs become symbolically meaningful street-based groupings that adapt to the abnormality of their conditions by normalising and celebrating, in a refusal to yield to racism, poor pay, and working conditions, state neglect and insecurity (Spergel 1995, 166-167). At the same time, in fighting each other for street capital, gangs uphold and develop a violent street culture: "[d]rug dealers, addicts, and street criminals internalise their rage and desperation, converting it into an interpersonal everyday violence that primarily harms

[22] In contemporary usages, the concept of social capital is often made synonymous with horizontal social cohesion (Putnam et al. 1994, 167). Bourdieu's (1986) focus is vertical. Others have also used the concept to explicitly recognise vertical power differentials in social relations (Szreter and Woolcock 2004, 654).

[23] Cultural capital extends the logic of Marxist economic analysis to non-economic resources. It has been widely applied with considerable variability. Bourdieu himself was inconsistent in defining cultural capital (Lamont and Lareau 1988, 155-157).

[24] Sandberg (2008, 156-157) notes important differences between street culture and Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital. First, street culture lacks formal institutions of orthodox fields. Second, street capital accumulation is specific to street culture, lacking the transferability that cultural capital has across social space.

them and their loved ones" (Bourgois 2011, 306-307). Outsider perspectives on street culture remove gangs even further from mainstream society, creating criminal categories via moralised forms of intelligence that do not give proper account to the fluidity, contingency and contextality of gang identity (Fraser and Atkinson 2014, 164-166). That gangs and gang members are differently conceived through in the street and the criminal justice system, demonstrates the differing logics of each social domain; that officially derived definitions have primacy over locally constructed ones, indicates the relationality of cultural production. Cultural products and producers, be they gangsters, politicians, police, or others, are located subjectively within "a space of positions and position-takings" (Bourdieu 1993a, 30) that constitute a set of objective relations.

Mainstream culture is sublimated and the street culture subordinated and subjugated. The notion of street habitus becomes a useful theoretical frame for understanding personalised adaptations to cultural constraints. It is the third key concept in Bourdieusian criminology. Alongside concepts of capital and field just presented, street habitus can be used to understand how hypersensitivity to disrespect and frequent violent performance come about and endure among gang members committed to street culture (Sandberg and Pedersen 2011, 34). Over time, the subordination and subjugation create cultural expressions of territorialised experiences with poverty, racism, segregation, and inadequate public services that can be found in marginal urban contexts like the Cape Flats. Put simply, this culture becomes embodied in habitus, which structurally binds street-oriented groups, like gangs, to street culture. But while the structured dispositions of habitus embody a reflexive and instinctive attachment to the well-known milieu of the streets, it also allows for agentic improvisation of adaptive responses to urban marginality (Fraser 2017, 82). Street habitus thus combines structural and agentic accounts by delineating how individual proclivities toward violence are both a reproduction of, and a response to, the structural marginalisation and symbolic violence that push people into gangs and violence in the first place (Fraser 2013, 973). Thus, the everyday violence of gangs is both answer and effect, in an agentic-structured relationship to symbolic and structural forms of oppression, of life in the inner-city (Bourgois 2011a, 426). This "regulated improvisation" (Bourdieu 1990, 57) of violent acts brings us back to our initial introduction of street culture via Bourgois (2002), who defined it as values, symbols, and modes of interactional practices that emerge as a "complex and conflictual web" in opposition to mainstream society.

As it does across the world, street culture can offer important opportunities for those pushed to Cape Town's urban margins. Researchers in the city have used the underlying

principles of street scholarship to explain the presence of gangs in the Cape Flats. The power of these gangs can, for example, be found in their ability to exploit the vacuums in governance and development left unfilled by the state and formal economy (Standing 2006, 237). Involvement in gang activities is a way of obtaining a competitive advantage in poor and unstable communities (Daniels and Adams 2010, 54). For coloured men, in particular, gangs become a vehicle for relative prosperity, empowerment, and independence, moving those that join them away from being weak, marginal, financially irresponsible and even childlike (Jensen 2008, 91–96). Membership in Cape Flats gangs is a means of accessing the material goods necessary for minimal well-being (Samara 2011, 99–100). The gang may also provide protection against physical and social threats (Jensen 2006, 277). In comparison to stable middle-class contexts, many township communities lack avenues to realise manhood and therefore attempt to create their own rituals, language, and symbols for becoming "real men" (Cooper 2009, 2). Therefore, gang violence comes into existence through its relationship to oppression and domination. As Steinberg indicates in *The Number*, violence is never *just* violence:

> [I]t tampers with the boundary between acquisitive crime and political nobility; it hovers ambivalently between an aspiration to social equality and an anti-social violence, between a disdain for the current order and disdain for social order in general. (Steinberg 2004b, 8)

Ostensibly, *The Number* portrays the failing attempts of prison gangsters at respect and order amid the perversity of prison life. But a deeper reading of the book offers a much more profound story about Cape Town's racial hierarchies, economic disenfranchisement, and the strategies the urban poor use to cope with these. Inside and outside of prison, gangs provide a means of coping with racial stereotypes and systematic marginalisation, in a way that stereotypes and marginalisation can be deferred elsewhere in the construction of a marginal identity that exists in opposition to dominant polite, white society (Jensen 2010, 81). Cape Flats gangsters "know that acts of violence against themselves or others are a reliable method for reasserting their existence when life experience has denied it" (Pinnock 2016a, 200).

Over time, killing comes to be considered necessary to gain respect from others participating in the gang (Wegner et al. 2016, 55–56). An ethos of violent terror may even bleed into other community relationships. If people live in an environment where they learn violent behaviour, they will learn that it is rewarded and that violence is likely to solve their problems and make them feel esteemed and powerful (Ward 2007a, 28). This repertoire

concept has been described as a set of “modes of action” (Hannerz 1969, 187) that can be called upon when required to solve particular social problems. The repertoire gives understanding and value to violence as a “cultural” (Lamont and Lareau 1988a, 157) act, or an embodied expression of cultural capital[25]. Behavioural repertoires bring street capital from the realm of abstract cultural signals into understandable embodiments of mannerisms, fashion, speech, and so on (Lamont and Lareau 1988a, 157). Without archetypal role modelling of this type, a person wanting to evaluate cultural capital would have to reconstruct the bits and pieces of cultural code prevailing in that person's environment (Coleman and Rainwater 1978, 85–91). Drawing on the street repertoire engages the person using it in an agentic act, whereby violent behaviour is consciously applied to obtain belonging, self-esteem, respect, and wealth, rather than accept the identity of a victim of circumstance (Lindegaard and Jacques 2014, 94-96). Young men living in Cape Town’s townships, for instance, have been shown to seek out violent confrontation through such repertoires (Lindegaard and Zimmermann 2017, 202).

Those that use violence know it has value as street capital because they have observed the power of the violent act when it has been wielded by others. Street repertoires may be most apparent among gang members, but membership in a gang is not necessary for the use of street repertoires. Behavioural repertoires are, after all, constellations of street culture that illuminate to the value of street capital, which are accessible to all that look up to them as reference points for navigating township life; this is just as true for gang members as it is for those that do not belong to gangs. Though gang members and gangsters represent only a small minority of people in Cape Flats communities[26], they can set the tone for community norms as an embodiment of prosperity, status, and strength. Most importantly, this occurs through conspicuous consumption and expressive acts of violence (Bourgois 2011b, 303). A youngster beaten at home may see the courteous way a gang member is treated. It is natural that this youth would seek the protection that comes with gang membership and violence. Another notices the *takkies*[27], sweatshirt or cell phone of a gang boss and aspires to have the same. The gang is always open for business and may be the only chance many youth have to get a job and some semblance of material and social empowerment. Gangs also inform the modes of style of speech,

[25] As with Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, a person cannot use a cultural repertoire unless he or she is familiar with it (Lamont, Small and Harding 2010, 16).

[26] Officials estimate that gang members make up only approximately 5 per cent of the total population of the Western Cape (Pinnock 1984, 3–4).

[27] Sneakers or trainers

fashion and ceremony present in any community. Street repertoires model and reinforce a street style on block corners and in homes on the Cape Flats, among gang members that embody “the publicly available symbolic forms through which people experience and express meaning” (Swidler 1986, 273). Constrained to their communities, Cape Town’s township dwellers access cultural resources where they can, relying on street repertoires to make sense of street culture and access street capital in exchange for the elementary units of a decent life: respect, personal empowerment, protection, etc.

Street life in Cape Town, as in other parts of the world, is an example of localised cultural and behavioural adaptations. As all local phenomena are, each incarnation of street capital is dependent upon the individual historical and socioeconomic context that makes it manifest. Still, in spite of their historical, socioeconomic and geographical specificities, the cases of street capital described also apparently display common characteristics of a globalised street culture (Ilan 2015, 127-139). The similarities of street life in the ghettos of Cape Town, Southern California, Philadelphia, and East Harlem have been conceptualised through what Fraser (2015) refers to as “homologies of [street] habitus”. As Fraser (2015) further explains, the global commonalities found in the world’s street cultures can help account for the diversity and difference of street cultures around the world, by bridging the parts of the collective character that are localised manifestations of globally patterned histories and cultures. We see, for instance, that in countries as diverse as Brazil, Germany, and Russia, similar patterns of violent street culture can be observed in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, but also that there important differences among these countries concerning the intensity and frequency of violence (Zdun 2008, 40–49). In places like Germany – where overall levels of violence are lower, social safety nets more secure and security systems more functional – violence is easier to avoid and joining gangs less necessary. Higher rates of violence in Brazil and Russia make everyday life more hazardous, and street life appealing, in relation to the dangers faced by people living in these settings. It can be assumed then that the value of street capital will be higher in Brazil and Russia and the socialising power of street habitus stronger. Street habitus serves as a theoretical framework for realising the interactional relationship between agency and structure through which street culture emerges, within the power relationships and contests of the street field (Sandberg and Pedersen 2011, 34). Gang members, and other street-base characters, fight each other through the skills and competences embodied in street capital, using these as a form of legitimate power and for its usefulness in generating illegal profits (Sandberg 2008, 156). Their street capital is embedded in street repertoires, which represent the cultural role models – and the cultural tools these

models depict – that can be used strategically by marginalised people in the manner of gang repertoires (Lindegaard 2018, 19). As already noted, the repertoire serves as a useful device for making cultural capital knowable, in a way that can separate the ways of being and knowing that have street value – that is street capital – from the ways that such street capital can be used through street repertoires. Going forward, these central concepts will frame our analysis of moving in and out of street life in the Cape Flats.

2.2 Resistance against Reproduction

Writings on street capital are heavily inspired by Bourdieusian sociological thought. The great attraction of Bourdieusian ideas are that they provide a convincing and encompassing account of systems of social reproduction and oppression (Collins 1989, 462-463; Wacquant 1987, 81). Concepts such as habitus offer a way of making sense of how systems of social stratification are maintained in the long-term, outside of a purely materialist analysis (Lamont and Lareau 1988b, 154). The most resonant part of Bourdieu's writing might be the structuring aspects of social reproduction, but he famously developed the concept of the habitus as part of a wider theory of practice that was meant to bridge the theoretical chasm between structure and agency. Bourdieusian thought introduces a dialectic of objectivity and subjectivity into analyses of the everyday struggles in which individuals and groups engage in with social structures, that are simultaneously being continually formed by and continually forming:

> The habitus… produces strategies which are objectively adjusted to the objective situation, even though these strategies are neither the outcome of the explicit aiming at consciously pursued goals, nor the result of some mechanical determination by external causes. (Bourdieu 1988, 782)

Agents pursue strategies. These strategies are, however, objectively constrained by structure, meaning that any strategy pursued must be creatively adjusted to the structuring constraints that impede its fullest implementation. Using the interactive link between agent and structure, Bourdieu presented habitus as a theoretical resolution to the subject-object dualism of social theory.

In spite of Bourdieu's theoretical intent to connect subjective and objective reality, his work has been criticised for an objectivist bias. Detractors declare that too concentrated a focus on the structuring effects of social relations undermines a more expansive application that aptly accounts for both structure and agency (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 400). This critique can be summarised by saying that the power of structural reproduction inherent to habitus overwhelms agency, and perhaps even annihilates it (Jenkins 1982, 272-273;

Gartman 1991, 423-425; Schatzki 1997, 289-290). Thus, against Bourdieu's intentions, his conception of the social has been interpreted as relapsing into the very objectivism that he worked against. In line with such argumentation, Evens (1999) states that Bourdieu's theory "fails to make genuine agency a condition of practice". Following an analogous line of reproach, Giroux (2001) claims that Bourdieu's is a theory reproduction "that displays no faith in subordinate classes and groups, no hope in their ability or willingness to reinvent and reconstruct the conditions under which they live, work, and learn".

Protestations of Evens, Giroux and other critics are given some credibility by Bourdieu's own overwhelming focus on how sociocultural processes contribute to the reproduction of inequality. The sociological framework he provides creatively and powerfully elucidates a theory of social reproduction, but unfortunately does not offer an equally comprehensive theory of social transformation (Wacquant 1987, 81). Claims of objectivist bias are no doubt given added strength by the widespread application of Bourdieusian sociology to study how variations in sociocultural resources reproduce societal stratification in fields as diverse as health (Collyer et al. 2015), agroforestry (Raedeke et al., n.d.), education (Colley et al. 2003), organisational management (Konecki 2006) and, of course, criminology (Shammas and Sandberg 2016). This does not mean, however, that subjectivity is totally absent from Bourdieu's work, and those that seek to apply it. What King (2000, 418) deems as the "practical dimension" of Bourdieu's work is perhaps a subordinate undercurrent in his writing, but it is present. Harker (1984, 121-122) likewise emphasises the non-deterministic practical aspects of Bourdieu's work in a model that accounts for both the reproduction and change of cultural practices "with reflexivity and change built into it, and a clear dialectical link to the material world, has not been comprehended by Bourdieu's…critics".

The practical dimensions of Bourdieusian thought, which scholars such as King and Harker underscore, speak to the fact that people cannot solipsistically consult *a priori* social rules that independently determine their action. Actually, their social action is guided, though not pre-determined, by a practical sense of what is appropriate in any given situation, in what Bourdieu labels a "feel for the game" (1988, 782) that is interactionally – or jointly – established amongst social actors. That habitus is the sense of how to play a game according to the different moves available on a particular field of power relations (Kloot 2009, 472), meaning that an array of moves exist. What in the abstract appears as a set of determined social interactions can be transformed through the adaptations of those taking action, or merely as a result of the uncertainty inborn to any social exchange (Charles Taylor 1993, 57). Social agents can adapt and improvise in their

environments by playing “on all the resources inherent in the ambiguities and uncertainties of behaviour and situation in order to produce the actions appropriate to each case” (Bourdieu 1977, 8).

Such actions can activate the transformative potential of a subject-driven agency that claws at and pushes against objectifying forces that shut off possibility. In doing so, people pry open space to practically resist the structural and symbolic dynamics of domination:

> [I]f practices had as their principle the generative principle which has to be constructed in order to account for them, that is, a set of independent and coherent axioms, then the practices produced everything according to perfectly conscious generative rules would be stripped of everything that defines them distinctively as practices, that is, the uncertainty and “fuzziness” resulting from the fact that they have as their principle not a set of conscious, constant rules, but practical schemes, opaque to their possessors, varying according to the logic of the situation. (Bourdieu 1990, 12)

Even though practices are constituted through the cultural machinations of socially structuring structures, practical action exploits a structural openness and interpretability that preserves possibilities for social restructuring. Through the fuzzy logic of practices, the objective rules that would otherwise inflexibly dictate action gain a flexibility, whereby they turn into a sense of how one might act, or should act, and not how one *must* act (Bourdieu 1977, 14-15). Since people learn how to act from others, “their repertoire of permitted actions is circumscribed by a particular cultural horizon” (King 2000, 420). Further, cultural strategies are inevitably derived from a socially created sense of practice learnt from other individuals. Any behavioural repertoire is more than just a fixed ideological precept, but actually constitutes “a field of productive relations” (Lancaster 1994, 19-20). Repertoires are ‘practically’ generated by people interacting recurrently with structures and other people who may hold varying social and situational positions within the space of a given field. Shared interactional practices become a type of sociocultural “*bricolage”* (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 30-33) that creates and models novel styles by interweaving scraps of differing cultural materials with personal accessories and the flourishes of circumstance. But only he or she with enough practice and skill can successfully master the art of living in a given field of power to become a “virtuoso” (Bourdieu 1977, 8). Creative virtuosic behaviour can innovate practice, dialectically reshaping the habitus that shapes social life. The relationship between agency and structure is open to interpretation, but imaginable strategies that can be taken by any person can only be derived from his or her

socialisation and are subject to the final determinations of what others think is and is not appropriate. Through this social universe, “relations of domination are made, unmade, and remade in and by the interactions between persons” (Bourdieu 1990, 130).

Just as Bourdieu sought a model of “constructivist structuralism” (Bourdieu 1989, 14) through habitus, so too have scholars of street culture availed themselves of the constituted and constituting properties of habitus to create connections between structural domination and opposition to that domination via agentic violence (Fraser 2015, 43). Their writings articulate well those aspects of street life that are produced through, adapted to, and sustained by poverty, inequality, racism, etc. Demonstrating that violent behaviour is reproduced through socioeconomic forces shows that the violent act is largely constituted through a process that is external to an individual, rather than through internal moral motivations. Street culture writings have rightly shown that the so-called problem of criminality is in fact a symptom of deeper social problems, and that the focus of interventions should be the contexts that make people street-orientated. Thus seen, gangs and gang violence become normal responses to the abnormal conditions facing people and groups in a particular street field, rather than symptoms of personal or group psychopathy. As a result, those working on interventions targeted at gang and violence prevention now have a considerable store of literature to take from to create policy and programming. In the spirit of research on street culture, these interventions acknowledge that the urban poor do not have a fundamentally different moral make-up than the rest of society. They possess life ambitions like those in the so-called mainstream, though not the legitimate opportunities to attain them. In appreciating this, the focus of interventions can shift from demonising the already-marginalised through the police and courts, to democratising economic and social opportunities.

Despite making important contributions to understanding the structured constitutions of violent acts, research on street culture has also been limited in important ways. In drawing on Bourdieu, street culture scholars mirrored his objectivist focus on sociocultural reproduction, persuasively outlining constitutive relationships between street life, street practices, and the reproduction of structural domination. They do not, however, offer a similarly comprehensive and cogent consideration of how dominated people can move beyond street life, by resisting or extricating themselves from the trappings of the streets. Where oppositional agency is applied, it is to producing street-wise acts: exposing why marginalised populations might protectively engage in violent behaviour, or why they may form and join gangs in high-risk settings. Comparatively little has been written about the avoidance of, and movement away from, non-street cultural resources. There are

exceptions to the tendency to position culture, offending, and victimisation exclusively together through the lens of street culture. Harding (2010), for example, called attention to the array of cultural models that could be used to mediate the relationship to offending and victimisation, indicting how cultural heterogeneity "provides an alternative way of thinking about [cultural] variation that is more consistent with the reality of life in poor neighbourhoods" (2010, 146).

Heterogeneous expressions and applications of culture produce varying strategies for adapting to high-risk environments. Some strategies may adhere to and reproduce street habitus, by drawing street capital from street repertoires. Others may deviate from street-based sensibilities totally, by calling on contending forms of cultural capital. Anderson (1998, 67) also specifies how "decent" codes of behaviour exist beside street codes as part of the repertoire of behaviours that can provide security in different situations in the American inner-city. Not only do people of both orientations often coexist in the same social grouping, but individuals also code-switch between decent and street codes: he or she may share many of the decent middle-class values of wider society, and also know that such values are of little utility on the street. Lindegaard (2018) has conducted similar research in Cape Town, as young men in the Mother City navigate risks associated with gangs, violence, and racism by picking from a tool kit of four cultural repertoires: gang, township, suburban, and flexible cultural repertoires (Lindegaard 2018, 219-220).

Such scholarship offers a good starting point for a more nuanced appreciation of non-street cultural processes. Still, more attention needs to be paid to the heterogeneity of cultural capital and the varying cultural arrangements that exist in the fields of power that define marginal spaces like Cape Town's townships. Analysis of this type can have important implications for determining what non-street resources are available within such social geographies, why and how individuals retrieve and adopt some cultural models over others, and the implications this has for reconstituting people's lives (as well as the social life they are embedded in). For example, it will be shown below how some street virtuosos can master the 'art of killing' in a way that upsets even the most unflinching aggression of Cape Town's ghettos. In transgressing the rules of the street, these violent virtuosos are able to optimise returns on street capital and improvise new repertoires that modify existing modes of street habitus. There are also those that enter street life, and then exit it[28]. Gang members that transition out of gangs attempt to undo the long-embodied

[28] Others are able to avoid gangs and violence altogether, by drawing on non-street cultural repertoires. Indeed, the vast majority of Cape Flats residents never regularly participate in street life.

practices of street habitus by finding new sources of non-street capital, and innovating compositions of new behavioural repertoires, for themselves as ex-gang-members.

There may be much to be gained in a break from existing literature on street culture and its preoccupation with the reproduction of the street. To begin with, much more has been written on gang entry and gang membership than on gang leaving (Pyrooz and Decker 2011b, 1). Moreover, adding scholarship on gang disengagement (and violence desistance) could have implications for the underserved practical dimensions of Bourdieusian sociology, as well. A move away from gangs and violence gives occasion for a rebalancing of the relationship between agency and structure, correcting towards the former through an analysis of non-street practices in transitions away from gangs and violence.

Bourdieusian criminology can be extended to help street scholars better appreciate how ex-gang-members can recreate their lives after years, or even decades, of street structurisation. Gangs and violence might be understandable responses to structural oppression, though they too come to oppress and must be overcome. Releasing oneself from the violent grip of the street habitus requires a complete restructuring of one's life. Ex-gang-members' stories of personal transformation are the component pieces of social transformation, which have largely been overlooked in the push to define and describe the ways that society is reproduced. People on the margins are often essentialised and subsumed by their oppression, denying them representation as fully evolved and complicated human beings. Acknowledging structural oppression is meant to be emancipatory. But focusing on it exclusively becomes restrictive. Real emancipation requires a return to a singularity from within a structured collectivity. This research attempts to exhibit the agency of a subordinated (and now criminalised) group of people, by affirming their willingness and capacity to reinvent the conditions in which they live, work, and worship. It specifically examines how non-street practices are integrated into peoples' lives as durable compositions of non-gang and non-violent behavioural repertoires and cultural capital. Previous studies of street culture have the tendency to empiricise gang members' street orientations as static personal characteristics – even if nominally acknowledging that gang membership is not static or permanent – rather than as dynamically evolving cultural skill sets that are performed differently in specific contexts and at certain times. Approaching the street repertoire as an evolving interactional resource shows how people pursue different cultural resources, including street capital, and how the value associated with street practices can alter over the course of a person's life experiences.

What follows is a reading of street habitus in the Cape Flats coloured communities that begins by acknowledging modes and methods of street habituation, whereby people become trapped in violence and violence becomes trapped in them. But it also acknowledges the ways in which the street laws of habitus can be refuted, particularly by those that manage to break free of gang rule. As people reposition away from the street, their street-oriented dispositions shift as they improvise non-street practices that refute the street law, specifying that the only way out of gangs is 'blood'. Engaging this line of study can help inform, with greater specificity, the types of cultural capital people access and the types of cultural repertoires people perform when getting out of gangs in the Cape Flats. At the same time, it will be important to not forget that street habitus works through gangs as a structuring force; as with gang organisation and participation, gang exit interfaces with the structuring forces of class, race, space, etc. Ex-members of Cape Flats gangs may be predominately seen through the lens of the gang. It is an imposing identity, the poses and performances of which are specifically curated to be so. Still, in light of the tremendous force of that identity, we cannot be blinded to the continuing strength of other forces that continue to circumscribe opportunities for personal transformation, for all people living on the Cape Flats. Disengaging from the gang may be the foremost struggle for a former gang member, as that person simultaneously fights against the multiple marginalisations that pushed him or her into the street in the first place. Thus, it is only in consideration of the context by which street habitus is structured that we can fully consider the different ways the street can be restructured, as young coloured men and women on the Cape Flats attempt to disengage from gangs and desist from violence.

The sections below look at existing literature on disengagement and desistence.

2.3 Disengaging and Desisting from the Street

There exists considerable overlap between scholarship on street culture and general gang research. Though street scholars pay much more attention to the constitutive relationships between gangs and sociocultural structures, street culture and gang researchers are both generally interested in people's movement into, and participation in, gangs, as well as the relationship between gangs and delinquent behaviours, such as violent crime. Empirical applications of street culture have shown, for instance, that adherence to beliefs that valorise street culture has been shown to be associated with a greater likelihood of violence (Mears et al. 2013, 14) and higher levels of victimisation (Stewart et al. 2006, 446). Similarly, gang members have higher rates of participation in violent crime (Thornberry et al. 2003, 145-146) and higher rates of violent victimisation (Peterson,

Taylor and Esbensen 2004, 806-808)[29]. By comparison, neither street culture scholarship nor general gang's scholarship has much to say about transitions from street-based behaviours. To date, only a small proportion of gang literature has reflected on gang disengagement, or the connections between gang leaving and discontinuing violence (Sweeten et al. 2013, 474).

It is perhaps partly a corollary of the general disregard for disengagement and desistance that gang participation comes to be considered as a death sentence. On the Cape Flats the sentiment of such 'truths' are encapsulated in a number of foreboding axioms. 'Getting into gangs is easy, getting out of gangs is impossible', is one, which speaks for itself. Another, which indicates that there is "one way in, one way out" of gangs, is even more dark and absolute. This barely euphemistic reference to the inevitable violent death that awaits gang members has ominous parallels to another well-know saying: "blood in, blood out". The latter was likely imported from American street culture, where it was popularised through television and the media and perpetuated through gang lore (Carson and Vecchio 2015, 264). Public fascination with the most sensational news stories lead to a disproportionate amount of attention placed on the most dire aspects of gang activity. After all, the media is governed by its own axioms, favouring a news hierarchy by which "if it bleeds, it leads". Decker and Lauritsen (2002, 61) also observes that active gang members had a stake in perpetuating fears associated with gang inescapability, because "the viability of their gang depends on the ability of active gang members to maintain the perception that quitting the gang is nearly impossible". Standing (2006, 133) noted that ubiquity of stories of gang members being murdered upon exiting the gang, leaves many afraid to attempt the same, even if they would like to. In their way too, scholars' focus on the many of the most morbid features of gangs perpetuates the myth that a violent death also may not be the only way to escape the streets.

[29] Gang-motivated violence often supports many expressive aspects, such as "impulsive and emotional defence of one's identity as a gang member, defence and glorification of the reputation of the gang and gang members, and expansion of the membership and territory of the gang" (Block and Block 1993 8). Studies have found that gang youths are much more likely than non-gang youths to participate in violent offences (Esbensen 2010, 81–82).Offending is elevated during periods of active membership (Melde and Esbensen 2013, 174). Violence is an important tool for acquiring, maintaining, and enhancing status and, thus, becoming gang involved may systematically induce violent behaviour among those concerned with acquiring a valued reputation (Hughes and Short 2005, 54). Failure to uphold that gang's normative commitment to violence can itself lead to violent victimisation and injury, or even death, for the violator of the norm (Densley 2013).

The literature that does exist on gang leaving shows that many gang members are successfully able to transition out of gangs (Thornberry et al. 2004, 10; Pyrooz 2014, 364). Because much of this research is based in developed countries – in America, especially – it is unclear to what extent its findings are transposable to the Capetonian context. It does, at least, offer evidence that argues against the belief that gangs are a death sentence. Historical accounts dating back to Thrasher's (1927) work suggest that gang disengagement is a natural consequence of members maturing, getting married, and finding employment. Subsequent studies on gangs also indicated that most individuals who were in gangs simply matured out of them as they got older (New York City Youth Board 1960, 28-29; Suttles 1968, 132-133; Hagedorn and Macon 1988, 5; Hagedorn 1994, 206-207). The developmental arc associated with maturing out of gangs is similar to that seen in desistence from general offending. Most people become involved with gangs during the "psychosocial moratorium" (Erikson 1994, 157-158) of adolescence, when youth provocatively play with personal and social boundaries. Over time though, most youth "drift out of delinquency" (Matza 1967, 54-57) and into adulthood, which is accompanied by work, marriages, and other conventional statuses associated with aging. Cognitive transformations essential to desistance may, for instance, direct gang members towards non-street social arrangements – marriage, parenthood, work, or religion – that act as "hooks for change" (Giordano et al. 2002, 992). Renouncing gang membership can be a turning point into other important life states, such as marriage, military service, and employment, which can lower that person's propensity to crime as they make their way into a new life. Also, the nature of illicit or illegal activities places one at risk of violent victimisation and at odds with law enforcement, which results in a "crystallisation of discontent" (Baumeister 1991, 305-306) that causes people to reconsider relationships or commitments to the street life. That does not necessarily mean, however, that a person will cut ties to his or her peers right away. Decisions to disengage from criminal relationships and desist form criminality can be fluid or sporadic and may have to be undertaken repeatedly over a period of time (Maruna 2007, 23).

Relatively less association with criminal peers will be replaced by more engagement with law-abiding peers, as well as exposure to (and learning from) social practices favourable to societal conformity, law-abiding behavioural models, and the reinforcement of non-delinquent behaviours (Akers 2017, xxv–xxvi). Eventually, moving out of gang-related delinquency will likely necessitate a final "knifing off" (Maruna and Roy 2007, 106-109) of old social roles, associates, criminal opportunities, etc. Delinquency literature suggests that illicit and illegal activities may initially be motivated by developmental immaturity, and

learned from and reinforced through delinquent peer pressure. For most youth, these behaviours remain adolescence-limited, to be used when such responses seem personally and socially advantageous, though ultimately abandoned in favour of pro-social responses that become increasingly rewarding as one matures (Moffitt 1993, 12-13).

There is considerable overlap in theorising desistence from general delinquency, as per the theoretical models just noted, and in modelling disengagement and desistence related to gangs (Sweeten et al. 2013, 471-473). Gang scholars like Vigil (1988, 114) for instance, have also pointed to the processes of developmental maturation by which many gang members age out. Other scholars indicate that gang membership need not be defined by a lengthy process of personal or social development, but can actually be short-lived. Also writing from a developmental point-of-view, for instance, Thornberry et al. (2003, 41) found that most youth who joined a gang left after less than one year[30]. Of course, not all gang membership ends at adolescence (Spergel 1990, 225). While most members might age out, go to prison, are killed or die, or leave in different ways, some stay in the gang (Sánchez-Jankowski 1991, 61-62). There is no single way to leave a gang, just as there is no single way to enter a gang or be gang member. For example, core peripheral members may find leaving easier than core members, because they are less likely to have developed reputations that would indicate their gang membership to others and are less dependent on the gang overall (Horowitz 1983, 179-180). For those that do get out, there is variation in why and how. Gang exit can be influenced by pull or push factors, whereas methods for disengagement can be hostile or non-hostile (Pyrooz and Decker 2011, 420-422)[31].

The complexities of gang quitting can make it difficult to define exactly who is an ex-gangster (Carson and Vecchio 2015, 258). In gang-leavers from an empirical point-of-view, researchers often look to self-nomination to define gang-leavers (Pyrooz and Decker 2011, 420; Pyrooz et al. 2013, 246), which is considered a robust strategy for determining both gang membership and exit (Decker et al. 2014, 592; Esbensen et al. 2001a, 124). In

[30] However, their research also suggests that any time in gangs can lead to a cascading series of long-term problems associated with dysfunctional family life, unstable employment, and, in some cases, continued involvement in criminal activity.

[31] Pull motives are characterised by changing lifestyles of gang members: girlfriends, jobs, or children. Push motives are seen as cognitive shifts about gang life: tiring of the gang lifestyle and wanting to avoid trouble or violence. In terms of methods, hostile departures involve events associated with leaving the gang – like being jumped out or committing a crime – whereas non-hostile departures refer to former gang members that can walk away without incident.

saying this, it must be understood that, while "knifing off of the street identity" is important for quitting gang life, becoming an ex-gangster involves a "complex process replete with pushes and pulls to conformity and back to the gang" (Pyrooz et al. 2014, 508).

Leaving gangs depends on a combination of what gang scholars typically term as declaring non-membership through "de-identification", which is no longer thinking of oneself as part of the gang or calling oneself a member, and "decreasing gang embeddedness" (Sweeten et al. 2013, 475-476) through a process that counters individual immersion within an enduring delinquent network that restricts involvement in pro-social networks[32]. De-identification is a symbolic act that announces the cutting of street ties that may be marked ceremonially, while de-embedding may take on a "succession quality" (Vigil 1988, 106-109) through a gradual series of steps that incrementally decrease gang identification, association, and commitment. Ultimately, whether abandoning the gang is an event or process may vary case-by-case. Interviews with former gang members conducted by Decker and Lauritsen (2002, 66) indicate that gang leaving may follow a "triggering event" for some, while others just "drift out" of street life.

Most research on gang disengagement has drawn on theories of social development and social learning to provide descriptive work on the methods and motives for this important role transition. But the gang exit literature lacks a specified conceptual framework that fully accounts for how a gang member becomes an 'ex'. Perhaps the most systematic effort to explain gang role transition was by Decker et al. (2014, 269) in their application of role exit theory developed by Ebaugh (2013, 3). Otherwise, Laub and Sampson (2001), Thornberry et al. (2003), and Melde and Esbensen (2011) have applied the concept of the "turning point" to conceptualise gang involvement as an acute turning point in the lives of adolescents, which can account for the impact of gang membership on delinquent involvement. Given the centrality of violent behaviour in gang scholarship[33], it is important to note the longitudinal relationship between gangs and violence, over the course of gang quitting. It was said above already that gangs have been found to be amplifiers of violence. If this were accurate, one would expect that gang exit is associated with decreases in violent behaviour. Existing a gang does indeed support such a thesis. Both gang de-

[32] Measures of de-embeddedness include no longer wearing gang clothes and colours, participating in gang fights, having contact with gang members, position in the gang, and degree of self-identification to the gang (Pyrooz and Decker 2011, 6-7).

[33] Desistence literature often refers to the events and processes associated with withdrawing from both gangs and gang violence (Pyrooz et al. 2014; Pyrooz and Decker 2011); this is likely due to a conflation of gangs and violence due to the higher levels of violent behaviour generally found in gangs, relative to society.

identification and gang de-embeddedness have been shown to cut violent offending (Sweeten et al. 2013, 487–89). Melde and Esbensen (2013:155-158) also found that participation in violent offending was higher among gang-involved youth, but subsequently decreased following gang exit[34]; other researchers have reported similar findings (Gordon et al. 2004, 69-71; Bjerk 2008, 406-407). But as with gang exit, there are variations to general trends. Each study just cited above showed that ex-gang members often still reported non-zero levels of violence, with post-gang levels of violence not necessarily returning to previous levels. Those that have been in the gang for a long time, for instance, may find desistence more difficult, as they have become highly embedded in violent gang activities (Thornberry et al., (2003, 46). Gang-leavers may also show a greater likelihood to view themselves as easily agitated and quick to resort to violence even after they left the gang, though less so than when they were members (Melde and Esbensen 2011, 536-538). Prior longitudinal studies have also found persistence in other forms of street-based delinquent behaviour, such as drug dealing, which can be tied to the protection of turf, to continue after gang exit (Thornberry 1999, 160-161). Violent threat and victimisation can prevail powerfully among ex-members despite disengagement, even from those gang members that leave without any problems (Roks 2017, 10-11). It may not be unreasonable to think that an ex-gangster is drawn back into the streets in self-defence. The threat of violence to ex-gang-members finally depends on the particular social dynamics of violence of where they live (Arciaga et al. 2013, 3).

What becomes clear, therefore, is that involvement in violent crime is influenced by gang membership, though not exclusively. Any form of violent crime, and desistence from it, is the constant interaction between purposeful human agency and structure, which has a complexity that is reducible neither to the individual nor the structure (Sampson and Laub 2005, 37-41). Similarly, disengagement does not equal desistence in practice, as some people continue to use violence or be threatened by it after getting out of the gang. Even in theory, disengaging from gangs and ceasing violent behaviours are thought about in different ways: leaving gangs is a state of relation, while committing a violent crime is an act (Carson and Vecchio 2015, 258). So, just because somebody chooses to exit a gang, and takes steps towards making that exit a reality, does not mean that involvement in violence will cease.

[34] In another study, they showed a positive relationship between gang disengagement and decreased delinquent behaviour (Melde and Esbensen 2011, 536-538).

Just because people are able to leave gangs does not mean that all will be able to do so, or do so easily. Although extant gang literature shows that people do choose to leave gangs and violence, and are able to do so, it is equally important to also tell why this might not happen. We have already seen above how the dialectical relationship between agency and structure operates to limit action in the street culture. To date, showing how disengagement and desistance might be structured has been a subplot in writings on gang leaving. The literature just presented typically imagines gang involvement and disengagement as a series of independent practices and associations related to gang identity. As an extension, gangs and gang culture are theorised in a way that is largely self-contained. To leave a gang, one must de-identify from the identity of the gang and de-embedded from gang associations and practices. Where socioeconomic structuring or, even more rarely, sociocultural structuring, is considered, it is as an adjunct to focal theorisations of gang identity and gang behaviour. Those scholars that have considered the ways that gang disengagement is structured note that there is a difference between the decision to leave a gang and the actual ability to accomplish this. Hagedorn (1994, 207-211) finds that, for instance, despite having strong inclinations towards legitimate society and ethical codes that disapprove of the crime, gang-leavers can be pushed back to streets as a means of hustling. Limited opportunity structures can inhibit access to jobs, and even marriage possibilities, in a way that helps sustain gang involvement (Hagedorn and Macon 1988, 124-125). Leaving opportunities are also limited by past gang involvement: rivals may seek revenge for violence committed against them, police may continue to criminalise the gang-leaver, and gang reputation may inhibit job-finding (Decker and Lauritsen 2002, 54). A gang member's life can be structured by years of gang membership. Because the gang has been their primary forum for social interaction and gratification for many members, negative encounters with outsiders can compound social isolation as discouraged gang-leavers return to the "grip of the group" (van Gemert et al. 2005, 27-28). Deterred from finding alternative sources of economic, cultural, and social capital, some return to street capital payoffs offered by the gang. This may be the reason that some former gang members come to occupy a grey area where they have formally left the gang, but retain social and emotional ties to it (Pyrooz et al. 2014, 503).

We can see, then, that telling the story of gang-leavers shows that getting out of gangs and violence is possible; however, giving a full account of that story, suggests that it may not be easily done by all. More research is required to examine the ways that the motives and methods associated with gang withdrawal are structured. Merging Bourdieusian criminological concepts with other aspects of gang research can help find inter-linkages

between seemingly divergent theoretical traditions and, consequently, raises the analytical utility of their respective self-contained, esoteric notions. As the above studies demonstrate, Bourdieusian sociological theory has been grafted onto meaningfully ways to solve real criminological problems. However, work remains to be done in anchoring Bourdieusian criminology with research on gang disengagement and violence desistence. It may especially prove insightful here, as a theoretical tie between agency and structure: one can make the choice to de-identify and de-embed in the gang, but past gang participation has inculcated a composition of street practices that are constituted through street life, which in turn is through social life, more generally. What makes leaving the gang so difficult, of course, are those same risk factors that influenced gang participation in the first place: poverty, inequality, racism, segregation, etc. Whether or not somebody leaves street life may have just as much to do with the opportunities he or she faces in finding employment, a relationship or another social group to connect to, as much as it does with making the decision to quit gangs. Indeed, the risk factors driving initial gang entry will be further compounded by the criminal socialisation, social isolation, and institutionalised criminalisation attached to gang life. Because of this, the agentic act of gang exit will be dually structured by a person's experiences in the street and society. Because of this, decompositioning of the durable street dispositions inculcated through street habitus requires access to non-street forms of social, cultural, and economic capital which, if applied over time, can disposition new non-street practices. This means that the full story of gang disengagement is partly told through motive and method, and partly told through how motive and method are restructured in new non-street practices. Further research is needed on restructuring; gaining a better reading of how agency and structure connect to gang disengagement can help create more holistically targeted interventions to support gang-leavers.

2.4 Disengagement and Desistance in Cape Town

Especially in a low-income context – where economic prospects are especially bleak, spatial inequality particularly pronounced, and state mostly absent in its role as security provider – opportunities beyond the street may be scant. The vast majority of writing on disengagement and desistence is oriented towards high-income countries, with the majority coming from the United States. Those in developing nations[35] face relatively lower

[35] Though South African is a middle income country (World Bank 2018) with many developed elements to its economy and good infrastructure, it is also a country with huge economic and social problems, where large numbers of people – including many on the Cape Flats – live in poverty and without access to security and other services.

job prospects, fewer opportunities for social empowerment and higher levels of insecurity that make their attempts at renouncing gangs uniquely difficult[36]. In my short time in Cape Town, as well, the many attempts at gang exit I have seen end in death, returns to prison, or regression back to gangs, indicating that exiting gangs and violence is made much more complicated by the considerable structural impediments facing poor coloured men and women trying to do so.

However, literature dedicated to studying disengagement from gangs and discontinuing gang violence is almost non-existent in the context of Cape Town. Writings on disengagement and desistance literature exist as a subset of scholarship focused on other topics. For instance, from his ethnographic work on a small Heideveld gang called the Homeboys, Jensen (n.d.) found patterns of disengagement similar to those indicated in international literature. Despite popular narratives that quitting gangs is fiercely prohibited by leaders and can be punished by death, he said the following upon returning to the community after three years:

> It was with the greatest relief that I returned three years later to find that the Homeboys had ceased to exist as a group. Several had married and moved away. Two had become police officers! The rest either worked or studied. (Jensen, n.d.)

Other researchers, however, have been generally more pessimistic. Lindegaard (2018, 187), for instance, found that the performance of gang repertoires was largely durable across time; only one (of twelve) gang-oriented research participants in her thirteen-year study across Cape Town moved to a non-gang performance. Standing (2006) also indicated that gang members may become entrenched in street life, which is in good part due to the scarcity of alternative options in many townships:

> The official denunciation of gang life demands that gangsters choose another option, the message being that they face an easy choice – life in the gang or in "civilised society". However, wandering into the gang and remaining an entrenched member can be seen as an unavoidable consequence of the social and economic contradictions of life on the Flats. (2006, 135)

[36] It was already shown above that lower relative rates of development in countries like Brazil and Russia beget forms of street culture that have higher intensities and frequencies of violence than developed countries (Zdun 2008, 40-49).

Those that have been incarcerated face even greater challenges in quitting gangs. Having a criminal record further undermines the likelihood of finding work in society with already-high unemployment in poor, marginalised communities (Standing 2005, 23). Gangs are one place where ex-prisoners can always find gainful employment. In looking at disengagement from the perspective of gang interventions, Cooper and Ward (2012, 253-260) cited Cape-based ex-offender programmes offered by the South African non-governmental organisation NICRO as an example of the types of economic and social reintegration initiatives that are necessary to help people leave gangs. Such after-prison programmes are, however, lacking in Cape Town (Standing 2006, 134).

Institutionalised approaches to criminal justice may not be ideal to begin with. Pinnock (1997, 28-54) indicated that programmes that respond to gang-related wrongdoing should be restorative, reflecting the perspective that ganging is a rite of passage inherent to the stages of adolescent liminality. In *Gang Town*, he further suggested that a holistic set of programmes that help strengthen personal resilience are key to assisting people in getting out of gangs (Pinnock 2016, 223-281). Indeed, there may be different formal and informal methods to exiting Cape gangs. In one of the few pieces of research that dealt with gang disengagement specifically, Rodgers and Jensen (2015, 5-7) presented three case studies of gang exit transitions in Cape Town, that illustrated distinct mechanisms for disengaging from gangs: by girlfriend, by religion, and by prison and organised crime. Their research pointed to the durability of street-life through organised crime, the continued prominence of criminal justice as a response to gangs, and to the informal mechanisms for gang disengagement that gang members may turn to. Other researchers have also shown the role of informal assistance in gang leaving in Cape Town's resource-poor townships. Salo (2004) indicated that Cape Flats men used narratives associated with the respectable son or responsible farther to neutralise gangster narratives related to violence or other delinquent activities. These are two strategies available to those trying to erase a gangster past. Unable to achieve the status of the good son and father, the protagonist of *The Number* eventually turns to religion to break his personal cycle of criminality and incarceration another important strategy associated with gang disengagement on the Cape Flats (Steinberg 2004b, 398). Jensen (2008, 169) also points to religion – along with community activism aimed against gangsterism – as a powerful avenue that young coloured men can use to resist gangs and prison.

The limited literature that exists on disengagement in the Capetonian context indicates people can escape the grip of gangs. Very likely, Cape Flats gang members that do get out probably age out, as do gang members throughout the world. But making the decision

to leave the gang is not enough to do so. As we saw from international research, de-embedding from the gang may be an erratic process, which might take time and many attempts before it is complete. Structural barriers can obstruct the directed agentic action put towards role transition. The greater the obstructions, the more difficult quitting gangs becomes. In situations of great scarcity, as on the Cape Flats, a dearth of employment and social opportunities can combine with inadequate social programming to make it more likely that an individual remains entrenched in street life. Denied participation in the formal economy and mainstream society, and access to state and social programmes, some people look to the community and family level instead to find new non-street opportunities and resources. However, there still exists little in the way of systematic study that can clarify exactly what opportunities or resources are available for Cape Flats gang-leavers, or if and how these can, in actuality, be accessed and used. The same oppressive structural conditions that result in a powerlessness that pushes persons and groups towards the fringes of society, and to gangs and violence as adaptive street-based strategies (D. Vigil 2010, 7), will be just as oppressively present after a gang member makes the decision to quit gangsterism. For an ex-convict, structural oppression is compounded by the stigma associated with a criminal record. This is to say nothing of decompositioning the embodied dispositions built up through years, and even decades, in oppositional street culture. In removing him- or herself from a gang, a gang member is not also simultaneously leaving the social, cultural, and economic history of the Cape Flats. These forces will continue to shape the particular street habitus that in turn shapes the ex-gangster and other individuals sharing his or her physical, sociocultural and economic space. More research is required to understand how disengagement from gangs might take place in contexts such as the Cape Flats, which are marked by high levels of inequality, and socialspatial disparity, which gangs have come to dominate as an alternative social order.

2.5 Conclusion

Despite the dominance of gangs, personal experiences with street habitus can alter if a gang member feels their street dispositions losing coherency, or their conditions of existence change, such that they subsequently experience a sense of internal conflict and social dislocation (Bourdieu 2004, 127). Role transition out of gangs may result. So, in order to more fully understand disengagement in the Cape Flats context, research will explore the processes of abandoning gangs, as has already been done by many international gang scholars. In particular, it will apply the model of role transition developed by Ebaugh (2013) – and previously applied to study gang disengagement by (Decker et al.

2014) – to understand how gang members transition from the street field into the social field of normal life. This study will then examine how, within the structuring power of a particular habitus, street roles reform and restructure in time. In the same way that "gangs can evolve into different forms of social organisation, so too can the meanings attached to gangs alter for the individual" (Fraser 2015, 54).

Giving greater account to the decompositioning of street practices and disposition of non-street practices can inform research on transitions from gangs in low-income environments like the Cape Flats. In doing so, it will also transition scholarship on street culture beyond the streets, moving it towards those practical dimensions of Bourdieusian criminological thought that can be applied to shifting street habitus. Bourdieusian studies of the street illustrate the importance of social structure in shaping individual action, through the notions of street habitus, capital, and field. This study seeks to bridge the gap that still remains between structure and agency, by examining the subjective ways that the street field can be subverted and how this might reflect the limits of the objective limitations of social structural circumstances. Since we are speaking practically, let us acknowledge the hope that research of this type can produce knowledge about how decisions to leave gangs can be supported, and how greater opportunities for quitting gangsterism can be created. Of particular interest is how the sociocultural creativity associated with creating street culture can likewise be applied to access non-street forms of social, cultural, and economic capital, in scarcity settings in the decompositioning of long-embodied street sensibilities. In this regard, this study will demonstrate that it is one thing for an individual to declare that a person has quit membership in a gang, but quite another for that decision to be fully accepted by the gang-leaver and by others. A lengthy process of non-street dispositioning is required to personally and socially consolidate compositions of durable new behavioural repertoires in the social field of normal life, that comes to finally be accepted and acceptable through the deliberate and consistent application of non-street repertoires related to family, work, and religious life.

It has been noted by Venkatesh (2003) that, in their application of Bourdieusian criminology, gang scholars have paid relatively less attention to the anxieties, expectations and preferences that any single gang member has in engaging with (or for that matter, disengaging with) street life:

> The pull of different ideologies may also be located within the same person so that the system of predispositions that orient action – "habitus" in Bourdieu's terminology – may reflect varying and possibly discordant cultural structures…

> And, these may change over time, especially over the life course as youth mature and move in and through other social institutions. This basic principle of sociological reasoning, the hallmark in life-course research, has been missing in street gang scholarship. (2003, 7)

Orienting gang research towards the practical dimensions of street culture underscores how agency and individual decision making contribute to a socially structured interpretations of gangs. Even amidst the hardships many Cape Flats townships experience, gang membership may only be a temporary phase of a person's life. This project hopes to reimagine how gangs in Cape Town can be understood through a theoretical model that regards both structural origins of gangs and gang violence, as well as the agentic behavioural processes activated in disengaging and desisting from them. Practically, more evidence about how people leave gangs can serve as a better starting point for creating effective policies and programmes. Symbolically, writing about the way out of gangs through research offers hope to those trying to leave gang life, as to those trying to help them. Rather than simply regurgitating structural domination and gang violence, expressing the ways that people move beyond street culture can be used to channel individual agency through narrative adaption and creativity in ways that challenge common "schemes of perception" (Bourdieu 1990, 60). From this perspective, it retains room for individuals, and the communities they live in, to counteract the depressing weight of structural, symbolic, and gang violence that they endure on a daily basis. But before moving beyond the street, we will first outline the paper's methodology, in the following chapter, and then provide an account of how street practices are made and reproduced in Cape Flats gangs in Chapter Four.

3 CONSIDERING METHODS

This chapter considers the methodology used for this study. The bulk of the formalised fieldwork was originally conducted between July 2013 and July 2014. Some additional research activities were carried out after that period. Most notably, life history interviews were carried out during January and February 2018 in order to: gather further data on gang disengagement, add geographical coverage, and capture peoples' experiences with a more diverse set of gang exit interventions. This section situates all fieldwork and findings within the methodological approach used to collect, frame, analyse, and report on research.

3.1 Outlining Methods and Sampling

The bulk of all data used, whether primary or secondary, was qualitative. In some cases statistics were used, though existing figures on gangs are sparse due to the hidden nature of the subject. Secondary research also drew from the considerable news coverage of gangs in the South African press. Journalistic accounts are vulnerable to sensationalism and simplicity, though the news media also offers valuable coverage of key events. It is a highly personalised perspective typically not available through other secondary sources. Editorial publications also have a bias, as they are skewed towards particular ways of seeing the world. Yet, these too are a valuable source of information, which can be a real-time gauge of public debate. When taken together with primary and other secondary data, news sources offered important research insights and a means for cross-checking primary research. Primary data was largely collected through life history interviews, other topical semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, and participant observation. It should also be noted that attempts at participatory action research (PAR) were made, but did not yield sufficient results in order to be systematically applicable to the research results[37].

As a general rule, selection, design, and implementation of each method was carried out so as to validate responses from one method by triangulating it with others. Triangulation was attempted where possible, especially to vet and validate life histories through multiple accounts; of course, to some extent, one must accept that research on gangs must rely on

[37] Though these sessions yielded little useable data, especially as the research shifted to gang exit, PAR sessions provided an in-depth understanding of gang members lives inside and outside of gangs and offered a richly personalised contextualisation of gang life on the Cape Flats. These sessions also offered insight into members' desires and struggles to exit gangs, as the rehabilitation centres are positioned uniquely at the intersection of gang participation and exit. Finally, PAR research helped to generate connections and relationships with people that would serve as interviewees and research assistants later on.

hearsay and perceptions, including the perceptions of the researcher. But all research methods used were designed to be complementary and mutually reinforcing. Each aspect of the study provided a unique research perspective. Semi-structured interviews, and even PAR, gave a look into social life in Cape Town. Of special importance was the nature of socioeconomic and sociocultural inequality in Cape Town, as well as personalized perspectives on drivers of gang formation, gang entry, and gang violence; important insights were also gleaned about the early stages of gang exit. Informal discussions and observations complemented formalized research efforts, by offering a greater appreciation for the lived and felt experiences of gang members and Cape Flats residents. This research set the stage for the contextualized and informed interrogation of the life trajectories of former gang members, which came to serve as the foundation of the research methodology. Focusing research through the life history was an opportunity to explore gang members everyday struggles with socioeconomic and sociocultural fissures in the city. In particular, personal narratives detailed the tension between submission and resistance to the social and cultural forces that exacerbate urban inequality, for a multi-dimensional and multi-level analysis of the resultant regularities and (irregularities) in patterns of gang participation and violent behaviour. Importantly, providing a nuanced life account helped to avoid either glorifying or debasing the struggle of life on the Cape Flats.

As was previously indicated, this project takes a street-based view of gangs, conceptualising gang membership as a subjectively defined association with an objectifiable set of street practices. To capture the subjectivity of street participation, all participants that were selected for this project self-nominated as identifying with notions of gangsterism-as-street-life. It is a way of acknowledging that street-based youths recognize street life and gangs as a positive identity, but that the way they do that is fluid, contextualised, and conditional (Fraser and Atkinson 2014, 162-164). It allows them to situate their street-based selves in their own narratives, in a move that can mitigate the stigma of savagery that is so often levelled at Cape Flats gangs and their violence (Standing 2005, 19). Self-nomination has in the past been used to define gang association (Esbensen et al. 2001b, 147). More importantly, it has also been used effectively in researching gang disengagement (Decker et al. 2014; Sweeten et al. 2013). An approach favouring self-identification acknowledges that imposition of outsiders' definitions of gangsterism can be grossly misrepresentative and stigmatising (Samara 2011, 132). Some screening of research participants was necessary. This was approached as a way of corroborating personal narratives, rather than *prima facie* notions of who see themselves as gangsters. Screening of interviewees was done through partner and peer

networks, working through community groups with considerable local knowledge and activities, who could verify each participant's official and unofficial gang associations and their known engagement in gang violence and other street-related activities.

Many introductions to participants were also facilitated through such community groups. Initially, many key informants were sourced through Hanover Park's Ceasefire project, which is run through First Community Research Centre (FCRC). A chain of rehabilitation centres connected to Ceasefire's programmes presented a particularly good opportunity for introduction to, and interaction with, active and exiting gang members. As an aside, it should be mentioned that connections made through Ceasefire generally provided only *initial* access to research participants, a good portion of which were from communities other than Hanover Park. When these participants returned home, preliminary contacts also snowballed into additional contacts, expanding the research network used for the study to a broad geographical cross-section of non-Ceasefire interviewees from across the Cape Flats, including: Hanover Park, Grassy Park, Delft, Lavender Hill, Manenberg, Mitchells Plain, Ottery, Gugulethu, Khayelitsha, and other areas. As suggested by MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, snowball sampling "is the best method for research on activity outside the law" (2000; 24-25). The original snowball sample, taken July 2013-2014, included formal interviews with 53 key informants. In total, over one hundred formal interviews were undertaken with this study group; many people were interviewed a number of times. Hundreds of additional hours were also dedicated to informal personal communications and observations in neighbourhoods throughout Cape Town, via access gained through snowballed contacts. Such interpersonal interactions presented a vivid panoramic view of life around the city through access to public spaces, private homes and other spaces central to gang life: hideouts, drug dens, *shebeens*[38]*,* etc.

From the initial pool of 53 key informants, ten – seven men and three women – were selected to participate in the initial life history component of the research (for examples of life history research see Ojermark 2007; Lewis 2008 and Yarrow 2008). From these ten, one emerged as particularly salient: the story of Gavin, a long-time Mongrel and 28, provided noteworthy personalized account of gang disengagement. I was able to closely follow Gavin's attempts to leave street and prison gangs over the course of a number of years. Based largely off strength of data linked to Gavin's story, the overall study was then redirected towards a greater focus on an examination of gang leaving. The breadth and depth of data available from Gavin's interviews was the consequence of a very particular

[38] An illicit bar where alcohol is sold without a licence.

long-term relationship that allowed for access into the life of a key informant, whom I met and was able to follow from almost the precise point at which he started his gang exit. Unfortunately, other data collected through the aforementioned 53 interviews mostly considered gang entry and participation, with only some attention given to the initial phases of participants' transitions out of gangs. In order to capture additional narratives about gang exit, 23 more disengagement life histories (49 interviews with nineteen men and four women) were done with former gang members that had successfully disengaged for at least one year; while focusing on participants' exit from gangs, this research also looked at their entry into, and participation in, gang life. Extra interviews were carried out with Gavin, as well. Not only did these additional research efforts provide valuable data on out-of-gang transition, they responded to important limitations of the initial research approach: that it was too centred on Hanover Park, and that it was too reliant on snowballing linked to organisational networks of Ceasefire that privileged experiences associated with this particular intervention model.

Sampling of an additional 23 gang-leavers incorporated research participants from around the Cape Flats[39], and considered individuals who had exited gangs through a variety of ways[40]. In order to capture as many gang leaving experiences as possible, this group also represented a variety of ages and different lengths of time being out of the gang[41]. Sampling was undertaken via the author's existing connections with those working in gang violence prevention in Cape Town. Support was provided by a research assistant with considerable personal and professional experience working on gang issues. Participants' gang participation and exit were vetted through on-the-ground contacts, usually via a combination of screening through partner and peer networks and an initial screening interview by the research assistant[42].Involvement in research was bound by the availability

[39] Geographical distribution of these 23 life history participants is as follows: Athlone (four), Delft (one), Elsie's River (one), Hanover Park (ten), Lavender Hill (one), Manenberg (two), and Mitchells Plain (four); Gavin is from Ottery.

[40] This last round of research participants exited through the following programmes: Ceasefire, Chrysalis Academy, Fusion Manenberg, *Ixande* Recovery from Addiction, *KwaSizabantu* Mission, and others; about half of participants did not go through a formalised programme as part of their gang exit.

[41] The age range of the group was 21-51 years, though most participants were 25-35 years old; the shortest duration out of gang was one year and the longest was twelve years, but most had been out for two to three years.

[42] Gang-leavers were those that had de-identified from gangs and had de-embedded from most gang activities; in some cases, research participants had non-zero levels of de-embeddedness, thus capturing grey areas of gang association that can come about through the process of gang exit.

of interviewees and the willingness of people to participate. Therefore, as is always the case with purposeful sampling, there is the chance that the people interviewed for this project are somehow different from other men and women on the Cape Flats, even others with similar histories of gang participation and drug use. To try to protect against such bias, every effort was made to include a diversity of perspectives in the research from the sources that were available: males and females, broad age groups, current and former members of different gangs, residents from various communities, as well as parents and friends of gang members, schoolteachers, social workers, members of local organisations working in gang prevention, academics and fellow researchers in South Africa, and others. When talking to gang members specifically, no concerted effort was made to formally stratify the sample, though considerations were made regarding age and gender. Research consciously sought female gang members, in order to explore the under-researched nature of female involvement in Cape Flats gangs. Gangs are typically the domain of the young, and the majority of this category of research participants were approximately 15-26 years of age[43]. But gangs contain all age groups, including the very young and the very old, although the older members may be less active (Standing 2003, 4). In particular, those that had already exited gangs tended to be older.

3.1.1 Life Histories

Life histories were used largely to conduct deep, exploratory research into the backgrounds of interview participants, so as to situate their experiences with gangs and violence in their individual narratives. As already noted, life histories were carried out in two stages. Four of the participants from the first stage were carried over to the second batch[44], with additional interviews conducted among this group to further probe their experiences with gang leaving. Participants in life history research were interviewed one to four times using a set research checklist; ten formal interviews and tens of informal discussions were carried out with Gavin. Life history discussions probed the childhood and youth experiences of each participant, focusing on early home life, experiences in school, relationships with peers and community environment, with a focus on his or her associations with prominent individuals in each person's life. As discussions progressed, they looked at participants' trajectory into gangs, connecting these to issues raised earlier. Importantly, interviewees were asked to reflect on how social relations and material

[43] Young South Africans are disproportionately at risk for violent offending and victimisation (Jefthas and Artz 2007, 37).

[44] Some participants that were not reengaged for research because they returned to gangs or criminality, had died or could not be located.

relations combined with personal choice to impact gang entry and participation. Detailing in-gang experiences focused on day-to-day experiences with violence. In this regard, participants were sometimes asked to detail memorable cases of violence, as well as instances where they could have acted violently but did not, which gave insight into the circumstantial interplay between structure and agency. The final stage of the interview process dealt with gang exit, looking at motivations for disengagement, agentic considerations that promoted gang exit, acquisition and application of non-gang social and cultural resources in non-gang roles, formal and informal assistance in this transition, challenges and threats to disengagement, concurrent desistence from violence, continued use of violence outside of gang membership, etc. For the second batch of life histories, especially, interviews were centred on out-of-gang transitions, with pre-gang and in-gang experiences providing context for these.

Let us recognise that while the life history interview just described is framed as a sequential process of 'checklisted' data gathering, in reality life histories were conversational and largely unscripted; indeed, the sensitive nature of the research requires a great degree of ease and candour to be effective. By the time one life history was completed, aspects of a research participant's life might have been discussed several times, yielding more information and nuance each time. Each elaboration added new insights and information, so that layered narratives could be built. Using this approach, research explored the biographical timeline of participants' lives in relation to individual movements into and out of gangs and violence, illuminating how personal changes are created and experienced. Change, after all, is the underpinning motivation of policy and programming aimed at gang violence prevention.

It should be further recognised that all stories are constructions. Through a retrospective approach, the study revisited the past through the lens of the present, which in its own ways can shapes and distort perceptions of the past. This is not to say that the life histories presented are not accurate reflections of events. Only that they are narratives mediated through a multiplicity of factors: the point in the narrator's life the story is asked for, who is listening, what questions they are asking, where the telling takes place and so forth. From the teller's point-of-view, memory can also be unreliable, consisting of fragments that are built up and repeated over time to create a story of self. Triangulation can be applied to try to overcome the limitations of memory. However, time constraints made it impossible to conduct interviews with family, or members of research participants' peer networks, as a way of verifying data. Informal vetting of data was done through organisational and peer networks that were familiar with participants. These were able to

provide additional contextual information and were an efficient way of verifying data from personal interviews.

From the researcher's perspective, there are biases as well. The researcher is always involved and implicated in the production of data. To begin with, any methodological orientation is invariably selective. Life histories are no exception. Even when carefully curated, the life history approach still retains biases that imply a linear model of biography, as the researcher shapes the stories that are told (Denzin 1989, 57). Narrative text freezes events and experiences into a rigid sequence, which suggests causality, negating ambiguities and possibilities that belong to life situations (Helling 1988, 240). Every effort was made to tease out those aspects of life, especially during attempts to exit gangs, which belie the consistencies of the neat upward trajectory often associated with stories of redemption. Even those that have 'successfully' disengaged from gangs are very much in the middle of their stories. As Taylor (1992, 46-47) says, "[t]he issue of our condition can never be exhausted for us by what we *are*, because we are always also changing and *becoming* [emphasis in original]". As they move towards an indefinite ending their everyday lives are animated by small steps forwards and backwards, rather than clear leaps towards a better future. Properly documenting his incremental path is not just a fairer representation of his experience but also a more accurate take on how social change can be reasonably expected to occur in the course of violence-prevention initiatives. Life histories offer a way to challenge outward reality and a means of stepping out of the moral universe of dominant societal hierarchies. It is a perspective akin to Jacobs' (1961, 14) sidewalk view of cities, which argues for a perspective on urban spaces that is organic and complex, and which is viewed from the perspective of how people behave in real life. As Vigil (2003, 238) argues, in interviewing gang members it is not large-scale surveys that count most, but rather the examination and appreciation of the detailed human complexities of this difficult-to-research population.

Life histories come with a number of important methodological advantages. Most notably, it is a method whereby personalized accounts of change can effectively be captured. The study of life histories has emerged as a tool for recovering hitherto ignored narratives and has "developed into a significant, theoretically dense, and diverse sub-set of historical and social-scientific enquiry" (Godfrey and Richardson 2004, 144). In particular, life histories can be used to highlight both alienation and agency, connecting these to research outcomes (Middleton 1993, 35). Life histories offer a complexification of the research context and a perspective that provides thick, enriched awareness rather than reductionism (Dhunpath and Samuel 2009, viii). The data they produce is connected to

overarching macro- and micro-processes; in discussing his or her particular life, a person is able to discuss not only his life but also the social, economic, and political spaces that people like him or her inhabit. In the analysis of poverty, for instance, life histories have been used to capture and communicate processes of change that can be used to map an individual's poverty trajectory and to identify the key drivers, maintainers, and interrupters linked to being poor (Ojermark 2007, 2). Such macro-micro connections are important to elaborating the intersection of agency and structure that is a central to Bourdieusian criminological analysis. The dynamic nature of life history analysis also helps to disentangle the interactive conscious and preconscious processes by which street practices and street habitus are made and re-made over time. It is significant also that applying a life history methodology frames gang disengagement and violence desistence in the context of both the antecedents and consequences of gang membership. Research shows that gang transitions – indeed all role transitions (Ebaugh 2013, 1) – necessarily take into account ex-roles in the establishment of new self-identities (Decker, Pyrooz, and Moule 2014, 268). Yet, most studies of gang members contain little information about the lives of gang members before or after their time in the gang (Thornberry et al. 2003, 4). In charting change, the life history can also be a post-modern challenge to the singular grand narrative, as life is actually made up of multiple and diverse "little narratives" (Gardner 2002, 28) that contest the stability the unified personal experience. Taking this approach can help avoid seductive assumptions about the linear and progression that often comes with the narrative accounting of life (Shacklock and Thorp 2004, 158), which can feed into positivist assumptions about criminality. The notion of a coherent story as a single, neat, unfolding trajectory through which a social actor acts consistently – and, for instance, can neatly categorized as criminal, deviant, or gangster – has already been challenged through life history methodologies (Denzin 1989, 29–30). Applying this method here, in this way, is fully in keeping with the dynamically contextualized street-based reading of gangs this study is participates in.

From all of the life histories considered, finally only Gavin's was constructed into something resembling a personal narrative, whereas aspects of other life histories are presented sporadically throughout this paper, as they fit the topics presented. Gavin was chosen as a research focus partly for his willingness to contribute to the study. His ability to articulate his experiences with Cape Flats gangs was also important in the choice to make him the central character in this study. His search for social and cultural resources in entering and exiting gangs is part of a generalisable process that other young men and women in his position must go through, even if he may have higher social and cultural

savvy than others do. Few efforts have been made, so far, to use life histories to document movement in and out of Cape Flats gangs. One example of this type of research is the study by Gould (2015), whose in-depth look at the lives of violent offenders focused on personal trajectories into criminality and, in particular, early life experiences. Perhaps the most well-known of the applications of life history research was that undertaken by Steinberg (2004b) who, through the life of a coloured man moving in and out of prison in the Western Cape, presents the longitudinal intersection of ritualised violence of prison gangs and Cape Town's racial inequality and economic marginalisation, and the mechanisms people use to mitigate these (Steinberg 2004b). In presenting the life of research participants involved in this study, this project positions itself next to these works, but focuses more deliberately on how people's moves away from gangs are connected to their relationship to violence and to society.

3.1.2 Other Interviews and Observation

As suggested above, non-life-history interviews, informal discussions, and observations were invaluable profiling social life and social spaces in Cape Town, and for comprehending the particularities of gang life on the Cape Flats. These methods were needed to inform subsequent life narrative research, and were a way of validating the findings of that research. It should be said also that interviews, discussions, and observations themselves offered usable research findings that were necessary to add context, nuance, and texture to life history analysis. In all, forty-three key informants participated in formal interviews outside of the life history method. Some were interviewed multiple times, while others only participated once. Interviews of this type were semi-structured, probing specific issues: female participation in gang violence, experiences with criminal justice, recruitment of children into gangs, the influence of hip-hop on gangs and gang violence, amongst others. Where the project shifted into community settings, research also shifted from a semi-structured interview format to one that was largely based on informal interactions and on-the-ground observations. Being in the field had the benefit of participating in the everyday social life of research communities, in a way that was unencumbered by checklists of questions, notes, and recording devices. Time spent in communities allowed for a better knowledge of participants' lived and felt experiences. Indeed, in-field interactions proved to be some of the most meaningful and insightful, suggesting that a formal interview process can be burdensome and may inhibit research conducted on topics of an illegal or hidden nature.

3.2 Putting the Research in Perspective

Taking into account the fraught territory of research on gangs and violence, a few words are necessary to clarify the ethical perspective taken. Experiences in the field quickly revealed that research of this type must be as embedded and personalised as possible. Obtaining deep, meaningful insights into gangs, and understanding their place in Cape Flats communities, invariably first required the development of trusting relationships with key informants. Repeatedly, it was found that a key informant who initially offered little in the way of useful information would eventually begin to be an excellent source of in-depth qualitative data. Thus, in studying topics as complex and hidden as gang violence, one must necessarily go beyond sterile researcher-subject relationships. As stated by Bourgois (2002, 12), formal social science research techniques cannot access with any precision people living underground, as most distrust outsiders and are loath to divulge deviant or delinquent experiences to a stranger with a research tool, "no matter how sensitive or friendly the interviewer may be". This is corroborated by Standing (2006, xi and 227-230), whose research on Cape gangs prompted him to quip that "people living and working on the Cape Flats are not willing to divulge sensitive and potentially dangerous information to strangers with clipboards". Actually, it is difficult for any stranger, no matter how unencumbered by research instruments, to fully appreciate the nuances of any socially constituted research topic. To the extent that outsider-ship can be overcome, it will be through a form of anthropological knowledge that could only be produced through significant interpersonal connections. As already noted, initial research relationships often carried over to community settings. It should become clear below, from writings about Gavin's life in particular, that such exchanges were participatory in nature and often involved meaningful relationships with research subjects and environments. This style of research participates and tries to find and give voice through its participation, rather than trying to disguise its intentions "behind the role of an invisible and omniscient third-person narrator" (Scheper-Hughes 1993, 25). For it is anthropologists, after all, within their participant-observation methods and their culturally relative awareness, that "can play an important role in fostering public debate over the human cost of poverty and racism, as well as nefarious forms of violence that reproduce inequality" (Bourgois 2011b, 307).

Anthropological research of this type necessitates a personal and contextual understanding of socialised investigation that is based on the willing suspension of moral belief. Moral conflicts inevitably arise when white men depict a non-white moral universe. As indicated by Bourdieu (2000, 233), it is "difficult to talk about the dominated in an accurate and realistic way without seeming either to crush them or exalt them". This

project cannot excuse or ignore the pernicious effects associated with the use of the street culture it studies. It can consider that the street practices described henceforth are not autonomously produced. Explanation is not justification. It is simply to acknowledge that the place of gangs in the Capetonian context, as well as the violent acts their members participate in, have a past, present, and future, as well as causes and consequences that cannot be separated from the lives of each of the city's almost-four-million residents (not only those living on the Cape Flats).

3.3 Analysing Data

This project approaches interpretations of primary and secondary data cautiously and does not claim to provide definitive answers to gang violence. It does, however, set out to add meaningful knowledge to street culture scholarship related to movements in and out of gangs and violence on the Cape Flats. Conclusions from research were drawn from the identification of generalisable continuities and patterns through the analysis of primary and secondary data, as well as discontinuities and exceptions. To mitigate the trappings of subjectivity potentially associated with life histories, narratives were contrasted and compared with each other, as well as other interviews and observations, in a reflexive effort to intersect and validate findings across the fieldwork. Within this process, the search for competing explanations and negative evidence was important to analysis procedures and implementing analytical controls (Firestone 1986, 10). Data was given meaning through *posteriori* coding and content analysis that identified key commonalities in responses between interviews and observations. The first phase of analysis involved working through transcripts, notes, and secondary data sources to find and identify "first cycle" (Saldaña 2009, 45-148) codes using NVivo 12. Codes were then grouped according to categories that served as basic organising ideas for research (Ryan 2006, 98-99). Another round of "second cycle coding" (Saldaña 2009, 149-184) organised codes and categories around an analytical strategy that connected codes (and sub-codes) to categories, which themselves went into higher-order themes that were in turn connected to theory. A theoretical model was developed by identifying interrelationships between codes (and sub-codes), categories, and themes via an analytical process that was informed by the principles of grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 3-21). The principles of grounded theory can be useful for move from descriptions of qualitative data towards theoretical models (Barker et al. 2002, 86). It has been used, for instance, to investigate how social structures, situations, and relationships produce patterns of behaviour, interactions, and interpretations, among marginalised groups (Tweed and Charmaz 2011, 134). It has specifically been applied to study the behavioural structures and modes of

perpetration used by violent perpetrators (Polaschek et al. 2009, 79-80); the composition and effects of prison gangs (Simon 2016, 223); and the relationships by which communities perceive and manage gangs (Stodolska et al,. 2009; 470–71).

In setting an initial research focus and outlining its theoretical parameters in an initial proposal, this research project required significant preparation in the lead up to fieldwork and data analysis. In this way, it violated the primary principle of grounded theory: that data is engaged by researchers without applying preconceived concepts. Considering this, it should be clarified that grounded theory was applied as a guide, rather than a rule, in order to help organise data analysis for the formulation of the theoretical system proposed in this paper. Considerable utility can still be found in applying an adapted version of grounded theory to help define what is happening in data, by using it as a method for comparing, sorting, and categorising fragments of data, as well as for mapping its continuities, discontinuities, and interrelationships (Tweed and Charmaz 2011, 136-137). In particular, grounded theory was useful in identifying and fusing the social processes by which gang participation and gang violence are structured, and then restructured as gang disengagement and desistence from violence. In modelling gang entry, participation and exit in this way, gangs and violence can be understood in their entirety: as an emergent personal characteristic that is produced through a combination of circumstance, individual choice, community development, and urban governance, as well as other national and global forces connected to street culture. From this perspective, both gangs and violence cease to be merely social objects or facts and become a truer representation of the multitude of forces that come together over time to influence violent and non-violent behaviour.

3.4 Conclusion

Life history research can provide important insights into the lives of marginal groups, though the extensive textual inscription of “lurid details of blood, aggression and gore” (Binford 2002, 211-212) can detract from historical and social critique. To avoid perpetuating underclass tropes, or those associated with a culture of violence, descriptions of violent behaviour, alienation, and social malaise are accompanied by analytical passages that locate provided narratives in their relationship to a more encompassing social order that conditions the choices available to the urban poor. Within this project, such writing endeavours to animate the research subjects as characters, relying on a highly narrative-based writing style that is meant to be engaging and descriptive, so as to convey in vivid detail the shape and texture of the lives of the people written about. The

style of presenting findings in this paper contrasts the impersonal way people are often presented in writings on violence: as perpetrators and victims that are the sum-total of violent incidents, or risk and protective factors. It constitutes a break from older literature that grew out of critical engagement with the apartheid regime, which tended to reify resistance to racial-, and class-based, oppression, and was blind to the inconsistencies and tensions within subaltern groups (Jefferson and Jensen 2005, 276). Offering a fuller, more fluid portrayal of gang life is in line with a movement towards exploring the everydayness of life on the Flats and in the city (see: Salo 2003; Badroodien 1999). The honesty and empathy inherent in writing in this way are a truer representation of life – a moral imperative, and one that can add a critical perspective to improving the critical conditions facing many gang-affected communities.

Narrative has the power to convey complex concepts and to humanise these same concepts. It is in the details of the personal account that one begins to appreciate the insidious influence brought about and sustained by violence. Therefore, where advantageous, the writing mimics that often applied in journalism to provide deep, individualised testimonials of how street life is manifested, understood, and experienced by the research participants. Even in the academy, the world is not fully rational place, and those parts of human life that at first glance are driven by thought, also mix with feeling. Lewis, Rodgers and Woolcock (25), for instance, examine the place of fiction within international development; development knowledge can be, and historically has been, seen as a series of stories (Lewis et al. 2005, 1). There is a need to infuse what we think with what we feel, because emotive language evokes meaning and produces a social reality that brings us closer to the felt experiences of others. Put simply, writing with emotion is necessary when writing academically about social phenomenon. In the end, the ethnographic endeavour is fundamentally a human project, in what is expressed and how it is expressed. Interview transcripts and field notes can never serve as impassive data points that evidence the purely academic, but are parts of an emergent and co-evolving method of “writing-thinking” whereby thoughts form themselves around data, with text making and remaking itself as the “movement of writing takes over” (St. Pierre 2017; 3). Ethnographic writing of this type itself can become a method of inquiry that produces practices that are both creative and analytical, achieving validity through crystallisation, rather than triangulation (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005, 960-963). A deeply intertwined writing process and writing product aids in reflecting externalities that refract within themselves different intellectual and emotional ideas, patterns, and expressions.

4 LIVING THE STREET LIFE

Although much of the analysis that follows will be focused on disengagement and desistance, this chapter will focus on experiences with gang life. In particular, this study will look at how gang-oriented practices associated with street habitus reproduce the street field, on one hand, as marginalised men and women struggle to survive on Cape Town's outskirts. Gangsters represent a commanding archetype that rebels against the structures of oppression, celebrating their own place on the fringes of society and even using this as a source of pride. They embody street repertoires, which demonstrate that violence is a valuable cultural resource that can be traded for personal and material empowerment in the street field. Analysis will also demonstrate how street virtuosos can destabilise and dominate the street field through acts of extreme violence and criminal skill. Their virtuosic challenges to the rules of the street unsettle it, reflecting the street field as a site of continuous struggle over what constitutes cultural and symbolic capital.

4.1 Capital Deficiencies

South Africa is one of the most economically unequal societies in the world (Income Gini Coefficient 2013). By non-monetary measures, such as ethnic, linguistic, and religious division, South Africa also ranks among the most fragmented (Alesina et al. 2003). More than half of South Africans have very limited cross-racial interaction, with coloured people being the least likely to interact with other racial groups (Hofmeyr and Govender 2015, 12-15). Cape Town is a microcosm of the national tendency towards inequality (UN-HABITAT 2010, 73). Most of the city's neighbourhoods are still mostly single-race communities. Apartheid is gone as a political system, though demographic and socioeconomic fragmentation in Cape Town is still entrenched in highly unequal sociospatial distributions of capital assets, policing, food security, and income. Such inequities obstruct access to the privileged spaces where capital is accumulated. Although only a short car ride seperates central Cape Town and the Cape Flats, they are worlds apart. For many Capetonians living in both settings there is little meaningful overlap between these worlds.

During apartheid, spatial segregation was intrinsic to the upholding of the order of a racist state. The perceived sacredness of white urban space required the distancing of non-whites from whites. The coloured population, especially, reminded "the Whites of what some of the Whites irrationally fear[ed] they might become, if distance and separation [were] not maintained by institutionalisation. Thus all non-white and mixed space near the city centre… [had to be] expunged" (Western 1997, 141-142). Today, these symbolic demarcations are still very much in place. The consequences of the segregated city were

made clear to me while visiting Hanover Park one day during research. I was surprised to find myself searched by police officers patrolling the area. They had come across me loitering in the court of a local council flat, where I was speaking to some of the community residents. At first, I could not understand the officers' reaction to my presence and was taken aback by the search – as most equally privileged white boys might be. In considering my position further, I quickly realised the officers' motivations and the underlying assumptions driving their action. Reminiscent of Bourgois' (2011, 302) experiences with persistent racial segregation in America's inner-cities, the only reason the police could see for a white boy to be in a non-white neighbourhood was to buy drugs. The implication is that coloured communities such as Hanover Park are reducible to drugs, gangs, and general criminality and that there are no appreciable characteristics beyond this.

One key informant, Gavin, with whom I spent considerable time and about whom I write at length in Chapter Six, is an embodiment of the sense of cultural dislocation that comes with leaving Cape Town's urban periphery and entering the out-of-bounds world of the city centre. His experiences are indicative of the practical and symbolic boundaries that separate these two. Gavin ascribes an almost mythical significance to the city centre, often referencing it with a sense of awe. As a Cape Flats rapper trying to make a career, he invariably describes Cape Town with phrases like "the city", "big-time", and "making it". His exclamations represent the larger significance that central Cape Town holds for many that are excluded from the city's CBD and the mostly white suburbs it connects to. The esteem in which "the city" is held is directly proportional to the exclusion felt by those whose lives are penned in by its invisible boundaries.

The following vignette is instructive in this regard. It starts with Gavin making a trip to Table View. He was required to make this trip for a job interview set up through the Ceasefire project. As an administrative error left him with insufficient funds for the return taxi trip, Gavin was forced to find his own way back home. After exhausting his phone battery, he walked almost 20 kilometres in the February heat to Rosebank, where I was living at the time. It was the only place he could think of to go to along the way back to Camp Joy in Strandfontein. When he finally reached me, Gavin chronicled his many attempts to "hustle" his way out of the predicament he was in: trying to charge his phone at local businesses, asking for money, or soliciting the use of people's phones. In the end, he conceded:

> I don't know the place bro. It's the city. If I'm at home, I know the hustle. [But in Table View] nobody would help me. And I was even wearing these [professional] clothes and acting proper. But, fuck bro, nobody would help. So, I just kept walking.

Later on, he suggested that the story would have ended much differently if he had still been with his former gang, the Mongrels: "if I was [in Table View] for drugs or guns, I phone somebody and have a car in thirty minutes. But, like this, I'm on my own". Gavin's story indicates the barriers that many coloured people face when traveling outside of the Cape Flats. Their experiences are dictated by the prejudiced preconception of others, and the type of economic and cultural dislocation that also finds its roots in racism. The story is also indicative of the calculation gang members are forced to make when exiting gang life. It is a very real trade-off of the money, power, and respect he dominated in a cultural context, for an empty bank account, personal disempowerment, insecurity, and social and cultural dislocation.

The dislocation Gavin felt is not abnormal. It is the rule. As evidence, let me offer one more example. This story is striking in its similarity to an account given by Jensen (2008) during a visit he made to the Victoria and Alfred (V&A) Waterfront with a group of youngsters from Heideveld. The V&A is one of Cape Town's biggest tourist attractions and busiest shopping malls. During my own trip there, I went with a couple of the Laughing Boys from Hanover Park. Upon arriving, I suggested that they browse the shopping centre while I tended to the various errands that were the purpose of my trip. They were eager to browse the impressive displays of *takkies*[45], name brand clothing, electronics, and other consumables, and quickly agreed. To my surprise, within ten minutes they had returned to the post office where they had left me. Instead of delighting in the V&A's consumerist kaleidoscope, like any other young person, they preferred to accompany my administrative drudgery. The reason: they could not walk into any story without security harassing them. The black and coloured male causes anxiety and suspicion in 'white spaces', and young men of colour need to prove themselves as safe in order to avoid being met with suspicion (Lindegaard 2018, 218). As vilified outsiders, their presence needed the validation of a white companion before these young coloured men could be accepted as anything other than a security threat. What is curious is the passive resignation with which these supposed criminals accepted their fate. Their reaction is noteworthy. It is a complete contradiction to the supposedly inherent criminality of those labelled as '*skollies*', as well a

[45] Sneakers or trainers

pacified reaction that seems incongruent with the considerable closeted skeletons I am well aware that each has from his time with the Laughing Boys, which indicate a willingness to act violently that was for some reason repressed. The reason the boys chose non-violence in this circumstance has everything to do with where violence can be legitimately used and who are considered its legitimate targets.

Jensen's (2008) story has illuminating parallels to mine. He too recounts the unease felt by the Heideveld group in encroaching on a setting their coloured bodies apparently did not fit into. In his opinion, rather than engaging with or challenging the "white gaze" (Jensen 2008, 53-54), many coloureds shied away from such interactions. However, the relationship between Cape Town's predominately white urban centre and the coloured urban periphery is more nuanced than he suggests. As he suggests, the sense of cultural discomfort and dislocation felt by those coloureds stepping into this space is palpable. The outing revealed the harsh restrictions and territorial boundedness of neo-apartheid. Yet, as imposing as the V&A is, it also possesses a magnetism, which is given force by the promised proximity to privilege that comes with visiting "the city". Accessing the Waterfront is metonymic to accessing those spaces of Cape Town that are restricted from the majority of its non-white, non-monied inhabitants. I fail to think of a single instance where a trip to town was declined. There is an unmistakeable yearning to occupy, and participate in, such spheres. To do so equates to a symbolic liberation that is otherwise unavailable. Those Cape Flats residents that accept the city centre as their aspirational referent assume ideas and values that reinforce their own subjugation. The reverence expressed by Gavin, deferentially, symbolically positions him outside of the sense of urban citizenship that access to the City Bowl signifies. In that sense, he is perhaps complicit in further strengthening the "symbolic order" (Burawoy and Holdt 2012, 67) that normalises the violent oppression of dominant social hierarchies, and keeps him (and those like him) trapped in unending deprivation and insecurity.

4.2 Seeking Street Capital

We have seen, then, how Cape Town's sociospatial segregation limits the number and types of cultural resources available to those living in economically and socially excluded townships. Denied access to the mainstream Capetonian society, and its stores of social, economic, and social capital, may turn people to the street culture. The preceding chapter has already shown the ways that different street moves are used in ghettos, favelas, barrios, and other places around the world (E. Anderson 1998; Bourgois 2002; Fraser 2015; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991; Sandberg and Pedersen 2011; J. D. Vigil 1988a). In

Cape Town as well, it was noted how gangs are an organisational and behavioural adaptation to conditions of economic austerity, social marginalisation, state neglect, and insecurity. The gang fills vacuums in governance and development (Standing 2006, 237); for those that join them, they are a source of dignity amid disempowerment (Jensen 2008, 91-96), protection amid insecurity (Jensen 2006, 277), income amid poverty and inequality (Samara 2011, 99-100), and a means towards masculine pride (Cooper 2009; 2).

Violence, in particular, is a demonstrable means of achieving power and respect (Pinnock 2016a, 200), which fits the frame of general scholarship on street culture. While there has been some writing on the use of gang repertoires in the Capetonian context as a way of surviving violence, racism, and other marginalisations (Lindegaard 2018, 21), this topic commands more detailed and systematic investigation. Looking further into how street repertoires are composed can provide a fuller knowledge of street capital in the context of the Cape Flats. Also, examining how street repertoires are developed and applied can offer additional insights into what they are and how violence is specifically used as a form of street capital. This direction of investigation will also show how extreme forms of virtuosic violence can be applied to destabilise and dominate the street field. Such an exercise will also contextualise subsequent research, offering a jumping off point for appreciating the ways the street field is created and recreated through the incessant struggle for the social, economic, and cultural capital available to those living on Cape Town's urban margins. Gangsters use street speech, street fashion, and street acts to mark their territory in a power contest against other gangsters in the social field of the streets. Research shows that street capital can be found in cultural repertoire that embodies the following: speech, dress, and actions. Firstly, speaking street indicates an intricate knowledge of *Sabela*[46] and the number. Secondly, dressing street projects a street-style often defined by baggy clothes and punctuated by name brand clothing and *takkies*, as well as flashy jewellery. Finally, acting street necessitates building a reputation for violence by acting impulsively, fearlessly and aggressively in the streets, and doing the same within prison to attain a high rank in the number. Actions that yield considerable criminal profits are also valorised by gangs. The following sections elaborate how street capital is accumulated and used on the Cape Flats.

4.2.1 Speaking Street

Pinnock (1997, 33) suggests that "language is one of the most distinctive features of gang disposition". Along with the valorisation of violence, gang repertoires are associated with a

[46] A prison language that mixes Afrikaans, English, Xhosa, and Zulu.

certain style of expressing language based in prison language and Cape Flats slang, as well as the associated use of certain signs and hand signals (Lindegaard and Zimmermann 2017, 202). These expressions of Cape Flats street style are embedded in a repertoire of narratives about violence, drug trade, drug experiences and tough upbringings; linked ways of storytelling are deeply ingrained through the street field that the gang members exist in (Sandberg and Fleetwood 2017). Speaking street or telling stories about successful criminal activity and fights is a way to display competence and skill and earn street capital. The spoken part of the street repertoire has an intense appeal to those that are socially and economically marginalised, even the very young:

> "They are hitmen [and] powerful…they can come to your house and shoot you – dah, dah", claims [a young man], while shooting his hands like guns, as he takes on the exaggerated swagger of a gangster. (Dziewanski 2016)

He is the product of an aborted recruitment attempt that started when he was just ten years old. Shortly after his recruitment began, he was keen to imitate the mannerisms and speech of those around him, as the following excerpt shows:

> [An older gang member] speaks to [the boy] in prison language to demonstrate what he has learned. In response, and to the laughter of the adults around him, [he] raises his arms, with his index and middle fingers pointed and thumbs extended in the 28s salute, shouting "*son af*". The phrase means "sunset" – a key symbol of the gang, which operates in prison by night. [He] is keen to imitate the mannerisms and speech of those around him, and is particularly fascinated with *Sabela* [emphasis added]. (Dziewanski 2014)

Speaking street is both a cause and consequence of gangsterism. Those conveying street narratives are not only giving an account of the streets, but they are also showing how streetwise men and women ought to behave (Jimerson and Oware 2006, 22). Youth, like the one presented above, are in awe of gang leaders and seek to reproduce the mannerisms, language, and symbols associated with gang life. The powerful mythology of prison gangs is especially appealing. This is particularly true as historical distinctions between street and prison gang life have blurred, bringing the number into the street. In an article commenting on youth reaction to the film *Four Corners* – and depicting gang life in and outside prison walls – a senior South African Police Service (SAPS) officer expressed great concern over youth reactions to the film (*IOL News* 2014). These reactions ranged from awestruck fascination with the mystique of *Sabela*, and the discipline of the number as they see it in the movie, to taking sides with their favourite characters – the 26 street

gang leader and 28 general. I saw such reactions play out first-hand during fieldwork when the film was released. So it is that, both outside and inside of prison, violence, and its adjoining rituals have become embodied in repertoires of gangsterism as valued sources of cultural capital.

The intricacies of speaking gangster are perhaps most apparent when juxtaposed with conversations in normal life, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters. But for now, it is simply enough to highlight the ways in which street speech connects the violent threat and the violent attack, which are a way of securing respect and protection. William (Manenberg male, 32 years) describes how his mode of speaking changed when he was being recruited into the Hard Livings. He notes that introduction of violence into his world as an inflection point in his speech patterns:

> William: There were a couple of times that we were in fights. I was physically attacked, you see. So my character changed a lot. Because the way I start to speak, I speak like a gangster now. So people start to see: "hey, this guy is now really a gangster".
>
> DD: So, how do gangsters speak?
>
> William: They speak like: "*hoss salute my bru, wat se jy*"[47]. So, that is the way they speak and you can identify that is a gangster…They speak in a more aggressive way.

For William, joining the gang is explicitly linked to violence, which is in turn necessitates changes in his character that result from a more truculent expression of self. This includes becoming more bellicose in the way he talks. But his is a particular form of bellicosity that is identifiable to others as signifying who is, and who is not, gangster. With this, it also signifies who is to be feared and respected, as William notes:

> William: It was mostly something to protect me on the street. So, that was the most times I use to speak like that.
>
> DD: How does it protect you?
>
> William: It shows [other people] don't try your luck, because I know what I'm talking about, and I have the *chappie.*[48] So, that is also how they would identify you, in the Hard Livings. So [others in the community] they would hear, and

[47] A gang greeting

[48] Tattoo

constantly speak of the gang, and that is what would bring sort of a fear in them, you see.

The not-so-subtle subtext of what he is communicating to the world is that he is not to be messed with because he is a violent gangster. Speech, action, and presumably dress are taken to be part of a singular street repertoire. The way he talks is combined with his other street actions to construct a gang persona that he says can "protect him on the street". The lexicon of gangsterism marks language as a tattoo marks his body, with both identifying his street affiliation. Speaking (and being) gangster is then itself spoken about in the community, further solidifying gang roles and reputations through stories and gossip.

However, playing the gangster is not necessarily inherent to taking on the role. In this case, learning the character means learning his lines. This occurs over time, through a dialectical process of inculcation, through which ways of speaking, thinking, and acting become dispositioned:

> William: For some time, you're speaking a particular way, and before you know it, it's you like that. You obviously have to learn the slang, the way [gangsters] speak. So it develops from a time. So [when in the gang] I couldn't speak normal like now, because I was just in that language.
>
> DD: You couldn't speak normal to the gang, or to anybody?
>
> William: To my family I wouldn't speak like that. But if they made me cross, then I would, yeah. But mostly on the streets, that was the most time I used that language… it is where you must be more aggressive.

When he was in the street, Andre (Manenberg male, 21 years) was also "just in that language". Speaking street was simply a necessary part of his immersive gang performance. Eventually, speaking gangster became a part of a street disposition that is called upon as an antagonistic offshoot of street habitus in times of conflict. But it is not all encompassing. Switching social fields – by moving from the street into the home, for example – softens even the gangster's demeanour. For a period of time, he becomes again the son and brother, when with his family. Still, even with them, he can be pulled back into the street, by habitually reacting with anger and aggression when he says he was "crossed". Thus, violent words and violent actions are inextricably interlinked in a singular street repertoire.

On the Cape Flats, a key part of that repertoire is knowing the number and speaking *Sabela*. On a very basic level, joining the number offers a prisoner protection against other

inmates (Steinberg 2004a, n.p.). But the number can also be a key source of power in the gang world. Let us take Ryan (Mitchells Plain male, 33 years) as an example of this. During his many years with the Americans and 28s he acquired considerable street capital by skilfully mastering the language and myths of the number:

> While I was in prison I was busy with my number stuff. Because for the three years in prison, I went through levels in the number. I came to a level where I just gave orders and I enjoyed it. I just sat back and then, as I was busy with my stuff, smuggling in prison.

So, joining the number, and moving up its ranks, was a way of increasing his status in prison and gaining power. By embracing prison culture he was able adapt to and thrive in the extremely hostile environment of the South African prison. Perhaps more interesting though is how he adapted prison culture itself through skilful and creative applications of the number myth:

> In prison it's all about the number. You can show a big person so small with the number. You can even be higher than me in the number, but I know more and that makes me more powerful than you by the number. There is nothing I don't know about the number. I made it my mission to know everything – 26, 27, 28 – I had friends who were other numbers.

Using connections to members of other prison gangs he studied the entirety of the number. Because gangs are all about the number he was even able to use a virtuoso knowledge of its myth, symbols, and rules to manipulate and dominate other gangsters. As with all forms of culture and myth, the number is less a single story than it is a set of practices that one enacts and adapts (Pinnock 2016b, 935). Ability to do so can yield considerable street capital. Though separate physical spaces, the sandy dunes of the Cape Flats connect to the four corners of South Africa's prison system through street culture. Many of those involved in gangs see prison as a rite of passage, and are eager to enhance their street credibility by taking a number and engaging in a prison culture; this mirrors and reinforces the values and codes of the streets (Samara 2011, 187-188). Although prison gangs used to be considered strictly prison business, the walls separating them from the street were broken down by rich and powerful drug merchants that bought their way into the number (Pinnock 2016a, 112). By the 1990s, parts of the number's recruitment practices, rank, and structure began to be applied, albeit in a diluted form, by street gangs like the Americans (Steinberg 2004b, 81). This street-oriented transmogrification of the number is itself an indication of the creative ways that street

culture, or culture in general, can be transposed and transformed. Just as the number mythology has been through the years creatively applied in the streets, subverting the hold of prison gangs, those prisoners with exceptional knowledge of the number can use it to subvert the structures and ranks of the prison gang itself. In this way, street culture is best seen as a force – not a thing – that is premised on dynamism and fluidity rather than stasis and firmness (Fraser 2015, 47). We will see further towards the end of this chapter the ways that street virtuosos are able to mix the number, with acts of extreme violence and criminal cunning, to destabilise the rules of street culture in a way that allows them to rule the streets.

4.2.2 Dressing Street

While the focus of this chapter is embodied cultural capital, the appeal of street style, as a form of objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 47), cannot be discounted in the context of gangs or the communities they control. Taahir (Manenberg male, 26 years), for instance, indicated that despite growing up without material need, he still aspired to join the Hard Livings. Getting into gangs is more than a reaction to poverty. His experiences indicate the ways that the multiple marginalisations of economic hardship, personal, and collective insecurity and social disempowerment intersect to bring about street culture, and how that culture is embodied in styles of dress and action:

> DD: So when, you said at age twelve you joined the gang. Can you speak about why that played out?
>
> Taahir: Yeah, first it was Staggie – Rashied Staggie. Everybody knows him. I think he's known [all] over the world…Yes, so I used to look at him. I got everything growing up as a child, you know, even though I grew up in an abusive home. My father is a teacher, you know, and he had his own businesses. I got everything material wise… But I always wanted more and the Hard Livings at the time were known as the most notorious gang everybody feared them and there was a lot of girls that admired them and that is what I wanted… They had the same tracksuits, and wore the same stuff, and had guns and money, and had the most beautiful women.

Growing up in an abusive home generates a desire for the sense of security, belonging, and affirmation that can be found in the gang (Ward and Bakhuis 2010, 55). That Taahir notes the matching tracksuits of the Hard Livings signifies the want of belonging and brotherhood, as much as a desire for power and profits. But, of course, being powerful and

rich (like Rashied Staggie[49]) is also hugely appealing to Taahir. Gang membership is, in turn, tied up in manners of speech and action, as well as the objectified cultural capital associated with the way that gangsters dress. Over the years, the gangster has come to represent a folk hero and a model for future success. Rags-to-riches stories of the local-boy-turned-kingpin dominate what it means to be empowered, with popularised narratives of criminal elites rising to power that emphasise "acts of excessive violence…Yet they are also frequently seen as men with a special intellect… All, without exception, have spent time in prison and are members of the country's infamous prison gangs" (Standing 2003, 3). The gangster is a type of anti-hero that stands out in the dramatic setting of the Cape Flats. By looking up to them, and trying to be them, young people attempt to move beyond their personal subjugation by finding release in the cultural capital these role models characterise. Cultural capital becomes a coveted object of struggle and a valued social resource, which become embodied by members of gangs such as the Hard Livings, or the Americans, Laughing Boys, and Mongrels; these fashion a behavioural blueprint for oppositional street culture for others (Bourgois 2011b, 303).

The appeal of street style cannot be divorced from the exclusionary structural and symbolic configurations of Capetonian society. Speaking of gang violence in his Cape Flats neighbourhood, Taahir says:

> Yes, [gang violence] is an everyday thing [in Manenberg]. There are a lot of times you and your friends walk and one gets shot. It's not such a big thing like it would be for other areas – rich areas. There it will be in the news and newspapers and everything, but here it is an everyday thing… Here things are harder for you growing up. Just to prevent [being targeted], it's part of a survival thing you…you grow up and become a gangster.

Taahir views violence as normal in Manenberg, juxtaposing its ubiquity there with an absence of violent crime in rich areas. The implication is, of course, that the violent behaviour is not only highly localised, but also more acceptable in some places. The unequal distribution of normalised insecurity further points to the unfair distribution of citizenship and agency throughout Cape Town.

In joining the Hard Livings he gains agency through the local and non-local cultural resources availed to him. He may not be a citizen in the larger symbolic order of Cape

[49] Rashied Staggie is an infamous leader of the Hard Livings. He and his twin brother Rashaad were known, for example, for driving through Manenberg and littering the streets with tens of thousands of rands (Kinnes 2000).

Town, but his has considerable power in Manenberg. That power is accumulated and presented as part of a public performance, which includes his clothing, demeanour, associations, reputation, and way of moving. Denied participation in mainstream society, Cape Flats gangsters turn the city's exclusionary order on its head, re-ascribing oppression as a means of achieving the personhood previously denied (Pinnock 2016; 161). Street styles and moves found on the Cape Flats are reminiscent of the "Shine-ism" of American hip-hip, which denotes "in-your-face examples of black masculinity and excess that frightens the mainstream, exploiting its fears and simultaneously challenging the economic disenfranchisement plaguing American communities" (Perry 2004, 29). It represents perseverance and overcoming life's hardships, and celebrating this through aggressive defiance and a brash profligacy that appropriates of the metrics of financial achievement. Similarly, in places like the Cape Flats, the fancy cars, jewellery, and designer clothing that typically signify the white establishment, are infused into hip-hop culture that emanates from the streets (Pieterse 2010, 439).

Specific street styles can also be infused into the identities for particular gangs, as was noted of the Americans earlier in this section. Emmanuel (Athlone male, 24 years) similarly indicates the ways in which clothes are essential to being a Playboy: "we're use to like wearing Nike clothes and going to GrandWest [Casino and Entertainment World], getting nice chicks and that stuff, with this *chappie*". In this case, clothing brands demarcated a gang's identity through its style, doing so in opposition to the style and identity of the Playboys' rivals, the Stupa Boys:

> Emmanuel: The Playboys stands for players and style.
>
> D: So what was their style like?
>
> Emmanuel: It was just Nike tracksuits, Nike *takkies,* and Nike caps – all Nike. The Stupas [an opposing gang], they wear Diamond jerseys and jeans.

Fashion objects have an important place role in establishing social self-image. Tracksuits, sneakers, hats, and other the other style accessories can be used to brand a person either a Playboy or a Stupa. Mobilising around visual representation of collectivity serves to differentiate one gang from another. The Americans gang, for instance, clothes itself in various symbols, borrowing, and transforming existing devices and icons: the United States flag is a symbol of the American nation, and the gang's territory is defined as "America" (Pinnock 1997, 38-42). Excluded from the state the gang members live in, the gang has created its own. Street styles and practices are interpretable as a voluntary separation from polite Capetonian society (Jensen 2008, 95). The Americans' aspirations

towards a 'land of opportunity' are given symbolic significance through their street style, which projects a refusal to take part in a society that has shunned them as outcasts. A style, admittedly, is not a solution. Dressing and talking in a particular way do not mount its protest on the real terrain where socioeconomic contradictions themselves arise (Clarke 2006, 160-161). Signalling opposition may feel empowering, but domination is still maintained through a symbolic order that controls, and works, through society's major institutions. Indeed, dressing like gangsters only reinforces domination, by further differentiating and removing oneself from the dominant society. As a part of an approach to policing gangs, for example, identifying people based on the fact that they wear name brand clothes, baggy jeans, and the like is also hugely stigmatising, and potentially criminalising (Standing 2006, 104).

Even at the cost of greater marginalisation, people still seek empowerment through street repertoires. It is perhaps an indication of the dire decisions many in Cape Town face, and why the symbols of gangsterism resonate both inside and outside of the gang. In a single walk through a Cape Flats community, or even through Cape Town's CBD, one constantly encounters American flags – as well as the competing British emblem – on shirts, hats, and pants[50]. Thus, symbols of gangsterism become symbols of community, and collective (though symbolic) opposition to oppression. Language, manner of speaking and fashion of gangs are, according to Anderson (1998, 83), part of an oppositional "campaign for respect". One way of campaigning for respect is by robbing others of their possessions. Attaining the accessories of success through the style of violence is a way of equalising material and symbolic power imbalances. As Emmanuel explains:

> I would maybe get this guy in the club, and see his *takkies* and tell myself: "look, he got pair of ZAR 3 000 *takkies*, and I got a ZAR 200 pair of *takkies* on. He is rich, and his mommy will by him another pair tomorrow"…So I would take that pair [he had] and I would tell him: "here, you can have my *takkies",* and then I would wear [his] home… If he wouldn't want to give it, there would be hell.

He was one of a handful of gang members I encountered who spent significant time outside of Cape Flats communities. The quip above was the follow up response to a question I asked him regarding his experiences and feelings outside, in the social field of mainstream Cape Town:

[50] Gangs organise under two competing flags: American and British.

DD: It's a different space; you don't have just poor or working-class people, but also middle and upper class people, and different races. I mean, did any of that affect you?

Emmanuel: It did affect me. It made me do things like take peoples' clothes – or take off their *takkies*.

Style, violence, and structure are clearly connected. Structurally excluded from the mainstream, and unable to otherwise attain the objects that socially signal success, Emmanuel robs the rich. His use of violence is clearly functional, in that he goes home in an expensive pair of new *takkies*. But in doing so he also, for a moment, upends the symbolic order that marginalises him and prevents him from earning an income and buying his *takkies* in a store. Anderson (1998) suggests that, for disempowered individuals campaigning for status, "seemingly ordinary objects can become trophies with symbolic value far beyond their monetary worth. Possessing the trophy can symbolise the ability to violate somebody" (E. Anderson 1998, 90). A person who can take something from another gains power over that person, by becoming the new owner, or controller, of that thing. While taking from another poor coloured person may be an acquisition of goods and power from that person alone, Emmanuel's act is specifically linked to, and justified by, the symbolic order of Capetonian society. As a poor coloured man in a white affluent space, he has little agency or mainstream cultural capital. But as a violent gangster in the same space, for a short period at least, he can control it and benefit from it.

4.2.3 Acting Street

Street life comes with costs: prison, injury, and death. But 'acting street' can also have important social and material payoffs. There are material benefits, such as money and drugs received for carrying out hits. Also, there is the sense of belonging and protection that a gang provides. Among the most alluring elements of gang life are prestige and power. Frequency and ferocity of violence make up the path towards a type of community celebrity or, at least, infamy. Reputations are pursued and made through the proximity to violence, and having one's name ring out means 'street fame'. Participation in violent acts is actively sought as a way of attaining respect. As put by one infamous hitman: "I didn't do it for the money, I did it for fame and to be recognised and feared by people" (Valentine 2015). The truth is that hitmen can earn considerable sums of money and drugs for carrying out killings. So, in addition to the social benefits one can amass through repeated violent acts, gang violence has considerable material benefits.

Marcus (Hanover Park male, 25 years) joined the Americans at eleven years old. He has known the power of acting street for most of his life, and was socialised into the street through his family: “all my family…were deep in the gang. I played with the guns, and that stuff. I was really fascinated. I became a hitman through that. I just wanted a gun in my hand”. He says that he built a reputation for killing with the Americans brought him significant power and respect, as well as considerable material benefits: “reputation is like money. So, I had three cars in my life already [due to my own violent reputation]. When I was very young, fifteen years old… I had a car, my own house, girls”. It is hard to imagine that such a life would not be appealing to a fifteen-year-old that was socialised into the street life from his earliest years. Marcus recalls laughing at his schoolmates for wanting to pursue prestigious careers in formal professions. As he explains: “I was like, it’s fantasy. They’re watching too much TV… Where do you get lawyers and stuff in Hanover Park?”

Through the influence of his family, he thinks it was impossible for him to become anything positive at that time. Instead, he was receiving a street education: “I come out of school they would say: ‘hey, this is the next generation, salute the big boy!’ The Americans and my cousins would do that to me”. Thus, he was dispositioned into the street life. As with any aptitude, learning violence and earning the rewards it offers takes time. Street skills and street capital are accumulated gradually. Getting into gangs may initially be explained through a process of experimentation, through which people try on the identity of a gang member. Marcus’s experiences, however, indicate that becoming violent and being known for the violence requires dedicated effort that comes about through an interactional process of separate violent encounters: “you work through people to learn gangsterism. So, I was taught also… There’s a lot of ranks in the gang. I started as a soldier, I worked myself up with blood and that’s how people looked at me afterwards”. Gangsterism becomes part of a street habitus that is learned and internalised. Throughout his youth, Marcus was learning and “trying on” (Brenneman 2011, 67) street repertoires. After he became a hitman, he gained a reputation for being fearless and violent. But much of the project of becoming violent occurs through projecting violence repeatedly, sometimes at great personal cost. He explains that he was “unfairly” sentenced to solitary confinement for fourteen days:

> When I came out, it was breakfast – the morning. You know how the warders treat the prisoners. Me, you can’t treat me like you want to. I have a reputation that I must maintain here. Whatever you going to do [to me], I’m going to [do to] you… I grabbed this spoon, hit him in the head so there was blood. So the

> *ouens*[51] saw it, and that was on my records in the [26] gang. The warder's ranks were placed on me.

He was beaten so viciously his eyesight was affected for some time after the incident. But receiving such a beating is a response that prison gangsters both expect and are expected to bear (Steinberg 2004). From the perspective of somebody not in gang life, the question becomes: why would an individual subject themselves to such punishment for the sake of something as intangible as reputation? As we have already seen, in the street field, having a reputation has very real consequences and benefits. Marcus believes that "if you're a gangster and you do not have a [violent] reputation, you will be like a small child. They're going to push you around".

Others that have conducted similar research in Cape Town have also noted that proving oneself through past violence can help a person avoid trouble in the present (Lindegaard 2018, 203). Reserves of street capital are accumulated in time and can be cashed in to provide credibility on the street. However, the street credibility that gang members like Marcus take so much care to hone can proved to be double-edged. Young people living on the Cape Flats, who position themselves towards violence, are highly at risk of both violent offending and victimisation (Lindegaard and Zimmermann 2017, 205). As Marcus indicated, the protective function of street cred is as tangible as having a gun in your hand, but having a violent reputation also makes you more likely to be a target of violent acts:

> It protects you, and it makes it dangerous for you. Even if I come down the road and I don't have a gun on me, they'll still think I have a gun on me. Because they know this is a guy that shoots every day… But [on the other hand] what people spoke about me, it's going to automatically trigger to them. When they see me in gang fighting, then this person's going [to] shoot me.

One interpretation of a personal disposition occupied by shooting everyday, is that it indicates a deeply disturbed anti-social personality. Another is that it is a performance of "good public relations" (Bourgois 2011, 302-303), crucial for credibility in the context of urban street culture, rather than the actions of a dysfunctional antisocial psychopath. From this perspective, the violent character of the gangster is not character, but a rather *a character*. There existed a tension among many interviewees between their non-gang selves and the gang personas that embodied the characteristics of a street self. As we will see below, many key informants differentiate their gang and non-gang persona by referring to a nickname that for them embodies the dispositions of the streets. Numerous

[51] The guys

others described their street act as the playing of a character, or the wearing of a mask. Marcus says, for instance:

> If I could just take that mask off, and just be what I feel and follow [that]. I could have been a much more better person…There's different kind of masks. You know by the gangster, it's: lie, cheat, and steal. That was me all the time.

It would seem that, once one puts on a mask, it is difficult to see the world without it. Eventually, the individual internalises the street disposition, accumulating behavioural patterns through interactions that are repeated in the long-run. The street characters inculcated through one's past must be decompositioned. In their place, new non-street characters must be made:

> I was now building a [new] character, and like proving everyone in the gang also like this guy, he is really done… But they *sommer* going to say and do things to get you angry, and stuff. Now I'm like going to pull up and want to fight against what they're doing. Because now that's also something I need to work out: the anger, how to control it. It just happens, you just snap.

Having issues with anger or temper was mentioned by many key informants as a lasting side-effect of street life, especially in the initial stages of out-of-gang transitions. Here we find interesting overlaps with the field of behavioural psychology, which is useful in articulating the cognitive processes that are connected to the structured sociology of our model. Individuals will do those things that solve their problems and advance their goals. The strategies they use depend on information taken in from the world around them. Repertories that are found to be useful for solving personal or social problems will repeated, forming mental models that could be applied to similar problems in the future (Bandura 1978, 141-142). Cognitive shortcuts like these play a crucial role in the automating of behavioural repertoires (Bicchieri 2005, 93-99). Researchers in the United States have found that, if a violent repertoire is called up frequently to deal with conflict, it will result in an automatic[52] tendency to instinctively push back aggressively against any interpersonal challenge – even in non-street spaces like schools or the workplace (Bargh et al. 1996, 240).

Before continuing on, let us note a few other interesting overlaps between the psychological field and the story this paper is telling. Psychologists have indicated that the

[52] Such "automaticity" (Heller et al. 2015, 6) results from reflexive responses to commonly faced situations, making decision-making more efficient.

abstract cognitive representations in the mind includes not only the behavioural repertoires, but the outcome that might be expected if the behaviour is performed, the person's perception of his or her own self-efficacy, and standards for evaluating his or her behaviour (Grusec 1992, 781). In other words, the embodied elements of the learned environment leave space for agency. Even deeply-ingrained behavioural responses are not totally automatic, but are a combination of automaticity and personal decision-making (Bargh 2014, 3). Further, it is important to highlight that people not only learn from their environment, but their behaviour elicits reactions from the environment through an interactive co-evolutionary relationship agent and environment that psychologists have termed "reciprocal determinism" (Albert Bandura 1978a, 345). In South Africa, such processes have been used to explain aggression in youth. For instance, a young person whose belligerence is unacceptable to a peer group will be rejected, finding acceptance in a more aggressive group and reinforcing both his or her own violent behaviour and that of the new peer group (Ward 2007b, 11). We can see even from this small example how divisions in society might be reinforced through the aggregation of violent aggression around street culture. But we can also see what connections may exist between the cognitive, to the social, to the structural, in line with a conception of the world in which "social universes in which relations of domination are made, unmade, and remade in and by the interactions between persons and, on the other hand, social formations in which are mediated by objective, institutionalised mechanisms" (Bourdieu 1977, 184).

Exclusionary social formations drive gang members onto the streets. Once there, a gangster must adhere to the logic of the street, acting and reacting appropriately. The appropriateness of street action seem counterproductive or absurd from the perspective of the outside observer, or even criminal when viewed through the lens of criminal justice institutions. The rational relativity of the street field must be accounted for. We find evidence of it in the life experiences of Ruan (Lavender Hill, 34 years), a long-time Corner Boy who, at the time of the following vignette, was in court answering for multiple cases he caught through his street dealings:

> I got called up… and the judge told me: "give me a reason why I shouldn't send you to prison"… And I was like: "I don't give a fuck, do what you want to"… And she was like: "if that's your attitude, you're going to Pollsmoor".

Caught between acting decent and acting street, he chose the latter; that he did so seemingly in spite of himself, or at least in spite of that part of him that was not dispositioned towards the street life, is an indication of the precognitive forces of street

habitus. As he explains, “I walked back down to the cells and I was knocking my head against the wall thinking: ‘couldn’t you just have been like decent for once?’”.

But this is more than a simple expression of “negative cultural capital” (J. D. Barker 2013, 361). Although he does have desire to the “decent” middle-class values of the wider society, he also knows that the open display of such values is not the way to take care of himself in the street field (E. Anderson 1998, 67). The courtroom is a liminal space between street life and decent life, where those deemed to be mainstream society’s villains meet to receive punishments and pardons. Ruan’s experiences are a direct indication of the different rules by which actions in the mainstream and the streets are judged:

> I did it because it was my reputation. Wynberg police station, Wynberg court, it was for all the surrounding areas like Lavender Hill, and even Athlone. Even the people who are coming to support maybe a friend or a brother, the family, they also know me. And I still need to portray the same person. It is like a performance.

The performative aspect of those courtroom shenanigans is explicit. They were judged as contemptible, and maybe even crazy, by the presiding magistrate. What is contemptible and crazy in one social field, may be commendable in another. As Ruan explains, being “crazy” is part of a consistent street act, and “my character was just a crazy guy who didn’t give fuck about anything, anyone”. Even though doing crazy things got him incarcerated, the same performance continued in jail:

> When I went into prison, I told myself that I’m going to be the craziest motherfucker these people have ever met. Nobody’s going to walk over me… I would use anything and everything to win a fight. People respected it and people knew that this guy’s crazy. I fed off that completely. It just made me more crazy.

The gang member's “disturbance” is functional to survival in his social field, and explains why gang members do the “crazy things” (Spergel 1990, 231) they do. Doing “anything and everything to win a fight” is exactly the type of crazy thing that creates respect, and thus street capital, among toughened prison gangsters. Violent acts can support the street persona of gang members in different ways. When Ruan went to Pollsmoor he belonged to the Junky Funkies. During his sentence, though, he befriended the leader of Lavender Hills’ Corner Boys, and decided to switch gangs. Still, he had to indicate his worth to his new brothers, recasting himself as a Corner Boy through the crucible of extreme violence:

“first thing I did to prove myself was to kill one of the Mongrels”. He happened to be walking one day with his fellow gang members when they spotted the only remaining witness in a triple murder case brought against one of the Corner Boys. Gang rules dictated that the man had to die:

> We made a phone call to say that he’s standing outside in a group, and it was decided [to kill him]. I’m not known with the Mongrels. They just saw me walking with these guys. On the way back, they gave me a gun in F-Court, and said if you want to prove that you’re with us, you’ll do this for us now. And I did it without blinking, in broad daylight, and that was the start.

A similarly violent rationale ruled his life as a Corner Boy. He became the muscle that collected drug debts for the gang, apportioning his own form of street justice to anybody found owing. Violence committed against a delinquent client has a resonant functionality in upholding a business model that requires the deterrence of unpaid debt through violence. As with violence in general, the assaults should also be interpreted as performances of good public relations, as well as warnings to other drug-buyers:

> If you don’t pay… Men, woman, children, it didn’t matter to me. Mothers, fathers, grandparents, I’d go in with my baseball bat and I would just fuck shit up. Obviously I’m not going to shoot people who don’t need to be shot. So maybe I stab you. I hit this guy with a hammer in his face for ZAR 60… just to say don’t fuck with me and don’t fuck with us.

The preceding quote gives gut-wrenching examples of how exacting and extreme the logic of the street can be. By mainstream society’s standards it would be gross and disproportionate. But within the drug economy it is necessary and justifiable. There is perhaps one situation in Ruan’s career as a drug debt collector that better than any other encapsulates the relative reasoning that exists between social fields: when the nephew of the Corner Boys leader smoked up a supply of drugs he was meant to sell for the gang, Ruan was instructed by that same leader to go collect the debt:

> [The leader] told me to break both his legs. I said: “but this is your nephew. It’s your brother’s son”. He was like: “I don’t care, where’s my money? All I’m worried about is getting rich, you break both of his legs now, or I’m going to break his legs”. I broke both his legs with a baseball bat – his own nephew.

According to street logic, acts of violence of this type are both needed and justified to keep a drug business profitable. Here, let us not think of street logic as social prescripts, or what

North (1990, 3) would call the “rules of the game”, but as a hierarchy of valued street options, the mastery of which creates a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu 1998, 25). The masterful use of street capital involves access to a complicated arrangement of competencies and dispositions that allow for the effective day-to-day manoeuvring of the street economy. But these resources are not evenly distributed to all members of the street field (Shammas and Sandberg 2016, 12). They are also not applied with equal skill by everybody competing in the streets. Street habitus provides a kind of practical sense of what is to be done in given situation. With the right set of moves, one can anticipate the future of the game and position him- or herself accordingly. By continually acting crazy, having a close relationship with the Corner Boys’ leader, and knowing enough not to get high on his own supply, he was able take a dominant position in the game. It is telling that what is referred to as the streets, or the street field, throughout this paper, was often actually referred to as the “the game” by research participants, and is often done so in street-oriented popular culture (P. A. Anderson 2010). Harding (2014, 109-111) fuses street metaphor and street theory by showing how gang membership and gang violence can earn considerable street capital in the game. He notes that the logic of the game, which is the logic of the streets, are firmly established and known to all street ‘playas’. Even Ruan acknowledged that “you pay for your dues”, going on to say that “me and the guy whose legs I broke, the two of us, started basically running the whole operation – the whole *tik*[53] operation – of the Corner Boys”. In the mind of a gangster, breaking somebody’s legs with a baseball bat is a professional reprimand. Having learned his lesson, and after his legs were healed, the nephew returned to selling drugs, working affably alongside his associate (and attacker) to distribute *tik* throughout Lavender Hill.

4.3 Street Virtuosos

So, we have seen how street capital can be accumulated by Cape Flats gang members, in what has thus far been a pretty typical reading of street culture. With little to lose in mainstream society, the structurally oppressed gangster men and women of Cape Town’s townships turn to the streets, and an aggressive street culture that becomes embodied in the dispositions and logic of street habitus. There is great analytical, and indeed moral, power in using the concept of habitus to demonstrate how street logic is reproduced in relation to structural domination. So as not to fall into an overly objective reading of street habitus, this section explores how the logic of street habitus can overturn subjective action with enough street strength and skill to do so. Creative behaviours can innovate street

[53] Methamphetamine

practice, dialectically reshaping the forces of habitus that shape social positioning in the struggle of the street field. Therefore, the last part of this chapter will explore how “fields of forces” can also be “fields of struggle” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 101). Let us begin with Bourdieu's (1977) own outline of the objective limits of objectivism. Of agentic possibilities in any given field, he states:

> [O]nly a virtuoso with a perfect command of his “art of living” can play on all the resources inherent in the ambiguities and uncertainties of behaviour and situation in order to produce the actions appropriate to each case, to do that of which people will say “There was nothing else to be done”, and do it the right way. (1977, 8)

The quote above indicates that subjective innovation is achievable within objective limits. But only he or she with enough practice and skill can successfully master the art of living in a given field of power to become a virtuoso. We will see below how some street virtuosos can master the ‘art of killing’ in a way that upsets the even the unflinching belligerence of Cape Town’s ghettos. They are able to use extraordinary violence and criminal skill to master, and even change, the rules of the game, and to put themselves in position to rule ‘the game’. In transgressing the accepted street logic, these violent virtuosos are able to optimise returns on street capital and improvise new repertoires that modify existing modes of street habitus.

4.3.1 Living Gang-Adjacent

This section focuses on the lives of two key informants from Mitchells Plain, Prince (35 years) and Jerome (31 years), who throughout their years on the streets engaged in displays of virtuosic violence and criminality that allowed them to work beyond the ‘logic of street’ typically associated with Cape Flats gang life. What makes them most-obviously special is that neither had ever belonged to a street gang. Prince had joined the number whilst incarcerated in Pollsmoor, reaching the rank of Inspector Two, one of the highest amongst the 26s. As we will see, he exploited this rank and his prison connections considerably when on the streets. But about becoming a street gang member, he says:

> I was in prison, too. I became tight with the leader of the Americans there by us called A-. We did a lot of hectic stuff, and they tried to recruit me into the Americans gang. But one thing I did not do is give away the identity of my persona. Because once you are part of a gang like then… you just become an Americans, or a Dixie Boy, or a [Hard Livings]. So, then the leaders can call shots over you.

For those that seek it, there is no doubt that gang membership can offer important psychological and sociological benefits by providing a sense of self-concept, identity, and sense of belonging (Ngo et al. 2017). Of course, we have already seen that gang joining is a source of power in a street field that values hostility. But while membership may differentiate the gangster from the non-gangster in otherwise marginal spaces, gangs have their own power distribution. Put differently, street fields, street habitus, and street capital reflect the larger social space within which they are nested (Sandberg and Fleetwood 2017, 377). Within the nested field of the gang, power is unequally filtered downwards to lower-ranked members. Prince refused to join a street gang precisely because doing so would mean taking a lower position in the wider field of the streets, in which he was trying to establish himself: "my goals in this gangsterism lifestyle was to become the greatest hitman of the Western Cape. I also wanted to become the biggest [drug] smuggler in the Western Cape…that was my focus".

Despite never officially becoming a member of a street gang, Prince positioned himself explicitly and firmly in the street-based "gangsterism lifestyle" of Cape Flats gangs. According to the stories he tells, and others tell of him[54], he over the years operated as a prolific hitman for many different – often-rivalling – gangs, and he was a successful merchant who used gang turf to independently sell drugs. Listening to Prince speak about his life is like taking a stocktaking of many of the most infamous names that have operated in the last two decades of gang life in the Cape Flats underworld. If who one is surrounded by is an indication of one's place in a given social order, Prince was near the top. In my four years talking about gangs in Cape Town, I have seldom heard of an individual who could be so deeply embedded in the number and in the street life, but could officially operate adjacent to street gangs: "I'm already a shot caller in the number... And I know who I am in the underworld. So how can I now make myself a lackey for another man?" Instead of becoming a lackey and taking a position of lesser power in a gang, he was able to combine the rank and connections he earned through the number, with virtuosic street skills and street smarts to dominate street life.

4.3.1.1 Rebelling against Repertoires

The other character I will focus on here is that of Jerome. Like Prince, he never joined a street gang but set out to dominate street life, and that "it was all about the money. My mind-set was, this was my goal: to be rich as I can… In gangsterism you set out goals and

[54] I was able to triangulate much of Prince's life narrative through interaction with former gang members that knew him, as well as through discussions with members of his family, church, and community.

you go after them". But unlike Prince, he never even joined the number. Without official rank, he relied on street acts to achieve his position in the street field, in a way that allowed him to benefit directly from street capital, but which was adjacent to both street and number gangs:

> DD: So you were a what, a 27 or a 28?
>
> Prince: I was a go-getter, like independent. I just studied the number, but I was nothing.
>
> DD: Really?
>
> Prince: Nothing. But the way I would move was like a gangster with a rank… I would never walk through the soldier, I would walk either with, they call it an *Ag-gunya,* or a higher rank… The higher rank is bringing in money, and he's doing exactly the same thing I can do. I was more into getting the big money. That stems from the family I came from. I was raised up that we believed always in excellence, if you do anything you do it in excellence.

Prince's explanation of his approach to street positioning was given within a larger description of a burglary he had committed, for which he waited in a garbage bin for seven hours to gain access to a site he was burgling. It is an act of extraordinary preparation and perseverance that demonstrates his commitment to excellence in the streets. A belief in his own street excellence came from a reading of the game that gave primacy to action over the abstractions of gang ranks and structures. Though Prince was technically not in a gang, he identified with the street lifestyle. Further, Prince believed he was as criminally capable as an *Ag-gunya*, and acted like it. Knowing his value in the street field, as Prince did, he also knew how joining a gang could mean being devalued within the nested hierarchies of street life: "I rebelled against the number in jail because everything is orchestrated from inside, they control everything. You don't control me". In rebelling against accepted street repertoires, he established new ones. As a go-getting street independent Jerome's position gave him agency, but his actions were still limited by the logic of the streets. During his time in the game he had to partner with high-ranking prison gangsters (including with Prince, for a time) for legitimacy and protection. He participated in gang fights, shifting alliances between the Sexy Boys, Laughing Boys, and others, in a way that best maximised profits from street capital, according to his objective to, which he explained is "to be as rich as I can". But in outlining how he worked towards this objective, he also outlined the objective limits of subjectivism and the state of "regulated

improvisation" (Bourdieu 1990, 57). It seems that even those with virtuosic street skills are not totally exempt from the street field.

4.3.2 Becoming Virtuoso

It is tempting to believe in the innate exceptionalism of successful people. But as in other fields, the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in the streets are developed through determined usage. Interestingly, Prince and Jerome have similar origin stories[55]. Both spent considerable time in their youth outside of townships. It is perhaps notable that both of the street virtuosos introduced above spent long stretches living in social spaces beyond the Cape Flats, through which they were introduced to different races and classes of people. In addition to those infusions of non-street forms of cultural resources, they also were introduced to the processes necessary to decipher, acquire, and innovatively apply different forms of cultural capital, in ways that transgress the expectations of any given social field. It has been shown, for example, how "transitory mobility" (Lindegaard et al. 2013, 972) can expose young people from the Cape Flats to different cultural repertoires around the city; living in a place for a period of time would have the same effect. Although being exposed to different repertoires will not guarantee that someone can code-switch between suburban and township spaces, it is determining for someone's ability to do so.

It is perhaps their early experiences beyond the social space of Mitchells Plain that nurtured their ability to adapt in different social fields. Jerome, for instance, moved from Mitchells Plain to the relatively affluent Western Cape town of Somerset West, before returning again to the Cape Flats. Of the move, he said that "so when I went there [to Somerset West] it was a broader mind-set, and now I have that thinking"[56]. In the sections that follow, we see the ways that his mid-set and thinking helped him to become a street virtuoso. That this is the case hints that transitioning *between* life roles is actually more accurately seen as transitioning from one role *into* another (Ebaugh 2013, 1). Gangsters

[55] I was able to also corroborate much of Jerome's narrative through peer, family, and community contacts; but because I spent less time with him over all, to a lesser extent than Prince.

[56] It is remarkable how Jerome links the unequal access to dominant forms of institutionalised cultural capital around Cape Town to pursuit of street capital on the Flats, saying: "our schools here [in Mitchells Plain] was like forty people in one class so… But when you come at Somerset West Primary, the European School, you realise that there's about 15-20 people in a class. So everyone gets attention, so are then developed properly… In [Mitchells Plain], say half of the class are doing their own thing… So they see also that this [education] thing is not working for them… They do something that works and they're good at. And there is people on the street that can use this [child]. They say: 'but look here man it's easy, just take this packet, stand on the corner, and just sell the thing'. It's basic. So then they just do it".

are not born, but instead grow into new roles that are a complex combination of their selves and their environments. Pre-street experiences are formative in assembling the sociocultural *bricolage* that develops as the cultural capital of each person's totality of embodied experiences.

Before he looked to the streets, however, Jerome was a good student and athlete that was raised in a good home, with a pastor father and doctor mother. As mentioned, he connects his success on the streets to being raised to always strive for "excellence". After Jerome left academics and sports, he pursued excellence on the streets:

> I dropped out of school in grade nine. And then I went into all these gang things, going to every house, sitting with everyone and getting more experience of everything. Because it was quite fun, because I'm getting a hold on the thing quicker now; and then I went into all of this.

Jerome was not born into the streets. And even once he stepped onto the street it still took time to "get more experience of everything", in order to accumulate the street capital necessary to become a violent virtuoso. Proficiency with street practices are acquired through practice. The dispositioning of street styles is interactional: in order to develop cultural capacity someone needed to invest time in repeatedly performing a particular street repertoire (Lindegaard 2018, 64-66). Jerome, for instance, describes what it is to become a hitman:

> You as a hitman out there, it's the first time you shot somebody… So you [are] in terror. But you're doing this. Fine, this first shooting is maybe [done], this second shooting, this third shooing, and you're getting used to this. So, it's an on-going thing.

Over the years, Jerome would come to fuse his street experiences with other non-street experiences, which likely included those he had as a child in Somerset West. The result was a cultural flexibility that allowed him to continually anticipate and adjust to the changing state of play of the street game:

> To make money and to get money in the number 26… I had to change my tone, voice, wherever I went. I was not someone who just stayed in Mitchells Plain. I moved – Bonteheuwel, Somerset West, Cape Town – I had a lot of people and so a lot of places. You know that in the number 26 they call it the six masks… I would then be English today, and tomorrow I'll be Afrikaans: "*dan praat ek soema*

soes ek nou"[57]*.* Just to blend in, to get the money, or to try to manipulate the mind, or to have control over people's way of thinking and things like that… approaching and addressing something differently in every aspect and time.

It is typically said that streets and mainstream society represent mostly autonomous social spaces, with little cultural overlap (Shammas and Sandberg 2016, 2) and that there is little to be gained from the transference of cultural capital between decent life to street life. Those fortunate enough to access multiple milieus can code-switch between decent and street behaviours, shifting between these depending on which offers the greatest potential returns in a particular setting (Anderson 1998, 95). Usually, though, capital itself is tied to a particular social space. As Lindegaard and Zimmermann (2017, 205) note, for instance, drawing suburban cultural repertoires in township settings puts young men on the Cape at risk of violent victimisation. What is required instead is for these young men to switch to gang performances in townships to avoid violence. But Jerome's aptitude for blending culture indicates that perhaps the boundaries between social spaces are more porous than previously presented. He is doing more than simply code-switching. Prince, however, is 'code-mixing'. To accomplish this, he assembles and blends the cultural capital of street life and decent life to commit street acts. Such acts may be done in the social space of the Cape Flats, or in the drastically differing social setting of central Cape Town and its suburbs. Without overstating the transferability of capital across different fields, we can at least see that drawing on dominant forms of cultural capital is not always a liability, and can actually be quite beneficial to an astute criminal mind. Indeed, as will be shown below, it is from the very expansiveness of a street virtuoso's cultural capital that he or she is able to anticipate the game and construct cultural repertoires (aggressive and shrewd enough) to dictate its rules.

4.3.2.1 Growing into Violence

It is perhaps Prince's story that most clearly illustrates how cultural resources accumulated from different social spaces across Cape Town can be creatively combined in virtuosic street repertoires. His story is illustrative of the incremental dispositioning process by which cultural repertoires are imbued with the street capital. He explains of his childhood, that "as I understand from the stories my mother used to tell me is that I was this soft little black boy everybody loved". Prince was born to a coloured mother and a Xhosa father, but in his early years was socialised in mostly white spaces. He lived in Gardens, in an apartment complex where his father was the caretaker, and went to school in Green Point:

[57] And then I just start speaking like I'm speaking now.

both are well-off neighbourhoods in Cape Town. The family moved to the black township of Nyanga when Prince was nine years old, and "for me as a child it was another experience, because I'm used to being between white people. But now… everything is chaotic". He would spend much of his early years in Nyanga, away from the institutionalised street gangs that are present in coloured neighbourhoods, but in the street life nonetheless[58]. Unlike the leafy affluence and security of the city, in the township "the expectation there was that you had to be tough. If you're not tough, everybody is going to run over you". But Prince had not yet evolved the survival skills needed to endure the social terrain he now found himself in. As he says, "I could not fight because I did not grow up in a violent environment…So now it came to the part of fighting, and they were fighting a lot. I was beaten up a lot". When there is violence in the streets, a child instinctively seeks sanctuary in the home. But there was violence there, as well:

> When I came back maybe crying because they stole my ball… My father would take off his belt and beat me and he would tell me: "you go back and you go get that thing, you go fight for it". Then I would run away go sit on the field and make myself full of dust and would come and say: "yes, I fought dad".

Finding violence all around him, and without a safe space to retreat to, Prince had few options but to strengthen himself. His first notable victory on a battlefield that he would come to conquer has a surreal element to it: he fought a girl that had been bullying him. But the event is significant in many ways. That he would win his first fight against "a girl" indicates just how ill equipped he was to face the streets at that point in his life. That his character arced from a harassed young man to coldblooded killer is evidence of the overwhelming power of street habitus, which is as present in shootouts between gangsters as it is in the schoolyard frolics of teenagers:

[58] Gangs in predominately black Cape Flats neighbourhoods tend to be small and less organised, and are typically referred to as crews or cliques (Roloff 2014, 4-7). Though the cliques and crews of black townships are less organised than coloured street gangs, they display many of the same street sensibilities as their coloured counterparts. For example, black youth look to gangs and violence in response to the same exclusion and discrimination as their coloured counterparts (Pinnock 2016a, 133). Young black people become part of gangs for reasons such as fame, attention, sense of belonging or desire to overcome poverty (Sefali, n.d., 1). Members of black gangs also use violent street culture to gain power and respect by fighting their enemies (Sefali 2014a, 4). As told to me by one member of the Vatos Locos (Langa male, 23 years), for instance: "you get into [gangs to] show people what you can do, to brag, [and] to be the big man".

> One day a girl challenges me; I'm learning karate at the high school. But she's not actually challenging me, she picking on me. I just got fed up, and I said: "hey, I'm going to fight her", and I beat her. That was my first win.

The fight was a bifurcation point, which forced his personal trajectory towards a life of violence that was built up through a series of incrementally tougher street challenges. In describing his youth, Prince connects these points of violence together in just such a progression. Speaking of that "first win", he says:

> And from then on I started to believe I could fight. Another guy, during [soccer] practice comes from nowhere and takes this shirt [I had] and he puts it on, like he's going to play. And I'm like I'm not going to let him go… I stand up for myself and I fight with him. I beat him. I take the shirt and I put it on, and I go play.

Each fight won sends the social signal that hardness and strength yields social dividends. In this case, Prince is fighting for security and belonging amongst his peers. He can now participate in a soccer game with the other youth, walk more safely at school and hold his head higher at home. Any behaviour that is reinforced through social interactions will likely be repeated. In the world of the streets, children from families in inner-city poor neighbourhoods "try out roles and scripts in a process that challenges their talents and prior socialisation... The outcome of these cumulative interactions on the streets ultimately determines every child's life chances" (Anderson 1998, 83). If Prince had lost those first fights, or if he had found refuge at home, or if he had grown up on the urban margins of an unequal and hard society, his life could maybe have been different. But those formative experiences with violence were relentless:

> The beatings I received as I kid, I didn't want [to] feel like a weakling, ever. So my thing was: I wanted the respect, I wanted the power, the fear. Because I've taken of beatings, so I'm not going to allow that anymore in my life.

To hear Prince describe his introduction to, and progression through, the street life, one cannot but think of an innocence lost. His change was really gradual, after moving from the city into the township and changing from a bullied youth into a fighter and then a robber: "there's robbing first. From robbing it leads to gang fighting; and then… it leads to that ego, and then more fighting". But even his eventual entering into street life as an armed robber does not necessarily hint at the gang fighting virtuoso was that was to follow. There are hints though that he is mastering the criminal arts, fusing his aptitude for theft and robbery with cultural capital accumulated from life in the city. As he put it: "I grew up in different

environments and different races and cultures…So, I took upon myself that I'm a guy that can mingle anywhere".

Knowing how and when to use what repertoire is key, and being able to mix and innovate cultural resources can serve as a powerful form of crimino-cultural subterfuge:

> Prince: When you went to break in [to houses]… you have to dress for the occasion. If you are going to Durbanville[59] you must not look like Mitchells Plain. You are going to bring suspicion over you. You must look like Durbanville.
>
> DD: What does that look like?
>
> Prince: That's now the marine shoes, the turned up shorts, and your golf t-shirts. Those are the sorts of people who are in Durbanville.
>
> DD: So you would put on the uniform of Durbanville?
>
> Prince: Yeah, I would put on the uniform of Durbanville, of those sorts of people that move like that.

As Jerome was shown to have done above, Prince is code-mixing: he blends the cultural capital of street life and decent life to commit street acts a in non-street environment. Accomplishing this requires considerable cultural aptitude to decipher and disentangle the styles of the street and decent society, and then apply these with sufficient sociocultural dexterity to carry out criminal acts in securitised segregated spaces of Cape Town's northern suburbs.

Of those first robberies, Prince recalled that "I'm like feeling this, because I'm in control. I'm the man with the gun". But even then he still had not grown into his violent virtuosity. Although he has a gun, he still has not killed anybody. Indeed, he is afraid of pulling the trigger:

> But now my fear that time was to shoot the person. I would do everything in my power not to shoot you. I would even go so far as to open up the barrel [steering] wheel [of the gun] and taking out the bullet and showing them this is a real gun [saying]: "don't mess with me, I'll shoot you if I have to".

His are the excessive gesticulations of a man intensely still trying to avoid the act of killing. While it is true that Prince is defying decent society by devoting himself to street criminality, he is also disobeying a spirit of the street that demands violent sacrifice. It is a

[59] Durbanville is one of Cape Town's relatively affluent northern suburbs.

fight that he would lose, however. The inflection point in his street evolution came one day when he was robbed at gun-point by a local gang. He barely survived the incident:

> I just pulled myself loose and I ran. He shoots and I can hear the bullets going past me, and I run. That was the push that brought me to the place of "yeah, I'm going to shoot you. I don't care anymore". Because I almost died.

From that point on, he identified with street life according to the following logic: "my understanding was, if you didn't shoot first you would be killed, it's all about survival". The street field is relational. The incident had shifted Prince's perspective on the rules of the game, and how he must position himself in order to survive. In accordance to his new comprehension of the street field, the next day he went to seek revenge against the man that had robbed him, and the clique he belonged to. Upon finding them, he explains that "I took out my gun and I shot… They scatter, and run. [But they fall] two or three on the floor and I shot 'til the gun was empty. I shouted for another gun". Prince's street initiation into violence had been gradual and marked by a series of tipping points, whereby his previous dispositions cascaded into each other. He had moved to the Cape Flats and been introduced to street culture. He then learned to fight for himself, and began to believe that he could do so. Even after entering the street life his use of violence was restrained, up until the point of his first murder.

After that first shooting, his reputation grew: "after people were talking about the shooting, how I emptied the clip of one gun and asked for another… It made me feel good". He had found the rhythm of violence. He would become an infamous killer – a street virtuoso – that gained a reputation for bloody gang hits and deadly shootouts with police:

> My reputation picked up big time. People started talking… I would take people out in front of their parents and the mothers screaming for mercy and I would tell her: "there's no mercy for this dog, he's going to die now. So you better make funeral arrangements". And then I would shoot the guy… People would retell the things I did, and that's how the talk goes on and that gives me popularity. The main thing that got to people was that I was not afraid to shoot at cops… The police would run away from me, and that's how I would get away. So got that people really excited.

Those extraordinary displays of violence were the stuff of gang legend. Even in a community known for violence, they got people excited. Shooting at police, especially, displays a wanton disregard for authority. In doing so, it rewrites the unwritten rules of

policing in South Africa, whereby police pretend to police and criminals pretend to be policed (Steinberg 2009, 33-35).

Prince was now ghetto famous. The man that would go so far as showing a person a bullet in order to avoid taking a life, now lived through violence. More than even living through violence, Prince represented violence itself:

> I loved my life… I would roam by the enemy, pick the spoils of the turf – the women, and all those stuff. There were many times that I would step into that place and not have a gun on me. But just me, I represented a gun to those people, and they would scatter.

He had reached such a level of infamy that, to his enemies, Prince was violence personified. His reputation alone was enough to protect him and to reap "the spoils" of violent power. The street virtuoso must prove him- or herself in what amounts to a death-defying violent game of chicken. Having already established his capacity for violence, the level of infamy Prince reached few others dared to challenge. He built up his violent street skills amongst the cliques in the black township of Nyanga. But from the age of twenty, he would come to apply them in the twisted backstreets of the sprawling coloured township of Mitchells Plain.

4.3.3 Being Virtuosic

Being virtuosic is an interactional and dynamic state. Street moves can be made forward, as well as backwards, with successful challenges to reputation eroding one's street credibility. Because street capital is interactional, it is also relational. The changing of social space also can negate reputation, though not the skills and knowledge that brought it about. After serving a short prison stay, Prince moved in with his mother. Living in a new urban locality, which was known as a particularly violent part of Mitchells Plain, he had to establish his street self anew:

> So I come to Eastridge, and if you're an outside person you have to give gangsters something to take note of you. So you have to be violent between them, for them to acknowledge you… The only language they understand is violence. You must first take them to the peak of your violence, and then bring them down to the level that you want them to be.

The Eastridge that he is entering has a local urban ecology with a social and pecking order that he must defy and disrupt. The surest way of doing this is to attack the apex predators that rule the food chain. Prince explains that he "first had to have [a] fight with one of the

top dogs, so that [the gangsters in the area] can acknowledge a person". But it is not enough to become one in a group of predators. To do so would be to fight amongst a pack of marginalised others, for scraps in an area where socioeconomic opportunities are few. Prince had to become the alpha. The gang, according to him, is defined by a pack mentality, which can be controlled if you understand its logic: "they're like a wolf pack, you have to fight the alpha and take over the minions, and then you have to enforce your way… I can call this a wolf whistle".

The Americans controlled the part of Eastridge he was living in, and he quickly found the gang's leaders through the local drug economy:

> I'm a Mandrax smoker, so I go buy [buttons] and I look for a place to smoke, and the only place to smoke is between the gangsters… They were like: "*hey, wie is jy*?"[60] Now, I'm already a number, and I'm a certain rank. They come with this *Sabela*, and I when responded they understood me.

As a respected *ndota*[61]*,* he was able to *Sabela* with the Americans and also establish his street credibility. Though *Sabela* is a prison dialect, it is also how street gangs communicate. However, though being well-versed in the language, symbols, and metaphors of prison language is a signifier of gang insidership, street space must inevitably be secured though action – violent action. The Americans were testing his street credibility to see if, in addition to being able to *Sabela*, he could also walk the walk:

> They pushed my buttons also, and they tried to rob me. So I had to jam a gun in one of the guy's faces and bring them back in the manner of: don't take me for a fool, I'm not a fool. I'm like: "I'm going blow your brains out". That's in a week's span that I am there – still injured.

Despite the fact that he was also still badly injured from a shootout with police that he had months earlier, he took on the entire gang. The man he threatened was the brother of the one of the local leaders of Americans, and "when they came back [in retaliation], I had to shoot on them… It's just me at that time". Unwilling to stand down, he stood by himself via a "crazy" show of force, until the Americans eventually backed off: "I got around about twelve guns with me… I would position guns where I would know I would run to. I would hide here, so I would shoot then run there, and shoot – crazy stuff like that".

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[60] "Who are you?" is asked as a test of authenticity in the number. In response, an *ndota* must move through a well-rehearsed exchange, using the right words and right metaphors to establish credibility.

[61] Prison gangster or, more generally, a gangster.

The story, verified by other key informants from the area, seems the stuff of Hollywood action movies. In a way, it is – right down to the dramatic shootouts. After all, in its most basic form, a lone gunman took on a group of local thugs and won. The reality of the story is somewhat less dramatic. Once he stood up to the Americans in such an astonishing way, high-ranking gangsters outside the community took notice. They traced and identified him through his street reputation, rank in the 26s, and personal relationships he had formed with Americans in prison. Whilst an action film would see him killing off the bad guys and restoring peace to a downtrodden community, Prince fought the Americans over two to three weeks, through repeated displays of street virtuosity, which were then added to stores of pre-existing street capital to create space for him to sell drugs on their turf. But even after he had made peace, he was in possible danger. He had staked in Eastridge through violence, but had to rely on his other street senses in order to keep it, and keep alive:

> So now the leaders of the Americans would come with their cars and meet me in my mother's yard like: "hey Prince, just want to *Sabela* with you man". When they stepped [out] of the car I recognised two faces, but still I'm not giving in. You don't know what these people are capable of… So I must read your body language… and so he brought this peace in, between me and them, and good enough nobody was dead yet. But I had a lot of wounds that I had inflicted… [But even with peace], I was still analysing them, checking them out [and spying] even. They would also call me in to come at this time… I would come in maybe early, or very late. I would always come unexpected, because I always wanted to catch them off guard, see what they up to and how do they react to me catching them off guard. So I was always in front of them, because I knew these people.

Prince says he was lucky he "did not kill anybody, only wounded two to three guys; guys got shot in the legs and stomach, and what not". He explained that if he had killed any of the gang members, making peace would have been much more difficult. These comments are another example of the regulated improvisation that even street virtuosos are subject to. His was more like a negotiated peace settlement, than an all-out military victory. Indeed, it is unlikely that such a victory could have been possible given the strength of the gang he was facing. And if he had tried for one, and in doing so had killed any Americans, the gang would have been required to kill him – irrespective of his virtuosity. Thus, even in instances of extreme violence, where social rules are upended, there are still street norms that will push back against the violent force that any one individual can project.

4.3.3.1 Another Extraordinary History of Violence

The incidents described above by Prince are reminiscent of those told by another street virtuoso from Mitchells Plain. Badly injured and badly outnumbered, Jerome stood up to a gang in Macassar that had beaten him and an accomplice, after they tried to rob the gang of drugs and money. Then, rather than taking this beating as an indication that he was lucky to get away, he went back at them more aggressively. With a severely broken arm set in a cast and sling, he fled his hospital bed after only two days of convalescence and returned for his reckoning:

> They probably thought I had a gun on me, or whatever… It was just two of us, with our casts and our bandages. We threw out their windows. And then after that they retaliated again, it was like a whole fight – in my time of healing. So I wasn't healing properly.

Just as Prince had noted, his presence was enough to indicate the likelihood of gun violence. Unarmed, consequences to his health notwithstanding, he stood up for himself and his street credibility. Clearly the physical consequences of the assault were less serve than the beating his street cred had taken. Healing could wait. First, he had to repair the damage done to his name:

> You have to, just get back harder. Knowing that you have no resources to fight these people. But just to make a point… I came with my cast… I had to make a stand for who I am. Once I leave that, they'll always run over me because they see that I was a fake.

Jerome's actions are indicative of how real street virtuosos approach street life. They are brazenly belligerent, seeking aggression regardless of odds and consequences. Indeed, the more extreme the odds, the greater the payoff facing them. Whereas others might say: "[t]here was nothing else to be done" (Bourdieu 1977, 8), it is in the toughest situations that the toughest prove their worth by making moves that others could not even conceive of. As in any social field, acts in the street field exist on a continuum from ordinary, and extraordinary, and gain meaning only in relation to the totality of simultaneous possibilities in it (Bourdieu 1977, 57). Ordinary street acts lack a symbolic assertion of power because they are expected. The key to being virtuosic is to master the street and exceed those expectations. Indeed, Jerome describes his *modus operandi* in the street field as one seeking the "extraordinary":

> I would come and do something different to what happens in a place… be extraordinary… You do things like that, because it's like you have to make a

> point… I mentioned it earlier was that your space is [now] more wide. So you can move into places where people will then fear that… The number [even] can't cover for what I'm doing because, it's like another type of way of doing it.

The most apparent way to make a "point" – or make a "mark", as Prince suggested above – is done through extreme violence. As it was for Prince in Eastridge, Jerome indicated that acting outside of the reigning street order creates space to move, and make moves, in the streets. He is marking his territory beyond the perimeter of expectable street practices. Acting in this way redefines the rules of the street, going so far as to even undermine long-established mythology of the number.

Jerome was not a prison gangster though he presented himself as such, appropriating and twisting the number to his advantage when it suited him. In prison, he says:

> I don't have to be a number. I would come in the cell, I would go in there as a *frans*[62], but the way that I would carry myself is like a number. So, I would come in there and be fearless. If I get a smack then it's fine.

He acted similarly on the streets. His mastery of the number allowed him to apply it irrespective of formalised belonging or rank. Words, symbols, and meanings that make gangs what they are are subverted through a masterful application of street sense and street skills. What becomes apparent in Jerome's explanation of his own mastery of the street is that, even though he also might have exceptional criminal cunning, he possesses an overriding belief that the power of the violent act surpasses all else, even the number. For instance, he describes that in reaching the limits of his ability to 'speak his way out' of a street situation he must "put in" by proving himself through sensational displays of bellicosity:

> Jerome: I know [all the number], yes. I just went in with that. So then I could use that in different areas. It's not always [though] easy because then sometimes you are pressed in a corner where you have to prove yourself. So then you can't just speak your way out here. You have to show that this name you are walking with, you have to prove it, you have to put in.
>
> DD: And what does that mean to 'put in'?

[62] Meaning: non-gangsters; insofar as number gangstesr are *ndotas* – or "men" in Zulu – the *franse* have "no right to personal possessions, to any of the material accouterments (sic) around which a person forms his own quiddity and individuality" (Steinberg 2004a).

> Jerome: Meaning, like, taking a hammer, hitting the person over his head, to make an example for a small thing; to say that that is the way you are; taking a knife and stabbing the person in the face, doing things like that. Do it so that you don't have to do it again, that was my way of thinking… Because I didn't like the thing that I'm doing. This thing that I'm doing is a pretence. But I have to do this. So that I must make an example for everyone, so that my space for working – for making money – is more broader.

Extraordinary displays of violence possess a power that outlives the violent act, precisely because they are not ordinary. If violence is the norm in the street field, one cannot just be violent. A fistfight or shooting might be startling to the residents of Rondebosch or Camps Bay, but it is unlikely to impress the hardboiled members of the 'number camps'. But as Jerome describes in detail later in this chapter, using a hammer to beat man's head into a "milk sachet" will draw attention among gangsters. A display of cruelty like this is aberrant, even in the streets. It sends a message, the ripple effects of which resonate beyond the event, giving power to reputation through the social mythmaking processes of rumours and street stories. Thus, gangland legends are created.

Even versus the number, violence can be the great equaliser. Like any other mythology, the number myth has meaning only because it is given meaning by a people that believe in it; indeed, the number is not a perfectly agreed-upon set of maxims, but an interpreted and contested arrangement of overlapping stories. Refusing the number's supremacy can discredit it, or at least weaken it to the point that competing mythologies can be established. Jerome is fighting to establish the myth of his own street virtuosity:

> I was growing up with all these gangsters around me, and for me there was no difference between me [and them]. They made a *frans* look like a nothing. But I knew that you can't stamp me to be something [I am not]… You are human like I am. The two of us we can fight, and I know that there must be a winner and a loser; it's basic.

It is not just how you fight, but who you fight. Just as Prince indicated that you need to target one of the "top dogs" to establish reputation, Jerome stated that robbing somebody with a high rank helped him establish a name for himself, by usurping that person's power:

> It is who you rob. If I know that [somebody] is a higher rank than you are, we rob him… So the whole gang thinks, and even he thinks: "what's going on?"… I would do things which the normal [street] system, there where they live in, is not used to. So I would do things out of the ordinary.

Robbing in this way is about more than reputation. Establishing reputation would require no more that working one's way up the street hierarchy. It is that the underworld expects that Jerome is trying to totally subvert that hierarchy. Conflict is one way of disrupting the street, and cunning is another:

> I would play mind games also… I go to the merchant. I have the full money [to buy drugs], but I would come there with half the money. So that I must give him the impression that I'm trying to work in a tax. The next time I come I give a little extra… So, I'm now paying a lot of money. So they don't know what is happening around them.

In each description of his movements, Jerome indicates that his objective is to destabilise and disorient by acting out of the ordinary. Through a combination of virtuosic violence and deceit he can gain control of the street field, while those around him scrabble to react to "what is happening around them".

By being extraordinary he is trying to upend the normal rules of the game in a way that favours his position. As he said before, it makes his space to move in the street field "broader". Of course, this space is not easily claimed. If it was, everybody would claim it. Establishing dominion over the street field requires a combination of belligerence, guile, and boldness, and that "you have to have guts. So I smoke myself on top and go there, across their border… You don't have to have a gun on you. You go over and your reputation can protect you". In his statement, Jerome is boldly (though admittedly with the help of *tik*) transgressing the established borders of gang territory, claiming physical and social space. He has so much latitude, in fact, that he can move without a gun, just as Prince and Marcus indicated they could. If you are able to master violence in a social field that values it to the point that you are, people will just assume that you have a gun. Again, this shows that past violence is never fully in the past. An event may have ended, but its effects persist and permeate the present. In some cases this can be as trauma, as street dispositions, or in this case as violent reputation.

4.3.4 The Logic of the Street

In the street, you have to do things in order to prove yourself and create space to operate. Interviews like Jerome and Prince are indicative of the ways that violent action can be strategically applied by those that have gained mastery over the streets. So, it is clear that agentic actions of this type are not inherent to character, but are choices made according to a logic that optimises returns to capital from one's position in the street field. As has been described already, violence and criminal actions are often presented as a type of

durable fiction – be it a mask, character, or something else – that is applied as protection against the harsh realities of township life. But as violence becomes normal, the line separating fiction and reality can become blurry. As you do something repeatedly it starts to permeate a person. Like this, violent acts that are repeated are dispositioned as street habitus. They move from being a characteristic of a character one plays, to being a part of the character of what one is, as indicated by Jerome:

> [Violence] becomes part of you. Because at first you're pretending, and then it becomes, it clings to who you are. Then you basically start *being* violent – even if you really, honestly, really, you love this guy that [you are attacking]… But the gang stuff becomes so "clinged" to your character, that you would even do something to him because you are used to it.

Jerome provides an example of his own unfortunate street dispositioning, stemming from a housebreaking that a criminal partner had almost botched by losing the profits of their plunder. That the booty was in the end recovered did not matter. The man had disobeyed Jerome's orders, and thus disrupted their established criminal order. It needed to be re-established through an extremely violent act:

> I regret it today, he was one of my friends. We were doing a job. It was very easy. But the guy didn't do what I said he must do, and I beat his head up with a hammer… That time I couldn't even really feel emotional like I'm feeling now because, if I'm very honest, I beat his head, like a milk sachet… but he survived.

Though intense trauma inflicted through his display of violence created feelings of guilt for Jerome, he could not fight against the street habitus dispositioned into him through years of street living. On one hand, the event can be justified and understood through the violent logic of the street whereby 'might makes right'. One the other hand, Jerome's reaction was so excessive that it still sits on his conscience. He had almost killed his friend. Having lived in violence for so long, his automatic response to a problematic situation was a punishing expression of street habitus. He had no alternative reasoning at hand. The old saying is that if the only tool a man has is a hammer, then every problem is a nail. In this case, the twisted logic dictated that the hammer be applied in a different way, according to the blinkered bellicosity of many years of street dispositioning. Then, after the first blow fell, reason seemed discarded altogether, that point yielding to a mad act of aggression:

> Because of the permanency of the pretence – into fighting always and hitting people – that became part of my character. When we came at home, I was very

> angry and I hit him, again and again. He went to hospital… And he came out again, and he still just came [back] and he was loyal to what we was doing.

The incident just described indicates the complex interaction of factors that define street habitus. A conflict arises in the street field. It must be dealt with through the logic of the streets, to which street actors are dispositioned. The strength and intensity of street dispositioning is then expressed into an act that combusted brutally when catalysed by the angry rush of an almost-failed criminal act. Jerome described himself as "possessed". It is an interpretation that speaks through a different spirit, interpreting a violent past through the lens of his newfound religious self: "though you created this [violent act]… this demonic force that's in you, when that starts manifesting, then you are totally under his control, and you just move". As violent acts progress, they generate their own force. His interpretation indicates that a man that is both in control and out of control of a violent behaviour through which he exercises power, ends up overpowering him.

Despite the brutality of the incidents, Jerome's victim returns, indicating the ties he has to the system of street habitus that had previously terrorised him. That a man that was beaten into a "milk sachet" returns to the scene of the crime, the social space where he was beaten, is a tacit affirmation of the street code under which he was punished and an indication of the extent of his own street dispositioning. Both the perpetrator and the victim understood that the street field has rules. Being on the streets means following those rules. If they are broken, there will be consequences[63].

> The way he looked at me, like you asked me if he deserved it, the way he looked after… in the rules of the game he would really think that he deserved it. Because there's one rule and you abide by one rule: wrong is wrong, right is right.

But as Jerome himself showed, the rules of the game can be subverted, with what is perceived to be possible and impossible re-established through extreme violence. As he described above, those strong enough to apply enough force can destabilise the street code and bend the streets to their own will and whims. As this occurs, they create new

[63] Jerome goes on to explain the logic of street punishment as follows: "being punished through violence, we would in that time believe that violence was just strict. There's nothing wrong with it… If blood has went out, then it's a more serious matter. Even your punishment also goes in its different levels… If you just smacked one person, we call it a cane; it was just putting him in line, because he's out [of line]". That there are limits to punishing actions indicates systems of rules that dictate street expectations: appropriate behaviours and appropriate punishments for inappropriate behaviours.

spaces in the streets, and refashion street habitus by pushing its boundaries outwards through ruthless attacks on his rivals. This then allows him to adjust his own positionality, by adopting position in the social hierarchy of the street by which maximum value can be extracted from the configuration of cultural practices that is skewed in his favour.

We will finish with a last example of one such act, going to back to Prince's experiences with street life in Nyanga. He had just remerged from a four-year stint in Pollsmoor, during which the clique he had been moving with before his incarceration had fractured and was fighting each other. Internal conflict started with a dispute over a young woman that had been having "an affair" with two of its members, and escalated into a civil war that lasted three years. Upon coming out of prison, Prince went to both sides in an attempt to broker a cessation to hostilities. When the shooting did not stop, he told them the following:

> I'm handling the peace now… But shooting is still going. And one side is telling me this story, and the other side is telling me that story. And so I say: "you guys do not understand me, so I'm going to do what I think is best for this thing". I'm going to kill this girl, and [then] I'm going to check now who is going to shoot who, and for what.

Of course, the original romantic squabble had long ago been absorbed into the spirally animosity of years of revenge killings. Key informants noted that violence between Cape Flats gangs can be reproduced through repertoires of revenge. Collective revenge repertoires serve a similar function to the repertoires used at the individual level. They provide a blueprint for how a person must act – not just as an individual, but also as an extension of his or her gang identity. It is tied up in a notion of 'picking up blood'[64], which stipulates that transgressions against the gang are met with violence. This collective repertoire of revenge is a powerful force within gangs, causing violent acts to become social contagion (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council 2012, 1-5). These can spread via retaliatory shootings and other acts of violent aggression (Copeland-Linder et al. 2012, 6). Violent assaults are often committed in retaliation for a previous attack or out of revenge, creating cycles of violent revenge between rival groups.

Yet, in the mind of Prince, murdering the source of that squabble would annihilate the initial enmity that had made enemies of brothers. He needed an act of violence so extreme

[64] For instance, following the retaliatory killing by the Ghetto Kids on the rival Dollar Kids and Americans, it was explained that: "the gang culture says that you have the pick up blood. Picking up blood and respect. It's like saying I'm putting my foot down and you can't fuck with me – you can't fuck with us". (Joanna, Hanover Park female, 35 years)

that it would destabilise the situation to the extent that it brings them to peace. So, he thought to make an offering of blood, through which to wipe away blood spilled as a result of internecine internal conflict:[65]

> I went to the house, kick [in] the door. Both the mother and the daughter are running, I shoot [at] them. Both of them go through the window. I shoot the brother [in the stomach] also… I got back to the house and I burn the house down.

That all three would-be victims survived, does not belie the ruthless intentionality of the act itself[66]. Words failed, so action was required. But the violent acts committed throughout the three-year gang fight had a momentum that was difficult to stop. He required an epic display of violence to counter halt the force of the on-going hostilities: "it was a desperate plea from a guy that was watching his brother fight his best friend. In the end, I would have to choose my brother, but I was not willing to kill my best friend". Perceiving himself as backed into a corner, he lashed out violently. It is telling that this gambit worked, with both sides coming to a type of ceasefire after the event. He had fought fire with a fire that was even more intense and consuming, asserting his authority over the entire street field in the process:

> I'm standing in front of the house, and community is coming out [saying]: "hey, the house is burning". And I'm standing telling their telling the community, if anybody is getting a bucket of water to put down this fire, I'm going to shoot you. I'm standing there with my gun… And even my people are saying to me: "are you mad?" And I said: "yes, I'm mad".

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[65] His actions are reminiscent of the symbolically sacrificial aspect attached to picking up blood, through which a transgression against a fellow gang member may result in the gang deciding that the transgressor's debt to the gang must be paid through violence committed against that gang's enemies. As expressed by a member of the Laughing Boys: "sometimes me and my brothers we have an argument and we both fetch a gun and want to shoot each other… Then we go [shoot the enemy], because we don't want to shoot each other" (Hanover Park male, 18 years). Picking up blood in this way can also be also cathartic (in that it vents frustrations stemming from internal grievances), as well as functional (in that violence is expressed as a form of domination over opposing gangs). Similar dynamics have been found elsewhere (Sánchez-Jankowski 1991, 87-88).

[66] The girl had to die, he said, because: "the beef all started over this girl and people I know are dying". The mother was complicit because she "knew about what her daughter was doing". The brother he attempted to kill as a precaution: "for us gun shooting-people, I do not expect to kill your brother and let you live, because you're going to come for me".

But the madness he was exhibiting was akin to the logic of *locura,* as prescribed by the street life, rather than some form of psychopathy or sociopathy (J. D. Vigil 2003, 230). His event was abnormal because it was unexpected, not because it was irrational. It was a virtuosic act so violent that it shook streets, knocking those that were fighting off balance and bringing their warring ways to a standstill:

> At that point, there was nobody that would shoot a lady, or a mother, or that would burn a house down [unless by accident]… So the guys are like: "yo, look at what Prince did now". Afterwards, even when the community came out. And it's not such a minor thing to face down the community[67].

He did this within a week of being released from jail he (just as he had when he had settled in Eastridge). Of the event he explains: "I made my mark". Interestingly, six months after the shooting he just described, Prince learned of the whereabouts of the family he attempted to kill. They had moved to neighbouring community in Cape Town. But he was not interested in pursuing the family further. They had served his purpose: Prince had "made his mark" and achieved a ceasefire within this gang. He had moved on now. Succeeding in the streets means staying active. As his actions have already shown, the logic of the streets can be merciless:

> You can't say: "guys I just came out prison, I'm going take it cool". You must move because, if you're going take it cool, they're going take you out. When you come [out], they must know that you're still that guy – [that] prison didn't break you.

Being "that guy" means being a street virtuoso. For Prince and Jerome, this meant conquering the street field through exceptional street skill and knowledge. Above all, it meant the periodic performance of virtuosic violence.

Their stories are important to better grasp street culture, because they illustrate the practical dimension of street habitus. In particular, they show that social actors can innovate away from the standard ways that the street is understood. Street virtuosos can use creative moves in the street game to diverge from expected street dispositions, configuring and improvising the cultural resources available to them into innovative and transgressive street repertoires. Significantly, their capacity to anticipate the game and move accordingly allowed them to live adjacent to street gangs, in a way that did not

[67] Committing violent acts in black communities like Nyanga can be dangerous. Vigilante justice typically takes place in South African communities where black populations are in the majority (Herbst et al. 2015, 849).

subordinate them in gang hierarchies, but still resulted in a mastery of the streets. Their experiences do not fit with many aspects of existing positivist definitions of gangs: declaring membership, allegiance to singular identity, taking a tattoo, etc. Their street associations are notable precisely because of their exceptional fluidity, dynamism, and ingenuity. Yet, both positioned themselves and identified within the broader practices of gangsterism. Prince leveraged his rank and contacts in the number, along with a strength and ferocity cultivated amongst Cape Town's black gangs, to excel as a merchant and a hitman for coloured gangs. Throughout his criminal career he transferred and used street capital between and amid the overlapping street spaces of the city's various gang typologies: crews, cliques, street gangs, and prison gangs. Jerome rebelled even against joining the prison gangs, but still combined a knowledge of the number, with his underworld networks, considerable street smarts, extraordinary acts of violence and out-of-street cultural capital to get rich in the game while never officially joining any gang. The acts of violent virtuosos can strike hard and penetrate the quantified objectivism of existing gang definitions, providing evidence for a more flexible qualified and subjective approach to conceptualising the creative ways that social actors participate in street life.

4.4 Conclusion

Common understandings of gangs and violence are embedded in, and drawn from, the social world. The repertoires available to any particular person are indicative of, and recreate, that person's position in society. Unfortunately, the position of many Cape Flats residents is still defined by the multiple exclusions of apartheid from which gangs initially emerged, and the neo-apartheid in which the continue to exist. This chapter illustrated that violent behaviour can be activated individually and collectively in situations where it has functional and symbolic value. It is infused with a cultural capital that lives in repertoires embodied by members of gangs such as the Americans, Laughing Boys, Mongrels, and Hard Livings. In prison, it is *ndotas* that are the behavioural blueprint.

The knowledge and practices associated with those particular street dispositions become a recognised and accepted extension of how cultural resources can be used to pursue personal and collective objectives. In this way, gang violence possesses a social symbolism that is simultaneously a product of, and a reply to, social hierarchies that deny citizenship to the majority of Capetonians. As Bourdieu (1993, 76) suggests, social relationships cannot be seen as a closed world because contained in each interaction is the whole "social structure". For the communities it affects, violence in South Africa signifies a deep disorder in society. In participating in violence, gang members are

struggling against the symbolic order that brought them into being through street habitus. But they are simultaneously reinforcing that same order in a way that kills each other and the people around them. Rather than make claims for a more just society, violent force is used to further segregate among the already segregated. The pursuit of citizenship through gang violence is not about reconstituting the fields of power, but about placement in them. Gangs are directing violence, not vertically at a callous and malicious state, but horizontally. Hostility is directed against one's fellow community members in a destructive struggle for the few economic and social resources available. In targeting others who are equally marginal to themselves, gangs are entrenching their neighbours' marginalisation even deeper – relative to their own.

For this reason, the explanations for the power of violence provided in this paper should not be misconstrued as justification. Critiques of gang violence must continue to be bold and fierce. Researchers and practitioners, like the communities affected by gangs, cannot excuse violence perpetrated by these groups under the guise of standing beside the impoverished and subjugated. Yet, critiques of gang violence will fail as meaningful interventions if they seek to demonise gang members, without also recognising the work that must be done to transform the conditions that make gangs possible. Fostering real citizenship must move beyond simply surviving adversity, to a re-visioning of the experience of marginalised groups and the possibilities those people have.

Little has been written on the remaking of street culture. Street virtuosos represent perhaps the most sensational aspects of street culture. But they also represent the place at which new non-street roles are being improvised, which is a jumping off point to envisaging potentialities for gang exit: what practical options exist within street habitus, how street dispositions can be decompositioned, what sources of non-street capital there are, what post-gang repertoires can be adopted, how this occurs, etc. As personal positioning shifts away from gang identification and association, the dispositions associated with street habitus must be rearranged into, and accepted by others, as durable compositions of non-street cultural capital. The following chapter examines these and other aspects of how people move from living the street life, to living the normal life.

5 LIVING THE NORMAL LIFE

This chapter extends research on street culture and connects it to current literature on disengagement from gangs and desistence from violence. The street virtuosos we saw at the end of the last chapter are redefining what is to live in the streets. Those that exit gangs seek to leave the streets altogether for what many research participants termed the "normal life". The stories presented in this chapter indicate how difficult it is to find an 'official' point for which a person can be said to have become an ex-gangster. To be sure, becoming an ex-gang member necessitates a shift in life aspirations, understandings of the world and even personal principles. But the notion that changing one's life requires only the proverbial 'change of heart' is misguided. Leaving long-embodied street practices and the dispositioning of new practices of normal life can take many years, as new cultural capital is acquired and new habits take hold. Familial, professional, and religious repertoires all contribute to people's new social positioning. But as much as these may be indications of one's inner valuations, their utility in the social world is perhaps more important. The composition of behavioural repertoires associated with the normal life shape other peoples' ideas of who a former gang member is, and whether his or her gang quitting can be believed. Absent this validation for former gangs, rivals, family, and community, those seeking to disengage can easily be pulled back into the streets.

5.1 From Virtuosity to Normalcy

Certainly, the desire to just be normal is something that must be most appealing after you have been in a very low place. What is – and is not – 'normal' is a subjective social construction. Judging role transition depends on roles one has acted out in preceding lives. If guns and drugs previously defined life, then any move away from either gun violence or drug dealing can legitimately be considered a step towards normalcy. The street virtuoso Prince is a good example of this. Before de-identifying from the streets, he had spent almost twenty years aspiring to become "the greatest hitman and biggest drug smuggler in the Western Cape", one of the 10-20 fabled "criminal elites" (Standing 2003, 3) that give Cape Flats street stories life. But as Prince got older, he experienced the same processes of personal and social development noted amongst gang-leavers by other gang scholars (New York City Youth Board 1960, 28-29; Suttles 1968, 132-133; Hagedorn and Macon 1988, 5; Hagedorn 1994, 206-207). With age, street-based aspirations became less salient, and family and stability became more important. As he said, of that time in his life:

> I was at that age where I wanted to have a normal life… But to come [to] that life is a process. I distanced myself of everyone and everything in the gang-world and I focused on [my girlfriend] and her children. The only [gangsters] I was connected to were in the line of smuggling, so that I can have a flow of supply [to drugs]… That's the lifestyle I chose for myself… It means no more violence, and [in] this woman that I'm with I'm starting to see now a family life. I'm seeing I'm a husband and a father – a man.

Though Prince never technically joined a street gang, he was heavily entrenched in street life, and his process of renouncing the street parallels other 'official' gang members that were considered in this study:[68] the pair processes of decompositioning the street life and dispositioning normal life. According to Prince, the former process means: distancing himself from the gang-world and no more violence. The normal life, by comparison, means: becoming a man by being a husband and father. Themes of maturation, disengagement, desistence, and normality all interweave in multi-track transition out of the streets.

At the beginning stages of this transition out of the streets, he is seeing and slowly moving into a new non-street role, which sets family as the basis of the normal life. But engaging with family does not automatically mean disengaging from the street. Indeed, earning income is fundamental to domesticity. Consequently, being 'a man' required that Prince still deal drugs to provide for his household. Of his change, he says: "So I started to live life without a gun and you know I started to love this life, stress-free life. The only problem was about how to hide the drugs in the house". The unceremonious manner in which a stress-free life is mentioned alongside drug dealing is laughable. But looking deeper, it is another indication of the rational relativity of those making decisions in highly disadvantaged social spaces. Overall, Prince's transition narrative strengthens the argument for a street-based reading of gangsterism that reads gangs, not as organisational structures, but as

[68] Although it is not discussed at length here, the same can be said about the out-of-street transition of Jerome, the other street virtuoso introduced above. In particular, aggressive responses may need to be de-automated so that new non-violent modes of action can be encoded. Jerome explains how God, church, and the Bible helped 'reformat' his old street patterns; his new belief system provides a new operating system: "I would say that the cure for the gangsterism thing is, the pattern changing... Like a computer hard drive, you format it. Then you start a new pattern… I started strictly studying the word [of God]. Your mind wants to fight against the good habit, but the good habit will win because you [eventually get] used to it. So I put more activities in church, and in more spiritual things. Only after a few weeks, my Bible was [already ragged and marked] like this because I want this translation and this translation… Because I'm putting my everything into it now – into this new pattern. This is how I completely break off my old gangsterism patterns"

structured strategies to organise and behave in ways that make sense for one's survival. That Prince did not simply knife-off his street connections is indicative of those street cultural forces that catch hold of a person and keep them trapped, with one foot in normal life and one foot still in the streets. It is the reason that associations with drug dealing are often referred to as the 'trap' in American ghettos. The same limited economic opportunities, racial segregation, and apathetic government conspire to deny people like Prince an exit out of the ghetto, even as they struggle to find one. While he claimed he had not committed a murder for years up to that point, drug dealing still provided the main source of income for this family. For a former street virtuoso it was a definitive move away from the streets. That this arrangement would not be considered a normal life for most of the readers of this paper, is still more evidence for a subjective, dynamic, and deep reading of street life. Indeed, probing Prince's transition narrative further, even living without guns and violence was not completely that:

> The adjustment was for me to stop living a reckless life, and try to fit in a safe life – even though the safe life had smuggling and cops in it. But it means less gun activity and less being out there [in the streets]. Everything is in the house. And the life I'm going to be in is a life with children, so I have to put these people first before myself… have no guns in my house… I had to hide the guns outside, or give them to someone to safeguard.

Being "in the house" is a metaphor for not being in the streets. But because transitional spaces are uncertain, the differing social fields of the house and the street can intermingle in seemingly contradictory and perhaps counterproductive ways. No longer living recklessly, Prince still kept a gun around to protect himself from those aspects of his street past that still lingered, protecting the income that underwrote his investment in family life and normal life from local gangs that "would come with their terrorism methods, with their guns and stuff. So I had to step up". Rather than using violence outright, he exploited his extremely violent reputation, the memory of which still lingered in street lore, as well as his rank in the number: "they knew me, so we could come to an understanding. Because the people who [were] informed of this were also people who are high-ranking numbers like me".

Like this, street capital could be leveraged through the improvised use of his remaining street reputation and prison rank to protect the domestic turf he had tentatively come to occupy. Even police who knew he was still selling drugs were likely to give him a pass, fearing his return to the gangster that had shot and killed two police officers and paralysed

another. As he explained, “even if they get a small quantity of drugs they would say: ‘you’re lucky we know you, we’re going take this, but we’re leaving you’… The cops were a little bit more acceptable, after the past I had”. Thus, we have an example of an on-the-ground law enforcement official who recognised that keeping the streets secure – and safeguarding officialised criminal definitions and statutes – are not the same thing. Security, rather, requires an approach to law enforcement that can read the street and adapt to subjective situations that are highly changing, contextual and relative. In giving Prince the leeway that they did, police accepted that his liminal space between street life and normal life was an extraordinary shift away from a body count that left tens of his enemies dead, as well as a couple of police officers.

Over time, he says “that [non-street] lifestyle crept into me… Because I was thinking of marrying. I was thinking of normalcy”. Prince’s was an incremental shift that took place over approximately three years. His journey shows that gang exit is not a short hop from one state to another. Transitioning involved a wide behavioural swing from extreme violence and wholesale drug dealing towards the comparatively quiet and regular way of life associated with low-level drug dealing. Eventually he married his girlfriend, joined a church, and left drug-dealing altogether for a regular job as a cleaner at a mall in Mitchells Plain. He describes his new normal life in the following way:

> I’m getting money in one month that I used to get in an hour. But the good of it is that it is stable. That other gang life was a gamble… I can die, or go to hospital, or I can go to prison. But this [life], it is stable. Yet it is less than the money that I used to make when I was in the [under]world. But I choose to live this life.

At face value, wins in the game of normal life may can appear trivial, especially if contrasted with the high-flying wealth and power associated with the organised criminality of gangs. He has family and stability, but neither money nor power. One cannot help but wonder if Prince’s life attests to the following truth: as a poor person living on the Cape Flats you can be safe, secure, and stable, or you can be successful, but typically you cannot be both. As mentioned, often being successful is embodied by the gangster kingpin trope represented by a handful of violent criminal elite. Although Prince’s version of normality is bereft of violent criminality, he is now relegated to scraping together a livelihood – and life – on the socioeconomic margins of society.

Mindful not to upset the transition Prince has chosen to make, I once posed this problem to him. His response revealed somebody that took ownership over his past, and presented himself with dignity and agency in the present:

> I don't see it that way… I have chosen a new life, which I am busy building. I hope that maybe what I have been through, my experiences, I can use as a testimony to benefit others. Maybe telling my story can even be a benefit to me. You never know what opportunities can come.

But his response also betrayed a hope that he could come to represent that other Cape Flats gangster trope: the reformed gangster[69]. Underlying this assertion is the conjecture that, in one way or another, Capetonian society expects all poor coloured men to embody some version of the *skollie* (Jensen 2008, 4-6)[70]. In his performance as the reformed skollie, Prince sees an opportunity to exchange the street capital he has acquired for benefits in his normal life; we will see in Chapter Seven how the life history of Gavin represents a similar undertaking. Both men step into the limited social space allowed them by Capetonian society. But they do so in order to position themselves away from the violent criminality of other street stories.

It should be noted that, even in the most reductive criminal narratives, once you get beyond the tropes of violence, drugs, and flash, the gangster lifestyle is about ambition and hope. There is a reason that coming-up stories of the local criminal elites capture imaginations around the Cape Flats. Like all heroes, they embody the stories that particular cultural situations require, representing those who are best equipped to survive in a particular social field. Young men and women that aspire towards the gang release their imaginations from the socially – and structurally – ascribed limitations of people living in need, believing wholeheartedly that they too are entitled to a big house, fancy car, nice meal and financial prosperity. On some level, to long for the regular life is to let these dreams die, and accept a sort of defeat, and once again take one's place in Cape Town's

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[69] Such narratives are made famous through books like *The Number* (Steinberg 2004b) and movies such as *Odd Number* ("Odd Number Film", n.d.). These stories deserve to be told, of course. It is glaringly obvious that this project is a part of a related process of storytelling. But focusing on certain stories indicates what the public values. Put simply, the public (researchers included) are fascinated by gangs.

[70] You find evidence of this in a state that largely ignores poor communities, unless they are a security issue (Samara 2011, 7). In the news too, gangsterism is a convenient explanation for crime and other social problems (Lindegaard 2018, 146). As a researcher you get a sense of how gang performances can be traded for personal benefit when negotiating with interviewees who have previously marketed their stories to a stream of researchers and journalists.

existing symbolic order. I am not arguing here for a continuation of toxicity of violence and drugs inherent to much of street existence, only pointing out the social contradictions and constrictions of a society that promotes a norm whereby men and women in townships are expected to accept less. This requires a redefinition what the normal life can potentially entail for somebody that is non-white, and from the Cape Flats. Much more must be done to create equality of opportunity that is necessary to help ensure that people all around Cape Town can live decently and securely – rather than having to choose between the two.

5.2 Transitioning towards the Normal Life

Many gang narratives are replete with sensational accounts of violent street culture[71]. It must be said, though, that not all gang exits are violent. For others it was the effects of gang roles on family relationships, questions regarding the integrity of the gang, and doubts about the gangster lifestyle. These results are consistent with international research on gang leaving (Decker et al. 2014, 273). Ruan's (Lavender Hill male, 35 years) transition out of street life was conspicuously unexciting compared to others I had listened to. As he tells it, it was the tensions associated with the boredom of the streets that definitively pushed him out:

> Honestly, I got bored. I got bored of only being in this specific part of Lavender Hill, as you're going up to Retreat Station, there were Junky Funkies all over. But nobody owned Retreat Station, so my life was that area and Pollsmoor. It was all that I did – that I was.

It was not the violence he himself had experienced through street culture that eventually made him leave the Corner Boys, but rather the circumscribed monotony that a highly territorialised street field can generate. He had a kingdom "in those few blocks I controlled, I could go into this person's house, sit down… give the mother ZAR 10 for beer, smoke a button with the father, [and] then have sex with the daughter".

But it was a tiny kingdom, and ruling over it was growing more and more unfulfilling:

> I used to walk around aimlessly thinking: "I could be spending time with my kids". I had Facebook and things like that. I saw family, friends, everybody's

[71] For many former gang members I spoke to, being affected through violence – personally or through family – made them question their gang allegiances. Including these experiences would have exceeded the word limit available for this thesis. They are being written up in a forthcoming paper tentatively titled: *Leaving the Streets: Transitioning out of Gangs on The Cape Flats.*

> always doing something cool. But I can't, as there's always that risk of someone seeing me. Or the risk of me actually doing something [with my family or non-gang friends] and somebody harming the people around me…

Ruan's turning point was not explicitly violent in nature, this is true. A violent incident did not make him question or leave the gang. The threat of death or injury *did,* however, separate him from a normal and meaningful life with his children, and it is this that finally led him to question his participation in the Corner Boys. An initial stage in role transition is are the types of "first doubts" (Ebaugh 2013, 41) that Ruan experienced, which refers to the processes by which gang incumbents begin to question and have reservations about their role commitment to gangsterism. As he explained: "I was like: where am I actually going? Yes, I don't have to work, people fear me... [but] I said: I do it can't anymore. I want to have a relationship with my children".

Street life had become a deep-rooted embodiment of the structuring outcomes of street field through habitus: he ruled through violence and violence also ruled him, exacerbating the isolation of segregation through continual threat. Unable to really enjoy the small corner of the world he had fought for, his discontent with street culture "crystalized" (Baumeister 1991, 305-306) to the point that departing the gang became reality. Under the pretext that being clean would make him more valuable to the gang, Ruan left the gang and Lavender Hill to attend a rehab in Observatory – a middle-class suburb of Cape Town adjacent to the city. Even here, we are able to see how he used his street smarts to negotiate just enough space to leave the streets. The Corner Boys would not have allowed him the respite, if it were not for the good of the gang. Going to rehab was an important "turning point" (Ebaugh 2013, 123; Sampson and Laub 2005, 34) in his transition away from gang involvement. He returned to Lavender Hill only to officially "knife off" (Maruna and Roy 2007, 106-109) his relationship with the Corner Boys.

But after he left the gang, he knew he had to consolidate a new life off of the streets. Unlike any other ex-gangster I have encountered, he stayed in Cape Town's suburbs to help ensure that he would not end up back in the streets: "I'm out, but I'm not out, because starting [again] is a process. That's why I live here where nobody knows me. Doesn't matter the rent in this small, shitty place. It just keeps me away [from the streets]". In the five years he has been out, Ruan has re-established a normal and steady relationship with his two girls, indicating how family can help become the "hook for change" (Giordano et al. 2002, 992) that pulls people out of street life. His exit story is also indicative that the violent street act is not always explicitly present in the lives of gangsters. But the indirect,

oppressive ramifications of street culture can have powerful consequences for those trapped in gangs, and by gangs. As a result, a normal (but personally fulfilling) family life can be very appealing when compared to easy (but socially restricted) access to money and power. In the “small, shitty place” Ruan now resides in, he can fully actualise a relationship with his family that is free of the anxieties associated with the violence of street culture.

His transition into the normal life is representative of a broader theme, which was a recurring impetus for leaving gangs amongst people in this study: children, marriage, employment and religion were regularly listed as the aspired-to idealised life-state of normality that helped pull people out of gangs. As we will see, these were also the ways in which people’s non-street personas are validated to one’s former gang, gang rivals, family and neighbours. Elements of the normal life are analogous to what Anderson (1998, 93) refers to as “decent life”: adhering to middle-class values embodied in being hardworking, speaking properly, dressing nicely and not being conflictual or violent. Or the ways of speaking, dressing, or acting that might relate to Lindegaard's (2018, 22) suburban repertoires. In these cases, decency, suburbanness, or what we will refer to as normality, are presented as failing behavioural strategies in marginal social spaces, which leave those utilising them exposed to violent victimisation. This chapter will argue the opposite, indicating the ways that the cultural repertoires of normal life, along with the related cultural capital, can actually be a beneficial behavioural strategy for those transitioning out of gangs. To argue this, however, is not to advocate for false dichotomisations of how cultural is configured in marginal spaces. Disadvantaged neighbourhoods are characterised by cultural heterogeneity, which includes a wide array of competing and conflicting cultural models and forms of cultural capital (Harding 2007; 354-355). But because cultural capital is limited, not all cultural strategies are available to all people, all of the time. Not acknowledging this fact is to perpetuate the non-economic, normative aspects of labels such as ‘middle-class’, ‘mainstream’, or ‘normal’ (Pattillo-McCoy 2000, 212–13). As other studies do, this one considers the strategic nature of the cultural positions people take according to available repertoires in such social spaces (Hannerz 1969, 34-58). Moves away from street life towards normal life may be a tacit legitimisation of the cultural capital of mainstream society, and the sociocultural symbolic order that underpins it (Bourdieu 1986, 47). These are strategic moves, however, rather than moral ones – just as the participating in street culture was. To men and women across the Cape Flats, gangsterism initially seems an avenue towards empowerment and dignity. After participating in street life for some time, most find that it is not that. In fact, most ex-gang-

members come to realise that being normal is comparatively better than being in gangs, even if that means returning to the 'small and shitty' spaces allotted most poor people of colour in Cape Town. If they are able to survive the transition out of gangs – and many do not – they can leave the cramped insecurity associated with street habitus, settling instead for the relatively less cramped and less insecure urban living structured by the habitus of normal life. With this repositioning comes a return to violence of the symbolic order that normalises the structural and symbolic oppression that continues to deny *real* options for citizenship, and keeps people mired in the marginality and gross polarisation of wealth they originally fled from (Burawoy and Holdt 2012, 67).

Regardless of the merge prospects they face, ex-gangsters like Ruan seek to extricate themselves from street life. As they do this, family, work, and faith roles are a counterforce in an internal and external tug-of-war process to reform the dispositions they have embodied over the course of their time on the streets. It was already noted in Chapter Two that other researchers have similarly noted that being a good son and farther (Salo 2004) and becoming religious (Jensen 2008) can be used on the Cape Flats to counter gangster identity. Further, because new sociocultural roles must be negotiated, successful exit from the gang requires not just withdrawal from the socially defined rights, obligations, and associations of gang life, but also physical and emotional acceptance of the withdrawal by others (Ebaugh 2013, 4). An individual may announce that he or she has left their gang, but find they continue to be treated as a gang member by individuals, by their gang, by rival gangs, the community, or by the police (Decker et al. 2014, 276-277). Because role transitions are partly shaped by interactions with others, the gang-leaver mush find a way to establish a new identity away from gangs and street culture. The "aesthetics" (Bourdieu 1984, 47) of normal life are objects and modes of representation within a universe of available realities and ways of representing them. Solidifying ones new self means engaging a lasting composition of non-street repertoires, and having one's non-gang persona accepted by others. As we see in the next section, the domestic, professional, and spiritual successes one achieves in the performance of these repertoires are the metrics by which gang exits are measured. If such cultural strategies are accessed enough times, a person might embody sufficient cultural capital to successfully consider themselves – and to successfully be considered by others – an ex-gangster.

5.3 What is Normal?

Let us consider one more narrative, to get a better sense of what normal life means and how it is related to the interweaving processes of leaving street life and living normal life. In

a different life, Patrick (Hanover Park male, 29 years) would have inherited a criminal empire. His family started and still runs much of Hanover Park's Laughing Boys gang. In fact, one of the gang's leaders is Patrick's uncle, who still insists that he take over the family business. At one point, Patrick wanted to be a member of Cape Town's criminal elite. But about four years ago, he made a permanent move away from criminality and violence, consigning the seductions of gangsterism to his kin:

> I told myself: "when I get out [of prison] I just want to be fucking normal". I don't want to have nothing fancy. I don't want exotic friends. I don't need to be rich. I just want to be normal for once in my life. Just try to live a normal life and serve my purpose here on earth, as the head of a family. I got myself a reasonable job.

For Patrick, as for others like him, there is something appealing about settling down in the security of the normal, quiet life. As a leader of a sizeable gang, drug deals and other forms of criminal enterprise would be a source of easy money, as well as the power, women, clothes, cars, etc. These are stereotypical waypoints on the horizons of most gang members. But, sooner or later, the insidious nature of threat corrodes the lustre of gangsterism. It can contribute to a growing sense of tiredness with gang life that links to changing aspirations and goals, and a new perspective on the non-gang self (Shover 1985, 92-96). Since the spoils of street culture must be earned using violence, looking forward also means constantly checking over one's shoulder:

> They can have their flashy cars, lots of money, and tons of girlfriends, it doesn't interest me. I don't want to live my life looking over my shoulder every day… Why the fuck do I want to do that? I go to work, and then I get home like past 2-3 o'clock. I can rest. I can play with my son, or help him with homework. I can go out, grab something to eat, and come home to put on a movie and relax. I don't have to worry about gangster shit.

Though Patrick is forceful in the affirmation of his non-gang identity, looking at his experiences shows us the great difficulties connected to gang leaving. New roles require acts of normal life to replace acts of street life. But de-identifying and de-embedding from the gang is not always enough to avoid violent activities. There are, for example, those lasting dispositions that continue to contribute to violence. There is also the reality that navigating the pains and pleasures of exiting a role and taking on a new one is a structured process. Living in most poor neighbourhoods on the Cape Flats means you have to stay tough. As a result, violent acts are not delimited to gang membership. Even

those that have successfully come out of gangs continue to struggle with violence, particularly in the early parts of their transitions. Of that initial period, Patrick, says:

> At first, I used to struggle with it. I used [to] get into a lot of fights, just with people in my area that would try me. People here [in Hanover Park] do that… When I just got clean [and out of the gang]. I would even stab guys a couple of times, because I was still that stubborn guy who wasn't going to let anybody step on him – even just step on my toes, for that matter.

Fresh out of the gang, Patrick's life was an aphoristic embodiment that taking the man out of the streets does not necessarily take the streets out of that man – at least, not right away. As he progressed through his transition, he reiterated his change to himself and to others with each interactional application of the non-street repertoire. In time, normal life was being increasingly dispositioned and street life decompositioned until the dispositions of normal life beame his dominant way of interacting with the world:

> It happens with a lot of practice. It's easy for you to say: "look here, you just need to take a step and just think, or breathe, or take a walk". It's easy to say that, but actually doing it, it only comes with a lot of hard work. The more it happened to me the easier it became, I guess… I knew that in order for me to able to survive this process, and come out in the end successful, I need to be humble as shit. That was the kind of things I was practicing every day – little things… It's not easy to just put a finger on these things, its things you mostly learn by personal experience.

Patrick's experiences support research that indicates that de-embedding from gangs and desisting from gang violence is a successive process, undertaken incrementally to decrease gang associations and activities (Vigil 1988, 106-109). Central to this is the long-term decompositioning embodying street-based dispositions. New dispositions are also acquired through personal interactions in the social field of normal life. This interactional, inter-subjective element of social life reengages the central to aspects of practical dimensions of a habitus (King 2000, 423). Patrick is not simply superseded by objectifying street culture, nor the structures connected to it. The origins of his, and other individuals' street actions, lay in their interactions with others, not in some unassailable objective street structure that confronts and conforms him. That is not to say that structures are completely made up, only that they are abstract tools that aggregate and generalise individual experience to highlight broader forces. The emergence of social structure requires an account of the interactional mechanisms that give rise to the processes of structural

emergence (Sawyer 2005, 197). Seeing structure in this way bridges the chasm between agency and structure, moving beyond subjectivism or objectivism along the practical, interactional path that Bourdieu (1986) himself plots, but perhaps does not fully follow through on.

For gang-leavers like Patrick, when seeking to follow a path of non-violence, each potential violent encounter avoided was a further dispositioning of non-street habits, and a gradual decompositioning of his remaining street habits. Generally, the more time that they spent away from the gang, the more likely they were to also be able to deal with on-the-job conflict non-violently. Such interactions were also successive validations of a non-street (and non-violent) repertoire that relies on being "humble"; it helps manage any conflict that might arise and which might quell remaining dispositions to handle that conflict aggressively, as one would in the streets:

> Confrontations [are] everywhere, up 'til today I have issues with my temper. Like at work, I got into an argument with my manager not too long ago, and I almost hit him with a spade. But I just left the site that day and I told him: "look here I can't speak to you right now I'm going home I'll come tomorrow if I'll feel better"[72]

Not hitting somebody with a spade is an important example of the presence of mind necessary for normal workplace interactions. A year or two ago, he very possibly would not have been so restrained, and could have ended up unemployed and in jail, as a result. Patrick has de-identified from the Laughing Boys and de-embedded from street association and activities, and stepped into a new role in the normal life. Still, vestiges of his old street role remain. He has been out of the gang for over three years, but persistently has to manage automatic responses towards anger and aggression.

Though he has left the gang and successfully transitioned into normal life, there are parts of Hanover Park that he is still unwilling to visit for fear of being spotted and targeted by former gang rivals. His caution speaks to the uncertainty of gang exits. From the following vignette we see that his worries are not without merit:

> There are certain places where I don't trust to go. I actually have met up with the leader of the Americans once. He didn't have a gun fortunately, that day he wanted to kill me. I actually came from church on a Sunday walking with my

[72] This incident occurred at a public works job Patrick has been working at in the one to two years prior to these interviews. He got this job subsequent to the catering job described below.

> bible. I had my shirt on, and my slacks, and my shoes. He jumped out his car and said: "you taking chances to even fucking walk here"… I tried to reason with him. He didn't want to accept anything at the time… So your past can come back to haunt you[73].

When the incident occurred he was fully immersed in an almost-clichéd performance of decency. He had become a 'righteous man' more than four years before, after his exit from the Laughing Boys. All indications were that he had been playing it consistently since that time: staying away from the gang, attending church, working full-time, spending time with this son, etc. Still, his past threatened him. The altercation was one part unresolved gang dispute and one part interpersonal grudge. During a gang fight Patrick had fought his accoster and had "punched him in the teeth". That incident occurred just before the Americans had shot and almost killed Patrick – puncturing his lung twice and almost paralysing him.

Even the righteous man faces threats. Sometimes those threats come from his former gang, rather than from his enemies. Indeed, in a small community, social pressure can be exacting. As a result, adherence to new roles must be equally exacting. Other scholars have suggested that it is flexible cultural repertoires that keep people most safe in townships (Lindegaard 2017). This study found that former gang members are, perhaps, different. Because their non-gang roles are constructed in relation to past criminality, they must prove themselves to be reformed in ways that are not required of other cohorts:

> This [transition] was a very tough process… I went to church this Sunday and I'm walking past them with a bible tomorrow, they would come and *Sabela*: "*jy, my bru salut*" and as much as I would feel obligated to speak in such a way I would not. I would greet: "hi, how are you? Are you alright?" I would say: "I'm good, my brother", even if that makes me look like a wuss sometimes… It's easy for them to say: "ah you want to keep you like this, like a *bekeerde*[74] brother, you a *kerk broer*"[75] – try to look down on me.

[73] Indeed, in an extreme example of the possible perils of the past, he tells me in the same interview: "the police were banging on my door at 6 AM [this morning] with a warrant for [robbery] case from eight years ago – eight fucking years". Others also told tales like this. Decade-old warrants are not the norm, but they are yet another hindrance to permanently staying out of gangs.

[74] Saved

[75] Church brother

As others have been shown to do, Patrick would respond to *Sabela* with the normal words and humble actions befitting of a "*kerk broer"* walking home with his bible. Religion allows gang members to re-frame themselves, shifting from the masculinity of a violent offender to the brotherly love of the church (Flores 2014, 201-202). On one hand, the shifts associated with Patrick's gang exit seem drastic. After all, he did cut off most, if not all, behaviours and contacts associated with gang life. On the other hand, the internal and external validation of his new non-gang role is a gradual, interactional process. Each time he walks past his former brothers with a bible and a 'hey, brother', Patrick is convincing himself and others that his performance is not a performance at all. Overall, it should be said that he is not performing, but is acting out the choice he made to change his life. At the same time, however, he does acknowledge that he must act in an appropriate way, or he can fall back into the streets:

> Patrick: That is what I needed to do and I don't associate with them because it's easy for someone else to spot me and think: "*naai*, he's with them having a beer; yeah, he says he's not part of that [gang] anymore, but now we know about him also". Tomorrow they get me at another place, then I'm dead. So I want my change to be visible, to be known by everybody that I'm not that type of person anymore.
>
> DD: So it's like you're playing a different character almost?
>
> Patrick: You can say so, yes. But [also], I never really had a chance to be me, growing up I could never really be myself I needed be what I needed to for my family, for the other people in the crew.

It is clear that the performance of righteousness must be "visible" and unassailable for it to be plausible. But this is also the most cynical interpretation of the above excerpt. When his 'character' was questioned, Patrick allows that it *is* a role. But he also asserts that it was more than that. In becoming righteous he is also reclaiming a part of himself that was never allowed to thrive. Because his kin were so deeply embedded in the Laughing Boys, the street and the family became one and the same, allowing little – if any – space for him to cultivate non-street sensibilities. Now that he has successfully dis-identified and de-embedded from the Laughing Boys, he is repositioning himself in proximity to the non-street capital. He attests that after some time, this performance gets easier, until the point that you "don't face these tests anymore". Even though it took a while, his former gang eventually saw that gangsterism was no longer his scene. Adopting a religious repertoire lowers the probability of being killed, giving a gang-leaver perhaps the best chance of

surviving the perilous first stages of the out-of-gang transition – before the new non-gang role is fully stabilised, internally and externally. But Patrick's experiences indicate that he is not just negotiating gang relationships and navigating gang rules. If this was the case, past conflict could be mediated and resolved through the command and control structures of the gang – to the extent that these even exist. An ex-gang member can completely disengage from his own gang, reconcile with his enemies, and still be killed as a result of an old grudge.

5.3.1 Working It Out

The preceding sections in this chapter have already described some of the ways that ex-gang-members pursue normality, and the erratic, contextualised, and conflicted ways that the normal life comes to be embodied after persistent engagement. What is and is not normal, however, is socially constructed, as the life possibilities that any one person can chase, or even imagine. Therefore, we should not misconstrue the taking of new social positions as inherently based on some form of moralised decision-marking, or even totally dependent on the greater maturity the comes with social development. As with any youth, as a young gang member grows up, shifting priorities lead to life shifts that may include gang exit. But the opportunities to leave street culture are structured by destitution, racial exclusion, sociospatial segregation, criminalisation, etc. facing many gang members; his or her prospects for a normal life are shaped by the same factors. Refocusing the study of gang exit to centrally include structural oppression, ties the personal and social processes typically associated with these types of role transitions (Decker et al. 2014; Melde and Esbensen 2011; Sampson and Laub 1995) inextricably to the structural constraints relevant to the personal and social processes of re-positioning that ex-gang-members described in this study. Infusing the study of gang exit with elements of Bourdieusian criminological scholarship – and applications of the concepts of capital, field, and habitus – can help indicate how people leave gangs and violence in urban environments, such as the Cape Flats, where social, economic and cultural resources may be particularly scarce.

Having already introduced Patrick, we will continue on with his story until the end of the chapter. His life illustrates well how socioeconomic and sociocultural inequality affects people trying to leave gangs, and the strategies they pursue in overcoming the deficiencies such inequalities create in non-street social and cultural capital. Fitting into the new social spaces means also acquiring cultural capital from these unfamiliar sources, sometimes combining these innovatively with street capital. Patrick was able to, for instance, secure a catering job two weeks after coming out of a rehab programme, through

a contact that had come out of the same programme a couple of months before. Finding and keeping employment is central to the process of gang leaving. For ex-gangsters, acquiring legitimate employment can be difficult enough. For those that secure employment in professional spaces that transgress the cultural boundaries of race and class, as Patrick did, adjusting to their new jobs can be even more difficult. Much of the catering work they did was at relatively upscale business and academic dinners, many of which were dominated by white South Africans. Staff had to adjust their speech and mannerisms to fit the setting:

> Being in that setting and working for all those high-end clients, I was forced to change my way of speech and even just small gestures and body language… So being around other people, I still had that in me. It was hard for me at first to, kind of, refrain from actually doing that.

Differences in cultural capital are apparent to a young coloured man from the Cape Flats that is working at an expensive dinner event. Racialised class inequities are inculcated throughout one's life and become observable when lasting embodiments of the different social fields are juxtaposed. Colleagues too would observe discrepancies in cultural capital that Patrick's speech and action betrayed:

> I met this girl but she was a cleaner there so we were kind of on the same league… And she told me: "why do always speak with your hands?" And it never really hit me before so I told her: how do you mean speak with my hands? And she said: "it's almost like you putting the words out there with your hands just speak it out of your mouth". And it kind of got me thinking... I would go there and I would know there's obviously rules and regulations about how you conduct yourself… I still do it up 'til today but not as much as I used to do it back then.

That the particularities of speech and action are observable to people seemingly across the same socioeconomic strata, perhaps points to the power of racial and cultural segregation that persists in Cape Town. Bridging the capital deficiencies created by segregation requires gathering cultural capital across different fields. How this happened for Patrick is indicative of the larger process of dispositioning that were taking place across the different spaces in his professional and social life.

With no set plan for acquiring non-street repertoires, he improvised a way into normal life, saying that "at first I didn't know exactly what it was that I needed to do. So I figured if I have better friends, I would learn what is going [to] make me better eventually". In this

case, recreating one's behavioural repertoires is explicitly linked to the redesign of one's social networks, thus illustrating the important interactional relationship between cultural capital and social capital. Patrick further describes the very deliberate process he undertook to acquire new cultural knowledge and skills:

> I had this group of friends who were just girls – no guys, so there wouldn't be any slang talking… I would just hook up with them and they would take me places. I'm a straightforward kind of guy, so I'll say: "look here I don't know what to do. You guys have to tell me – show me – what is appropriate to do, what do we do for clean fun?"

Through his new contacts, Patrick was able to gain access to new forms of cultural capital, as well as an understandable schema for acting "clean". He describes his previous street lifestyle predicated on gang and drugs "like being in a coma for twelve years. You don't go forward. You're just there". Like coming out of this "coma", rehabilitating from street life requires the restoration and strengthening of motor and cognitive functions. Where old pathways have been disrupted, new ones have to be developed. Social mobility and cultural locomotion are activities that can be learned through repetition: "I literally went everywhere – I tried clubbing, I would try gym with one friend – everywhere I could around here". Through directed training and persistent practice, this form of 'rehab' reprograms dispositions, establishing new social connections that enable a person to patiently acquire new cultural knowledge and skills:

> They took me to all those fancy clubs, introducing me to all their friends... I wanted to fit in. So I would just be the quiet guy wherever we go and I would study everybody, everybody's behaviour pattern. Gradually, maybe not tomorrow, but the day after, I'll be able to have something to say to you. Because I know basically what you are and what you're into. And that is how I slowly taught myself how to handle people.

On one hand, interacting with others in a socially acceptable manner is a learned behaviour that is injured through the traumas of street life. On the other, street capital can actually be useful in non-street situations. Again, the street skill of manipulation is cited in its applicability to decoding and manoeuvring through normal life: "a lot of criminals are very smart people. I used to study people. You can't manipulate people without knowing who they are or what type of person they are".

There is transferability to certain skills of social interaction, regardless of what field they are in[76]. Patrick would now use his shrewd ability to read people for different reasons. As he says: “I wasn’t using it to manipulate anybody, but I was studying everybody else”. Leveraging and improvising the remaining parts of him that could be applied to the normal life, Patrick had to relearn how to move and speak. With each additional interaction he slowly acquired the skills and knowledge associated with the activities of living daily in normality. He was able to pick up on mannerisms and speech, making himself pliable by adjusting to the social cues being used around him: “even up to catch phrases or small phrases that I would use from other people at different places just to try to seem a bit more normal”.

Inherent to the transition out of ‘being street’ is the effort of “trying to seem a bit more normal”. At first, it is clear that this is an act, the performance of which only becomes second nature after repeated social interaction. In time, an ex-gang member can work on increasingly complex activities, with one accomplishment building on another:

> I got myself clean and away from gangsterism. Then I got myself a cell phone, opened myself a Facebook account. I had to adapt. I didn’t know shit about Facebook and WhatsApp. I didn’t even know how to type proper messages, but I learned.

Patrick first de-identified from the Laughing Boys and de-embedded himself from the street activities associated with the gang. After departing the street, he had to “adapt” to off-street living – even training himself in the technological innovations that passed him by during his self-described street “coma”. Professional and social experience came together to revive and exhilarate parts of him that had been dormant for years.

> I went to very good schools [in my youth]. I had of the best amongst my peers, even though my relatives were selling drugs and shit… Since I was big enough to walk to church I would attend church, even though I would be a whole different person when I come back from church. I got to experience that side of [normal] life.

[76] Having a mastery of manipulation was noted among participants as a key street skill. Ruan, for example, says that street culture calls for “using your 26”, referring to a “way of robbing somebody in a nice way – by manipulating”. It connects to the identity of the 26s, which is known for making money through duplicitous behaviour and the cheating of people. Ruan indicated that he had used his 26 during work interviews and to carry out professional duties. The power of manipulating the number was similarly noted in other interviews as a means of extracting, finding, and securing legitimate opportunities.

Pre-gang life had given him a sense of normality. Even as he was transitioning into the Laughing Boys, elements of normal life still contrasted the street life he was moving towards. Indeed, despite over a decade in the gang, it is not clear that the gang was ever really home. Indeed, in some ways, coming back to normal life might be more familiar, and that "part of me really felt at home living that [normal] lifestyle. The other part of me was just pretending that I would be at home amongst my [gang] friends". Having left the street life, today he is trying to come back to normal life for good, drawing on a combination of professional and social networks to create a mosaic of cultural skills and knowledge that can be applied across diverse social fields:

> There was a little bit of everything working in that specific field that I worked in [as a caterer]. If you want a decent life, this lifestyle where you go to all these fancy clubs in town, you meet a variety of people there [too]… There where you get people in Hanover Park, they just want to go to Staples. There would be the exact same people in the club every weekend. I just wanted to know as much as I could, learn as much as I could.

He uses the word "field" to describe a particular professional space defined by money and upper-to-middle-class sensibilities. As we have discussed, this constitutes a field in another way, as well. Race and class are associated with distinct forms of cultural capital that are not easily acquired.

Some professional spaces provide an opportunity to acquire a range of cultural knowledge and skills. But to even find a job, some form of cultural capital is needed. The institutionalised cultural capital that comes with academic qualifications, for instance, is a prerequisite for many jobs. Other cultural capacities – speech, dress, or action – are less tangible, but equally important to securing and keeping work. In the initial stages of gang leaving, willpower and determination must be relied upon, where other types of skills and knowledge are lacking. As professional repertoires are enacted over time, they are inculcated through a dispositioning process that makes routine, taking instruction, and non-violent conflict resolution feel normal. In some instances, street skills can make up for capital shortfalls, through improvised acts that transfer street capital across social fields. Social capital is also important in finding work. Given that the vast majority of people interviewed for this study found work through networks of family, friends, and community, it is unlikely however that their employment will result in a more equal distribution of cultural capital. Most likely, cultural resources – and, thus, economic resources – are likely to be reproduced along racial and class lines. Indeed, those that are able to find work consider

themselves lucky. Many accept little pay to work long hours. Their reward is a small-but-steady income that supports them and their families. A large portion of people interviewed for this study did not have any work. With their transition into work life impeded, they would be more likely to return to the streets.

5.4 Conclusion

Having the requisite skills to earn money is perhaps the most essential element of surviving and thriving away from gangs. But beyond the instrumentality of work, there are deeper – quintessential – aspects of life. The independence, personal esteem, and dignity that comes with working are perhaps the foundational aspects of the repertoire of the workingman:

> I told myself: I just want to be normal. I don't want to be dependent on anything on anybody… I see a nice car driving by and that would inspire me to want to go to work today, and work a bit harder. Maybe I get another promotion, maybe I get a raise, maybe I can save a little more money this month, [and] by then end of the year I can maybe buy me something like that.

He passed numerous tests from the gang, until his change became socially acceptable. He also survived a number of violent confrontations, post-exit, and was in fact lucky to avoid a prison sentence because those he stabbed survived as well. Only after making it this far has Patrick successfully positioned himself as outside of the gang, moving away from his former street dispositions and towards a dispositioning of internally- and externally-validated non-street repertoires. This took four years.

As he moves further away from this gang role, Patrick is redefining himself according to the mainstream, seemingly equating it with personal empowerment and dignity. In doing so, he is buying into the idea of a society that oppresses young men like him. Gone are the dreams of "flashy cars, lots of money, and tons of girlfriends" associated with his drug-running family. He wants to be normal: speak less with his hands, get a promotion, work a bit harder, etc. Many key informants related the modest wages they were earning to the normal life, especially as this was contrasted by the high-flying and fast-earning lifestyles they left behind. But does the pursuit of the normal endorse and normalise the symbolic order that delineates rather limited possibilities for a person from a poor coloured community like Hanover Park? I would argue that that, while Patrick believes he can slowly work his way up Cape Town's warped racialised social hierarchy, his desire to do so is not an endorsement of the exploitative configuration of race, class, etc., in Cape Town. It is instead an acknowledgment that gang life is even more exploitative, and for most people it

means a life that is violent, poverty-stricken, and drug-dependant. The indignities of the streets are relatively more dehumanising than a humble existence on Cape Town's margins.

6 THE REPERTOIRES OF NORMAL LIFE

We saw above that moving out of Cape Flats gangs is about more than deciding to live a normal life. Achieving normality can come after a lengthy transition, through which non-gang roles are engaged in ways that are inconsistent and incomplete. With enough time, however, the embodied dispositions of the streets fade, and are replaced by new ways of living. Though each transition has its own character and course, ex-gang-members generally seek some version of a normal life defined by family, work, and religion. This chapter further delineates and describes the cultural repertoires and cultural capital associated with each generalisable life principle most people in this study organised their new lives around. It also further elaborates the dual decompositioning and dispositioning process through which members of Cape Town's gangs leave the streets.

6.1 Domestic Repertoires

As they age, many gang members start to feel the pull of domestic life associated with settling down and getting married (Hagedorn 1994, 209). The family-feeling of gang solidarity becomes less important (Fagan 1989, 659). The centrality of the gang in role identity is taken over by the bonds to one's family and, more broadly, the normal life (Laub and Sampson 2001, 20-21). As this occurs, domesticity pulls gang members away from the streets, into new non-street positions. Take for instance Jayden (Hanover Park male, 41 years), who left the Americans about a year-and-a-half ago. His wife and children were the key force that pulled him out: "I got a family and I can focus on that. You earn money in a proper way, and you give it to your wife to use it for the kids. You realise the gangster life is not for you". Leaving his role as an American meant making a claim on new identities and practices. He explains that by pursuing a social position outside of gang life he "was trying to become a proper man". There are clear parallels between Jayden's invocation of becoming "proper", and the normal and decent life mentioned above; by being proper, he is embracing a domestic repertoire pivotal to not only finding a new identity, but also for convincing others that he has done so:

> I called the Americans to say… I am not going to be active anymore. I am not a gang [member] anymore. I will still respect you, but don't call me for [gang-related] things… Because the enemies see you with them, [and] they're going to come to you.

In the de-identification meeting with the Americans leadership he explicitly claimed his non-street self, telling the bosses: "from now on you will know me as Jayden, [not as

'*Lange*'[77]], and these are my kids and my family". It was a pointed declaration of transition, knifing off the diehard American *Lange* and becoming Jayden, a man who now lives for his wife and children:

> For the first time I began to act like a parent should be. My children come to me, this is happening at school and that is happening at school, and I am thinking must I go to the school now, and not stay here [with the Americans].

Again, his children are referenced as a signifier of his transition towards the proper way. These claims on a new fatherhood role are presented in contrast to the old role of the gangster. He explains:

> I am now thinking in a proper way. Because there are many things I have learned from the past. It is hard to change some stuff [in the way I behave] *mos*. But I can see the difference between this life and that life. This life now is a *lekker* life. There is no pressure on you, no more focusing on [gang] friends and selling drugs.

Behaviours associated with street roles are now a domestic liability. Moreover, the contrast of the old and the new also helps elucidate the positive elements of the new non-street role. From this perspective, living normal – or proper – can ease the stresses of the street. But his new domestic identity comes with new responsibilities, which are set in a domestic repertoire of new knowledge and skills that determine what it is to be a good father and husband, and that "now I focus on my family. I have got a wife and she is worried about Friday. So I focus on bringing in the money, and she can sort her things out". External controls of family life can play an important role in gang disengagement (Pyrooz and Decker 2011a, 421). On the Cape Flats, breadwinning is typically considered an important duty of the decent husband. But accepting and fulfilling this domestic duty means there must be a steady income that is earned in a manner fitting of the decent life. The most significant burden on the family man is that he must provide for his family. Living up to a domestic repertoire means living up to masculine expectations associated with breadwinning: "when you try to change it's not easy. Sometimes you will try, but no man, the things don't work out. Then you fall back [into gangsterism] again… Now, the situation is a little bit different [for me than before when I fell back]. But it's [really] still the same. It's all about money". When asked whether you can be part way in and part way out of street life, he maintains that "you must choose for yourself, what is best now". It remains to be

[77] His nickname while an American.

seen whether the choices Jayden is making can finally – and for good – take him from being the gangster to being a proper husband, or whether financial pressures and proximity to the gang will pull him back into the street. Jayden knows too well how financial pressures can pull an ex-gangster back into the game: “when I stopped [with crime] I had to budget. You bought a TV; you must earn money. Otherwise the shops come collect all the things. Then I said: “no man, I cannot manage with this, must earn money again”.

In his more more-than twenty years as an American there have been a number of failed attempts to move from the street towards propriety. He was finally pulled back in after those ‘exits’ because a return to illegal enterprise – drug dealing, robbery, and housebreaking – brought him back into the gang’s criminal activities, through which he could make “four times more, or so” the money he could legally. The ill-obtained earnings reinforced his family position as a breadwinner, but proved incompatible with the other responsibilities of the respectable enactment of a domestic repertoire. He explains that “in this [domestic] life you are in now, the criminal things like that don’t work; because then you go back [to the street life] again”. So, being a husband and father is not only about earning money, it is also about how that money is earned. Jayden is now working as a painter, and refers to his employers, a two-person family-run painting enterprise as “like a family”. They are part of the emerging social constellations by which the dispositioning of normal life is occurring:

> This life is best for me now. I am a guy that loves my work. This life is simple, but it’s just how you face it. You must face the life. When you wake up, you wash your face and brush your teeth, and everything like that. You go out and think I got kids at home and a wife, and I must go out there and work and earn money in a proper way. You do your work, don’t let anything bother you, and finish and come home. Then one day you do the right thing. Then you do that every day. I am trying to do that now.

In describing the dispositioning of the everyday, Jayden is connecting the regular enactment of his domestic and professional routines to the persistent, and mutually reinforcing, performance of the repertoires associated with family and work. His family may be the main reason for his gang leaving, but his obligations towards them can only be met through the contemporaneous and proper enactment of the workplace repertoire. He must “face” the difficulties associated with the decompositioning of his remaining street dispositions, until enough time spent living the “proper” way allows the dispositions of

normal life to evolve through a sequence of agentic micro-endeavours. If he can succeed at this, perhaps he can finally bring about a permanent move home.

Other key informants have similarly spoken about the powerful attraction of home life as a hook for change, describing their experiences in becoming domestic as part of their moves away from a street life dominated by violence and drug dealing. We witnessed already how Prince's aspirations of becoming a hitman and a smuggler were displaced by the desire to be "a man", by being a husband and a father. His sentiment has echoes of Jayden's notion of being a "proper man". Though his turning point away from street life was unequivocally spiritual, Prince refers constantly to the importance of family life in getting off the streets. Like others in his position, he is engaged in the processes involved in the dispositioning of normal life, while his old street habits are also decompositioned. However, becoming a husband and father can be a difficult endeavour. There exists a harsh contrast between the practices needed to succeed in domestic life and those used on the streets:

> I'm used to a reckless life. So now, the difficulty that I am facing is to be normal, and to act normal accordingly. When people like me are put in a situation, or pushed into a corner, we react violently… But now we must get into that place of being calm and patient and understanding.

In most ways, the mind-set and skill-set associated with home life are diametrically opposed to those embodied in the streets, and inculcated through many years by street habitus: "it is very difficult for a person who is used to violence only, to get to that space. Those are the things that a man is struggling with now, and being now a husband and father".

Where street capital was earned through acting crazy and aggressive, domestic capital necessitates restraint and calmness. Prince notes that learning and perfecting the repertoire of poses of the domestic role comes after repletion, happening in relation to one's previous street role and the decompositioning of street capital:

> Fatherhood and being a husband is not a thing you can say that you studied for in your previous [street] ways. It is a thing you gradually learn to do better… At this moment, I'm trying to be the best I can.

Agency, effort and time are touchstones of acquiring domestic acumen. But to leave the analysis here tells an incomplete story, one that risks reinforcing the idea that 'grit' or 'willpower' alone are sufficient to transition out of the streets. The personal will that is

expressed through an agentic act can be constrained considerably by the structured and structuring realities of life in Cape Town's townships. For example, Prince lives in a small *hokie*[78] at the back of a Mitchells Plain residence that is owned by a member of his church. The dwelling is just big enough for two beds, a television and hotplate. There is no other place to sit, so we hold our interviews sitting opposite each other on the two beds, as his wife and her two children move around us.

Even in the short time we spend together in this setting, it becomes viscerally evident the potential for this type of living arrangement to constrain home life. Prince confirms this, saying: "now imagine, what it's like for two people [living with two children and] quarrelling for four days in a box like that, it's hell. It can make you crazy…" In addition to his own history of violence and substance abuse, Prince is now also dealing with the recovery of his wife from drugs and gambling, and while he considers himself "lucky" to be renting his shack at a discount, it is located in that part of Eastridge that many of the associations and animosities of his "reckless" street past also reside. His domestic life is caught between the claustrophobic craziness of home and the immense recklessness of the streets. It leaves Prince little latitude to successfully perform the daily responsibilities associated with being a husband and father. He must make an exceptional effort to just be normal:

> There is nothing off the street that he can throw at me to shock me, because I know everything off the street. The things that gangsters fear, I can handle that. But the only thing that attacks me [is] my nearest family, with the home life. I'm not used to the home life. I'm not used to being around the people I love all the time.

After more than fifteen years of practicing the street repertoire, he was a street virtuoso that was shocked by nothing. As he tells below, Prince had mastered the "groove" of street living. Unfortunately, street dispositions have no place in the home. So, Prince is now a novice with few domestic skills and the potentially destructive street habits that threaten his home from within: "I'm staying with the person who I am married to. I see her ups and downs and she sees my ups and downs. We're hard-headed people… There's too much friction now and we're trying to get into the groove". For Prince, as with other interviewees, overcoming predispositions towards the violent confrontation of conflict is a key challenge: "there are times, for instance, when my wife rubs me the wrong way, and I just get so angry and I just explode at her". Whereas asserting street dominance once required sensational acts of violence, thriving in the home calls for controlling one's temper. If

[78] Shack

enacted over time, enough times, walking away from conflict may come to supersede the will to be violent. As Prince explains: “these are the small things I’m busy with now”. Acting like a husband and father may seem “small” in comparison to the life-and-death fight of a hitman and drug dealer. Yet, succeeding at both requires the persistent determination to survive that is essential to persevering in all hardship settings.

Being a spouse and parent is one-half of a two-part performance of normality that many other gang-leavers I spoke to also relied on. As told by Ryan: “there are two things the gang can understand [to justify leaving]: serving the Lord and getting married”. Though he say that the gang is watching all the time, in adopting and performing these two roles together “then *maybe* you can go from gangsterism”. Whether a gang-leaver is successfully able to transition out of gangs is partly socially determined. His or her former gang can violently oppose exit, as can rival gangs. As already noted, one interpretation of the street rules is that it is blood in and blood out. But street life is notoriously contradictory, and those that are able to master it can use their knowledge to exploit street representations and symbols to their advantage. One example of this is the ad-libbed application of prison gang myths to exit street gangs, as Ryan states:

> In the number, you have something like a blackboard, which is like a teacher [or mentor]. Your first upbringing [and blackboard] was you mother and father. In the [prison] gang history, they respect that part. When you leave prison, the number sends their people out, and they say: “go out and build *jou kraal*”[79]… They release you to your family.

During his time in the Americans and 28s, Ryan acquired considerable street capital by skilfully mastering the number: “there is nothing I don’t know about the number”. Now Ryan attempts to apply this knowledge in the streets to defend the territory he has managed to establish outside of the streets and prison. To some extent, role transitions can be made understandable by referencing the language and symbols of gangsterism. But there is only so much that words can do to justify a change: “you can use words, even the number [to explain your change]. But gangsters think talk is cheap… There is no trust, only manipulation of everything and everyone”. To ever truly be considered an ‘ex’, a gang member wishing to leave gang life must prove that he or she has changed.

But showing you changed means stepping out of one’s street role and into marriage, as well as the accompanying repertoire of the religious man:

[79] Literally, an Afrikaans word for an enclosure for cattle or other livestock, located within an African settlement or village surrounded by a fence. But here it refers to the making of family or community life outside of prison.

> The lady I am with, I had an argument with her brother, [who is a Mongrel]… He thought I was gangster… The next day I went to them. I tell them I am a man of God… I always let everyone know. My [American] brothers in Beacon Valley, I told them [too]: "I am getting married, I am starting a life".

In juxtapositioning his new non-street self against his old street relations – both friend and potential foe – Ryan is expressly claiming his new life according to family and God. These are two strong signifiers of change that are packaged together and given to the world as an example of his present character. But even his former gang did not accept his role transition outright. It had to be negotiated. The Americans countered his demand at de-identification by offering to pay for his wedding. It was a test, meant to cede ground to his new life in the short-term, while keeping Ryan tied to the gang in the long-term. Despite the fact that he did not have enough money to pay for his wedding, he rejected their offer because "by the gangs nothing is for free". As he explains: "they give you money now [and] they come back, even if it's after a year, [threatening]: 'we paid for this, you must do this stuff for us'… and when you do the stuff [they request] you back in". By passing on the pay-out, he deflected the American's attempts to get him back into the street, getting away from the street until the next such encounter. For the first years of gang exit, there are many such confrontations. Not all were benign, as will be described in other parts of this chapter. Transitioning into the ex-gangster means overcoming each test. Failing to do so on one occasion could mean failing the whole project.

Jerome's experiences further indicate how referencing family roles is a way of transitioning out of street life. He states that: "one excuse that [gangs] understand is: I'm busy with my family". As evidence, he presented an example:

> Like the other day, an inspector [from the gang] came to me and says: "hey, Jerome, I miss you"… and he would say: "when you going to come around, like old times? We [are] still here waiting on you man". So, I just said: "you know I'm with my family now, [I told you] I was going stop this life". Then I tell him: "why don't you just do the same I'm doing?" But then he stopped me and said: "don't preach". I'm then out and away [from him].

Like this, the gang-leaver navigates a series of tests, whereby his or her non-street credibility is checked, and the reliability of the domestic repertoire is determined via social contact and communication. Although the dispositioning of normal life is partly a personal undertaking, it requires validation also from former gang, rivals, family, and others. One must persuasively embody the domestic repertoire, as well as the workplace and religious

repertoires, as part of a successful and persuasive performance of normality. Without such interactionally acquired external validation, gang-leavers continue to be endangered by the street hazards associated with gang life.

As an aside it should be noted that, while the strength of family ties are a reliable signifier of a transition out of street life, if may not be sufficient, partly because familial baggage is burdensome in the street. As Jerome explains: “family was the weakness [I had]… it was a weakness then; it’s a strength now”. It is yet another example of how non-street cultural and social capital can be a liability in the streets. Not surprisingly, his participation in street life broke down the bonds that connected him to the domestic life and the repertoires associated with it. The need for personal protection and protection of loved ones reinforces the connections with the streets. Jerome says he maintained only “disposable” romantic relationships, and was cut off for six years from his family. After disengaging from the gang, Jerome reengaged with this family and was looking to begin solidify a family life of his own. He was living at the home of his father and mother, was already a father, and was engaged to his child’s mother.

But the time he spent living in the “insanity” of the streets made a normal home life difficult. Instead of regular and healthy meals he referred to *tik* smoking as “breakfast, lunch, and supper”. Rather than regular relations with a family and girlfriend or wife, he wasted years in jail for participation in 23 cases of attempted murder, robbery, housebreaking, etc. Living in normalcy requires abiding by values that call for a restrained and gentle nature. Because the contrast between the social fields of the streets and the home is blunt, transitioning between them can come as a hard blow:

> When I came back [to my family’s house], I had to now conform to the family values and it was quite hard… Aggressiveness would pop up, say, where I would explode… I would repent and say sorry, apologise, which we gangsters do not do. You do not ask forgiveness and do stuff like that, so that’s also a new thing that’s part of the new pattern that I’ve learned.

Becoming an ex-gangster means abandoning the behavioural repertoires and cultural capital related to street dispositions, and picking up new domestic models of knowing and being that are better suited to home life. Herein lie the dialectical mutually constituting transitional processes of dispositioning normal life and decompositioning street life, by which the composition of normal repertoires are connected to the street dispositions of normal life. One does not simply choose from a tool kit of non-street behavioural strategies and apply the chosen tool expertly. As with any other pursuits, mastering domesticity – or

work or religion – requires practice. Mastery over a behavioural strategy is gained as it is applied repeatedly through trial and error. Through practice one acquires domestic capital, whereby the competent performance of the domestic disposition becomes an enduring counterweight to street habitus.

It should be noted also that moving into family life can have different meanings for different people, depending on what place family relationships had in their street life, and how this may interact with different aspects of their social positioning. For younger gang members, domesticity may still be dominated by links to their parents. Many of those interviewees that had not yet married or had children referred to playing the role of the 'good son' (or 'good daughter') as a type of stand-in for the domestic repertoire. As said by David (Hanover Park male, 25 years), for example: "my mom [and dad] raised me in the right way, and I chose to go the wrong way. Now I must, like, show them I can be good – be a good son for them".

Similarly, Byron (Hanover Park male, 25 years) explained: "the whole time [I was in the Mongrels] my mommy prayed for me. It was of this I am here… [Now] I want to take my mommy and brother out of this place". It is notable that absent a family of one's own, the role of the good son can be actualised through working to take care of one's parents and siblings. It should be said that being a good son was not exclusive to younger gang-leavers but was perhaps more prominent amongst them, as they did not have their own family through which to activate their domestic repertoires. Whether this version of the domestic repertoire resonates with gangs as a validation of the authenticated performance of non-street roles is unclear, but it does at least seem to provide a sense of non-street identity for the ex-gangster playing the good son.

Something similar can be said for women that participated in this study: generally, they did not reference their maternal roles in relation to the gang – that is, as a way of validating their non-gang role. But most of the women did mention embracing paternal responsibility for the sake of their children. As Tasneem (Hanover Park female, 33 years) said: "I just want to work and want my children to have a better future". Joanna (Hanover Park female, 35 years) also refers to her son as a source of inspiration: "I had a tough life growing up, I don't want my child to go the same way". Finally, Raeesah (Hanover Park female, 28 years) also explained:

> I don't smoke drugs, I don't sit by the corners, I don't have that bad entertainment. I have my child that keeps me very busy… you will always see

me with my child. I go fetch her half past one from school, then I take her books and we go sit in the park.

That women spoke of motherhood as a source of internalised role inspiration, and not as a source of externalised role validation; she could relate to differences in social expectations given between males and females when it came to parental roles. Because women are expected to be mothers, seeing them turn to the domestic life is not as impactful. Indeed, all but one of the female interviewees already had a child they were partially or fully taking care of while they were still in the gang. It may also be that women have less need for external validation of non-gang roles, as they are much less likely to be on the frontlines of gang wars, and therefore perhaps less likely than men to be targeted with gang-related violence after. Regardless though, for women as well as men, the domestic identities are a powerful force driving role transitions away from gangs.

6.2 Workplace Repertoires

Along with family attachment, job stability is an important determinant of criminal desistence (Sampson and Laub 2005, 15-16). Work bonds the former gang member to normal life, just as domestic life does. Further, it was expressed already the ways that family and work fit together practically: stable and sufficient income – that is, steadily earning economic capital – sustains the winning performance of domestic duties. Without legal work, gang-leavers can be pushed back to illegal forms of street hustling to get by (Hagedorn 1994, 207-211). Lack of work also disconnects the unemployed from the necessary social and human capital necessary to de-embed from gangs, making the successful transition to adulthood problematic for the undertrained and socially isolated (Pyrooz et al. 2013, 257). Though it is doubtful that all gang members would simply desist from crime if they were given jobs: the centrality of employment to role transition was noted across all interviews in this study. The following paragraphs will look at the processes involved in transitioning into employment, and what it takes to acquire the professional cultural capital associated with the workplace repertoires. But before the dispositioning processes associated with acquiring the dispositions of normal life can unfold, a job must be found. It is in the pursuit of professional prospects that agentic action related to transitioning from gangs is most obviously structured. In a country with a high unemployment rate, and even higher youth unemployment[80], the job market is already

[80] In the first quarter of 2018, South Africa had an unemployment rate of 26.7 per cent, and a youth unemployment of 38.2 per cent (Statistics South Africa 2018).

competitive. Those lacking in social and cultural capital are at a disadvantage, leaving some ex-gangsters awkwardly straddling street life and normal life.

For instance, Joanna describes the period of time directly after serving a three-and-a-half year murder sentence in Pollsmoor. It was while being imprisoned that she decided to get out of gangs. Upon her release, she knew that getting a job and avoiding gangs would not be easy. Though she had finished her matric in prison, she was unsure about how to translate these basic qualifications into gainful employment: “I never worked in my life... I didn’t [even] know what to do, where to start”. Lack of skills and work experience can be major obstacles to finding a good job, and job instability is in turn linked to criminal recidivism (D. Glaser 1964, 238). The initial year outside she strained without formal employment, making money working sporadic odd jobs around Hanover Park for over a year before finding a job.

As ex-convicts, former gang members are pushed to the fringes of the economy. A job application attached to a criminal record will almost certainly be rejected from a pile of job-seekers (Standing 2006, 134). Criminal records were frequently cited amongst the impediments related to formal work. Gang histories are otherwise inescapably etched onto the bodies of gang members, and were mentioned as a major source of stigma and obstacle to finding formal work. A lifetime of living on the fringes also meant that key informants frequently lacked the most basic of identification, and consequently were excluded from many jobs. Employment was generally then only available through personal networks. All but a very small number of interviewees were able to find any sort of work throughout their lives via applications submitted inside of traditional channels. Leveraging available social capital was key to finding work. The rule rather is that jobs are procured through a friend, or a friend-of-a-friend. Predictably, gangsters know other gangsters, and de-identifying from a gang does not magically reassemble those social networks.

Joanna only managed get employment through a contact she had met via a prison church ministry, after seeking the phone number for the ministry in the newspaper and phoning the woman “everyday… for about one to two weeks”. After some time, her persistence resulted in an interview at a printing shop in Ottery. Although Ottery is only about four kilometres from Hanover Park, navigating the new space proved difficult. Many residents of poor townships such as Hanover Park rarely leave their communities (Jensen 2008, 54). When they do so, they must contend with a geographical and cultural displacement that can be disorienting:

> The first day I had to go to the interview, I walked to Ottery. I was getting lost. And the people [I asked for help] did not look helpful. I spent like three hours looking for this place, the meeting was supposed to be for 9 o'clock, I got there past 11 [o'clock]… The day that I went for the interview, I put on gloves [to cover my gang tattoos]. That is what I normally do. People look at these [tattoos] first, and they judge you.

The spatial and cultural dislocation that Joanna felt was compounded by the stigma she felt as an ex-gangster. This was one of a number of mentions of stigma associated with lasting taints of criminality that are left on one's personal records and person after a life lived on the streets. Now removed from the street field, it was difficult for Joanna to find her bearings. These experiences hint at the considerable difficulties that gang members face in acquiring the non-street capital needed to navigate the formal economy and securing work. Considering the odds that gang-leavers face in finding work, it is not surprising that most people reported that would be content to find any work, even if it likely meant long hours and low pay. The majority of people interviewed as part of this study were either working menial jobs, or were struggling to find work. Positions as cleaners, caterers, factory workers, or as general labourers are most readily available, and seem to form the basis of much of initial ex-gang employment.

The same social and economic disparities that push people into gangs prevent people from attaining gainful and meaningful employment as they attempt to exit gangsterism. Finding work is essential to living a normal life. By earning even a small income, the ex-gang member is stabilising his or her life economically, and at the same time stabilising the workplace repertoire. As Joanna explains:

> For me, my life, I could see that I'm growing, because I bought myself a bed, bought myself a TV. It's mine… I bought it with my money. I worked for it… It makes you feel human… It gives you more dignity and pride. So that builds you as a person and makes you stronger. Because you come out of the prison, and your pride is gone.

Earning an income by par is an economical – and, thus, practical – imperative. But there is also another 'practical dimension' to finding and maintaining work. In the Bourdieusian sense, a job is a means of accumulating the professional and personal skills that are inherent to solidifying one's non-street roles. With each bank deposit, rent payment, food purchase, or acquisition of household goods the repertoires associated with these are reinforced. Concentrating on the practicalities of gang leaving, however, is no reason to

ignore the more humanistic meanings related to this important transition. Working, having a legitimate income, and using it to make the most basic of purchases is a validation of a person's pride, dignity, and humanity – all of which are stripped through the dehumanizing way that the South African criminal justice system deals with offenders[81]. Earning an income is an emotional human imperative and an indication of citizenship through a person's participation in society, via the formal economy.

The knowledge and skills necessary to succeed the street corner, battlefield, or prison cell are likely to be of little use in an office, or even a warehouse or factory. Managing conflict is not an imperative for a gang member with a reputation that depends on violent authority. In switching social fields, the ex-gangster must not only leave violence behind, but also the authority that comes with it. Subverting dispositions brings a notable demotion in social standing. Going from street glory to the indignities of normal life can be trying. Prince explains the personal and interpersonal dynamics related to making this switch: "pride creeps in… I am a second-highest ranking officer in the number 26. I am this guy, with this [ghetto famous] reputation… Now to go and be a lackey… to become a cleaner, or to work construction, is tough". But he did become a cleaner, working six days a week to earn an amount of money that he could previously make in an hour. The significant decrease in pay, and associated loss of status, can make it difficult to submit to subordination:

> One day, with my manager, he said to me that I must do "like this". And I did it. And then he goes [and] says I must now do something opposite. And this morning goes like that. I got so angry, slaving like that. I just started to walk to his office. I'm already thinking: "I will punch him in his face – because he wears glasses – and then I will hit him like that [in the stomach] and kick his balls – and it's over". [After that], I'll just leave and never come back to this.

Being challenged activates a type of fight and flight response, which looks to return both to street practices and street localities. The street field and its associated practices are familiar; more importantly, a return to the streets is a return to being master of, and having mastery over, one's domain. By comparison, normalcy is introduced through deference, discomfort and a type of domination over life and labour that understandably gives rise to occasional acts of rebellion. On the way to beat up his boss, Prince passed his wife, who works with him. He admits that he was lucky she stopped and calmed him. Had he chosen

[81] Overcrowding (Republic of South Africa 2017, 24) and torture (Langa, n.d., 24) has been reported in South African prisons. Correctional services are meant to rehabilitate, but they often do the opposite, by perpetuating the destructive and unhealthy behaviours that lead to incarceration in the first place (Langa 2007, 66-67).

violence on that occasion, he would have likely also have been choosing a return to gang wars. That one incident captures the essence of the daily fight to live normally, and the heroic victories demanded of a prosaic life. Getting into even one physical altercation (even if one wins it) can mean losing the long battle to leave the streets. As Prince explains: “those are the challenges everyday I’m being faced with in how to react and respond”. Such challenges are continual, and must be overcome in turn.

Another similar workplace ordeal took place with a mall customer that would not leave at closing time, although he was told repeatedly by Prince that the establishment was shutting for the day:

> [The man] says: “you can’t tell me the place is closed”, and I changed. I’m not anymore the cleaner… I’m not Prince. I feel ‘*Rato*’ [his street persona] rising. I tell him: “I’m telling you…” and he gets it that something is happening now… But as he goes away he says something, and I just can’t let him go. I just go get him by the shop and I grab him. I’m busy yelling – ready to *moer* him good – and it dawns on me that I’m a changed man; and I just say: “you’re a grown man, you must respect me, so that I can respect you”.

A desire to be respected obviously animates each encounter just described. On the streets, authority and violence are inextricably bound up in getting and keeping respect. But in performing respectability, the relationship between respect and authority, and violence is inverted. Respect is now gained through humility. Being humble and asking forgiveness were recurring themes throughout the research. Although, it will be shown that acting meek to authority was often connected to religious values, the virtue of humility pervaded all of the compositional repertoires of the normal life. Following the altercation described in the previous vignette, Prince saw the man he just almost assaulted and apologised to him: “the following day I went to him and I asked him forgiveness, because I saw him again. Up until today we greet each other”. An almost-assault served as a corrective experience that further destabilised Prince’s previous gang role, in the continuing pair processes of decompositioning the streets and dispositioning normalcy in their stead.

The fight or flight responses to conflict displayed by Prince where common across many interviewees. While street capital is belligerently fought for, the culturally appropriate response to conflict in the social field of normal life is to avoid belligerent altercations. Transitioning towards a behavioural space where a flight response overrides the desire to fight does not come naturally. Incongruences between social capacities and social space

create friction during transitions out of gangs. Too much friction can derail the exit process altogether, especially before non-gang roles have been properly consolidated. The experiences of Declan (Mitchells Plain male, 42 years) further illustrate the difficulties associated with transitioning into the workplace, from the gang. Declan describes an interaction he had with a superior during his first days as a farm labourer:

> I worked in the garden and one of the authorities he was scolding me [saying]: "hey, look how you look, Pollsmoor is written all over your face, and this is not Pollsmoor"… And I thought to fight him right there, then take my bags and I wanted to go. I [also] thought to go take revenge there at home.

Like Prince, the automatic reaction to being challenged by a supervisor was twofold: regress to his street sensibilities and then contemplate a return to the street itself. Interestingly, the frustration created by the incident also prompted a desire to redirect frustration emerging from the interaction as violent retribution towards the street. That there is an inclination to displace anger towards the street shows that violence is not just embedded in street-based behaviours, but also habitually and symbolically positioned in the street field.

A colleague familiar with his background intervened and counselled him, just as Prince's wife had done in the previous account. She told Declan: "you going to let the same *Duiwel*[82] get you down again? Just for that simple thing? Instead, just submit under the authority [of the farm boss]". In invoking the devil she was referring not to the apparent evil of violent conflict, but instead to Declan's former street persona. While in the Americans Declan was referred to as '*Duiwel*': a gang-oriented alter ego that personified the significant street capital he acquired over two decades in the gang. In explaining this street persona, he says: "this other guy was very bad, and he don't care. [As *Duiwel*] I just do stuff and I don't care about the consequences". Like many others in this study, Declan compartmentalised his gang self in a street persona, to which he attached a label and set of street-based attributes and expectations for behaviour that was offensive, aggressive, and overreactive. Though a street moniker itself may refer to some arbitrary aspect of a person's life, the nickname *Duiwel* is more apparently related to vice and criminality, and was a character Declan actively pursued and created as a rejection of a prior virtuous nickname derisively given to him in his youth: "at school, the children mocked me: 'hey Pastor! You a pastor!' And all that because my parents were like pastors. I didn't like it. I did feel out, and so I wanted to be in like [the gangsters]".

[82] Devil

Declan explains that decompositioning his devilish dispositions today is “the most difficult part” of living his new life; but he also says:

> This is the right path. Where I can break down from the old path and focus on the new. So when I go one day I’m a new person. I was 25 years in gangsterism and it’s not going to go over in a couple of months for myself. I thought maybe three years to break down these old habits, and maybe adapt new habits in life.

The logic of the street is to disengage from anything that can even hint at weakness. Because family, formal work, and faith are seen as the natural enemies of an underworld predator, engaging these in the world can feel wholly unnatural. In particular, social interaction in normal life requires a trust and emotional intelligence that might have all but been killed off in world full of manipulation and hostility:

> I took time [to submit to authority]. In the beginning it was very difficult. I was watching [my bosses] carefully, because I knew how some white people are. I did speak to them, and I thought they’re going to keep [the things I told them] against me because I was used to that… I had goodness, but I had to hide it away. Because if one of my gang members had to see that goodness, then I would be a target for them. It works *mos* like that in a gang. Your own members they are enemies and they watching each other closely. I couldn’t dare to show there was a softness [in me].

Declan’s difficulties trusting authorities were amplified by racial tensions created through prior experiences with discrimination. For instance, he tells of employment he had previously held with a moving company that worked in many of Cape Town’s affluent neighbourhoods. He was paid ZAR 40 a day to “move the rich people’s furniture from the one house to the other house”. The job required trips to Bonteheuwel, where labourers hoped to be selected for work. The descriptions he provides of this selection process are drenched with anxiety: “I have to pray the whole time that they pick me… It affected me by sometimes a lot, watching other people eat nice. I also have a taste for nice things”. If not chosen, he (and presumably his family) would have to go without food that day. Sporadic meals are compounded by the grinding uncertainty of privation. Surviving in this way comes with a high personal cost, which takes its toll over the years:

> It does something to you. You don’t think much of yourself because the way life treats you. Sometime I also wish I… have a nice car to go to work with, or maybe have enough money to buy a bus ticket. It’s stressful [too]. These full

> trains, and sometimes the trains are not working; or then I decided I won't pay for a ticket and must watch out [for security].

The workingman must toil with considerable effort for little, staying resolute to stay away from the easy money on offer on the streets. Even when there is work, the wages one earns may be associated with other losses of dignity. For instance, of his job as a mover, Declan says: "I felt we were degraded", with customers looking down on him and his coloured colleagues because of the impression that "we're coming from the bush… we're coming from the concrete jungle". Throughout his employment as a mover, he pretended to embody a workplace repertoire to cover for his criminal activities. Therefore, his only experience submitting to authority was to manipulate those he was working for: "I just knew I had to be humble under these people… just submit, and manipulate them by stealing their stuff". Thriving in the street field required respect, while thriving in a professional field meant being respectful. At that time, being humble was an act he says was not difficult, because he still had power. Only now is submitting to authority a truly humbling experience, because power must be relinquished without manipulation.

The manipulative application of the workplace repertoire promotes a very instrumental, and potentially adversarial, version of social interaction. Being around others is enacted in a zero-sum world of constant power contests. This is perhaps why many key informants indicated that – in the street field – there is little room to trust, or to be trusted. But trust is essential for connecting to others in professional and social relationships. Reciprocated trust relationships are also essential as accepting and feeling accepted in new non-street roles. As Declan explains: "they know I come from bad places, and that is what kept me here. They trust me with their stuff now: give me their car, their bank card, stuff like that. I saw that this was all about restitution". There is a dignity derived from the presumption of decency related to being given such responsibilities. For a former criminal being used to manipulation as a defining feature of interpersonal exchange can be powerfully validating, reinforcing his bonds to the workplace and other aspects of normal life and helping fortify a belief in the potential for his own ex-gangster status. It is in that belief that the dispositioning of normal life and the decompositioning of street life are practiced along the lengthy transition away from *Duiwel*, back to applying his previous role as Pastor, to advancing in the workplace: "they teach us there [at church], from the Bible, it's all about farming to get the weeds out of my life, by destroying the bad habits I picked up – to get that out of my life".

6.3 Religious Repertoires

As important as family and work are in the life of the ex-gangster, religion appears to play particularly central role in transitions out of gangs. Many of interviewees' turning points were related to some kind of spiritual awakening, and almost all practice religion as a central part of their new non-gang roles. A religious conversion, or reawakening, can help a gang member switch tracks by setting up a change in life course that could not have occurred otherwise (Brenneman 2011, 237-238). Disengagement narratives collected as a part of this study were saturated with religious references, something also found in studies of criminal desistance (Giordano et al. 2002, 1036). There are a number of reasons this might be the case. Religious faith reinforces personal beliefs that a better life is possible. The spiritual elements of religion can provide gang members with a "critical resource" (Schroeder and Frana 2009, 722), which they draw upon to help alleviate problems in a non-criminal manner (despite their unfavourable life conditions). In addition, interviewees indicated that religion provides purpose. Energies previously used for violence and criminality can now be redirected towards the legitimate social goals of promoting cohesion and community (Flores 2014, 202). Part of the appeal of religion is also no doubt due to the fact that it's one of few social resources that is accessible to people living in tough environments (Deuchar 2018, 48). Whereas getting a job requires that one has skills and experience, finds a matching vacancy, and beats other applicants that apply for that position, joining a church or mosque has no such reservations to admission. After years of being caught up in violence and criminality – not to mention the many false starts that may be associated with out-of-gang transitions – even family may be reluctant to embrace the reformed gangster. Many also spoke of the power of religious forgiveness. It is a way for a gang-leaver to forgive him or herself the bloody mistakes associated with gangsterism (Maruna et al. 2006, 163). Because the spiritual typically trumps the secular in South Africa[83], religious absolution is a way of erasing previous roles, using spiritual awakening to expunge one's criminal past and reorganise one's moral rebirth into the social world. On the Cape Flats "[r]eligion, like any youth programme, offers a trajectory, a pathway or line of development. It also holds out the possibility of transition… a new trajectory or turning point – seeing the light" (Pinnock 2016a, 266).

[83] Only 5.2 per cent of South Africans do not affiliate with any religion in particular; an estimated 86 per cent are Christian, 5.4 per cent follow traditional religions, 1.9 per cent are Muslim, and 0.2 per cent are Jewish (Statistics South Africa 2015, 30).

But one of the most powerful reasons that why faith is so fundamental to gang exit is that it provides an unequivocally forceful repertoire by which to live. What is more, a winning performance of religiosity projects powerful signs of personal reformation to any critics that may remain suspicious of the ex-gangster. Work is constrained by structures. Whereas family life is a domestic matter that largely takes place in the home and profession is limited to the workplace, religious respectability is tied up in clear public displays that are validated by church and community. What makes the repertoire of the righteous man so powerful then is that it provides an internal behavioural schema, as well as an archetype by which the performance of that schema can be discerned externally. Good behaviours can be a way for people to signal their religiosity and ethics to others (Levy 2014, 1318). Seeing religion as repertoire means viewing religion strategically, as part of a cultural tool kit, and considering people that use such tools as agents, who do things with reference to the many cultural elements available to them in a given social space – as opposed to, say, seeing religions as moralising forces acting on people (Campany 2012, 107).

Even though finding salvation from the gang is far from secure, key informants opined that religiosity provides the gang member the best possibility to transition into a new life. Many had ardently stepped into religious repertoires as personal and interpersonal strategies for exit. Marcus, for instance, asserts that where worldly interventions for exiting gangs fail, faith can succeed:

> Basically, there isn't actually any key out of the gang – only through God. You can't go to a lawyer and say you want to come out. You can't take your mother to the gang and say I'm done – or even Ceasefire. They will now [in the gang] say: "yes, we won't touch you", and stuff like [that]. Even if you pay them money [to leave]. Once they have the money, they're going to do stuff more to you.

According to Marcus, the criminal justice system is of little use to judge the credibility of gang exit; nor can the ex-gangster appeal through family life or community organisations. Even the paying of bribes is likely to prove ineffectual in securing an exit. "Only through God" may he be allowed to leave. It should be said that Marcus's own gang exit experience through religion was not at all straightforward. He still had to manage expectations from his own gang, the Americans, to continue on in the brotherhood, as well as deal with threats from rivals. Nevertheless, unable to move out of Hanover Park and into better social and economic circumstances, enacting a religious repertoire is as useful a tool as he had in his transition out of street life.

Those in other Cape Flats neighbourhoods said similar things. William reiterates the opinion that the church is the only place an ex-gangster can seek sanctuary from the gang in a community like Manenberg:

> Yes, when you leave [the gang] you're now a *frans.* But the main thing is that [in the gang] they would respect you if you make that decision to leave [via religion]. But that is the only reason they would respect you – if you busy with the Lord's stuff, you see… Because it's like outside, they can see the man of God, and you would be respected for following the right path.

Even though he is no longer a gangster – nor an *ndota* – the gang-leaver will still be respected if he is a man of God. In connecting himself to the spiritual realm, he shows the "outside" world that his "following the right path". That path provides as credible a transition out of gangs, and into normal life, as can be hoped. Even then, however, religious repertoires must be constant and convincing in the ways they are portrayed, as indicated by David:

> Now that I am out some time, people see me walking with my bible, and they think: "here's a changed man". So they know that I am not going to go to another gang [and join]. Now I just keep to myself, I am busy with church and stay there by my family and just with my son. So, it's like you joined the church and you're always with your family, so [in the gangs] they know you're not going to become an enemy. So people do respect my decision [to leave gangs] like that.

The performance of walking with his Bible is essential to embodying righteousness every Sunday. A bible is a necessary accoutrement for the successfully "changed man", just as *takkies*, name brand clothing, and a cell phone are cultural objects associated with street success. For David, going to church with his bible is part of righteous routine that includes "changing how you speak – like no *Sabela* and no dirty words – and then how you dress must be with a nice shirt and nice shoes". Such is the vocabulary and wardrobe that are the accoutrements of religious change. Speaking and dressing righteously signal religiosity, just as good behaviours do.

But people's belief in absolution is not absolute. Street nature is manipulative and obstinately distrustful. Complicating matters, those that have converted back to gangsterism after finding God have sullied the cloak of the religious man, and undermined the belief that a gang member can be saved. So, it is not enough to simply be saved. One

must convince others that this is so, providing a credible counterexample to all of those that have tried and failed to convert to the spiritual life. As Andre says:

> There are guys that don't care about religion, you see, because a lot of guys have made a mess of religion – just using the religion to block them out [of the gang]. But they [in the gang] would come to see, no, that you were lying because of what you doing. But if you [are] serious they would say: "no, it's fine" [that you are out of the gang].

If it is to be persuasive, the roles of the righteous man need to be reinforced consistently through public performance. Being exposed as an imaginary player can be fatal. The bigger the reputation, the greater the stocks of street capital that must be discarded, meaning the move from violent virtuosity to virtue can be particularly arduous – and treacherous. The streets are always watching, after all. As said by Prince:

> I'm Born Again, but the world still views me as that same guy [in the gang]. I had a big reputation. So... you do not go telling people you're Born Again you let them see you are a changed man… I started to live that [spiritual] life, attending church meetings, services, church studies [and] being part of the church. Everything that needed to be done, I was always there. So people started to see Prince is not anymore a criminal, he has changed.

Because it is rare that the gang-leaver can exit his or her neighbourhood, interactions with members of one's former gang are to be expected. Through these interactions, righteousness is continually put to the test. Mistakes in seemingly banal exchanges can either crack the façade of reform, while sticking to scripture can reinforce the role of the religious man. In this way, both failures and successes in transitions from gangs are interactional. Even being greeted in the street is not without significance, as Prince explains:

> When they say: "*salut, my bru"*, I would say: "yes, sir". When they would try to speak gang language with me, I would say "look here, my brother, I need to get to this thing at church". Or maybe they would greet me with *Sabela* and I would say: "same here brother-man". My response would be to speak back, but not the fashion that they're speaking in. I would evade it.

Part of this exchange may be a reversion to the familiarities of past modes of interaction, at least for those still living the street life. Perhaps Prince's former brothers greet him as they always have. But his reading of what is an everyday situation implies motives that are

much more sinister. In response, his performance becomes intentional. Prince's deliberate evasion of gang language is necessary to show that he is no longer his street self. At the same time, using decent language demonstrates his new righteous self. Within this act being a 'brother' is subverted and stripped of the symbolism of street brotherhoods, and infused with a new significance that denotes spiritual union. It is the performative embodiment of "brotherly love" (Flores 2014, 186). Projecting outwards the inward reformation of one's gangster identity, he says: "just makes people understand that I'm not part anymore of who they are"".

Ryan also spoke of the tests he faced during his transition. Changing social interactions with his former gang brothers, intermingled with the psychological shifts to illustrate the dual processes of dispositioning of normal life and decompositioning of street life, have already been described in detail above:

> They [the Americans] still come looking [for me] – saying: "where is that *ndota*? Where is 'Stripes' [his gang nickname]?" But I said: "I am now brother Ryan"… the people in the number also needed to get used to it. And I had to get the number out of me. Sometimes a word still slips out – a *Sabela* word... I must get used to normal talking. The whole mind-set, my way of speaking, my whole character must change.

While he is trying to quiet the voice of the gangster 'Stripes', his former brothers are still trying to speak to that part of him. As this is happening on the outside, inside Ryan is trying to will himself to talk normal, as a way of re-habituating his mind-set and character. He admits that it takes time to break down old dispositions and build-up new ones: "I was long in gangs and the number. And now everything is new… So, I must get used to this church stuff. I am a little bit shy". It is interesting that Ryan uses the word "shy", because in the world of Cape Town's prison gangs and street gangs he is a 28 and an American with considerable authority; actually, he is the same *ndota*, who declared above: "there is nothing I don't know about the number". But he is a child in the church, and is just growing into a new non-street way of being:

> When I changed my life, I had to be disciplined. My pants were not anymore hanging [low], down here. I don't walk with a vest anymore [to show my *chappies*]. I had a long *bokkie*[84] that I take it off. There was a time I made

[84] Beard

> dreads [in my hair] also. Everything changed. The way I speak, the way I talk, the way I do everything… I used to swagger, and now I walk straight.

Dress, speech, walk, and way in which Ryan wore his hair and beard, were combined together in a coherent and disciplined performance of change. Interestingly, his sense of discipline is transferred between his old gang self and his new non-gang self. It is a word that came up often in our conversation, and in conversations with others in this study, with its meanings shifting as identities shifted. Because "the new identity incorporates vestiges and residuals of the previous role", as Ebaugh, (2013, 4) states in outlining role transition, there will be frameworks for seeing the world that survive out-of-gang transitions. Discipline continues to serve as a reference points for organising personal and social life, and is a form of knowledge – or capital – that is transferred between social fields, no matter if they seem diametrically opposed, as the gangs and godliness are. As a gangster, he explains, his low-hanging chinos, vest, etc. was an exemplar of a street style that proves: "this man, the way he looks, he is a boss; he has *discipline*; he can lead". His new style, by comparison, he says exhibits "*discipline* with my religion". It is the latter form of discipline that he is currently busy fashioning himself by, and trying to convince others he is living by:

> Ryan: You will never see me stand on the corner. They will just see me – the gangs. They think I am coming to spy on them. I always try to give them the message I am no longer involved in this… You get guys, they say: "we kill the 28s". They want me to hear that stuff. I tell myself: "they want me to say something, so they can have a reason to kill me".
>
> DD: That must be very difficult to deal with.
>
> Ryan: I just show them I go to church, and I come from church. They share information with each other. They ask: "what is that guy doing here?" They looking for that one mistake, and they will kill you… I don't give them a reason. I just show them I am by my church and family.

With little room for error, Ryan cannot but be totally committed to what he calls making a real change. This even means that "people cannot see you still smoking drugs and drinking". Though I insist that there are obvious differences between simply smoking drugs and drinking, and being in the gang, he counters by saying: "the gangster's mind works differently. They think: 'this guy, he can still come back [if he is smoking and drinking]'". When gangs see an ex-gangster smoking or drinking, they see a man that is not serious about changing. The coherent and disciplined performance of change that is expected

during gang leaving is neither of those two things. Sensing weakness, gangs can take to provocation in the hopes of frustrating change and testing the fidelity of the religious repertoire:

> Especially in these [Cape Flats] communities, if they see when you walking with the Bible, or going to the mosque, they will test you – threaten you – to see if you get angry. Then if they see your change is genuine they will respect you... The only change they see is when there is spiritual change.

Thus, he must be steadfast in his righteousness. But while faith may give Ryan a fighting chance to leave the gang, even religious protection may not be enough protect him during the hazardous exit out of the streets. I have personally known many young people that have zealously embraced change in their lives, only to be gunned down in the midst of their transition. A person may be killed because of past grudges or affiliations, as D- was. He was a Laughing Boy that I had interviewed on the very first day of my fieldwork. At that point, he had completely left the gang, found God, and had mediated his exit with his rival Americans, but six months into his transition they shot him anyway. It is unclear whether the hit was sanctioned through the gang's leaders. It may simply have been a mournful case of being spotted in the wrong place at the wrong time by a potentially drugged American who happened to have a gun on his person. The laws of the street are not actually laws. They are instead general organising principles, which are subject to the interpretation and improvisation of those operating in the street field – as well as those trying to exit it. In both cases, poor marginalised people utilise their best available strategies to, firstly, survive their disadvantage, and secondly, thrive in whatever ways they can. Both surviving and thriving require struggling against those in similarly desperate circumstances, making competition for capital resources ruthless. The unfortunate upshot of conditions like these is a violent structure culture where the use of force becomes a legitimate, and even expected means, of gaining a better social position. Shootings, stabbings, and assaults then become an everyday reality all Cape Flats residents must in some way cope with – as victims, as perpetrators, or sometimes as both.

6.3.1 Turning the Other Cheek

Gang members are expected to move towards violence, dishing it out and accepting it as part of the gangster performance that embodies intimidation. However, by embodying righteousness, former gang members risk moving from being threats to being threatened. Members of rival gangs may, for instance, continue to perceive a former gang member as a risk well after an individual left their gang, and look to intimidate him or her in different

ways (Pyrooz and Decker 2011b, 11; 2011a, 419). The 'appropriate' way of responding to aggressive intimidation in the streets is through aggression of one's own, in the actions and reactions required by street repertoires of revenge. But the righteous individual is expected to know that he or she shalt not kill, and must try to avoid violent responses when threatened. More than a moral imperative, pacifism is a response to the centrality of violence in street culture. A person seeks to define oneself relative to oppositional culture by reacting in opposition to it. It is perhaps the most extreme – and perhaps most important – example of how religiosity signals a behavioural shift after gang exit.

Still, without guidance about how to act, responding to violence with non-violence may seem an altogether unnatural prospect. The gangster aggressively fights for what is his (or hers) and takes offence to the slightest provocation. But the religious man does not stand up and retaliate; respect is garnered by sitting down and being humble and, in doing so, enacting a religious repertoire of righteousness. The case of Byron illustrates this well. Getting baptised as a Born Again Christian was a means of washing away his old street identity. In Cape Town's fortified City Bowl, or in the verdant serenity of the suburbs, his security would have been protected by SAPS or private security. Because he lives in a poor neighbourhood on the Cape Flats, he must fend for himself. Faith provides him some protection, and a way of identifying and acting in a world where he was still poor, excluded and threatened. Indeed, the threat to his personal safety was now worse, due to his years as a Mongrel. Byron had already been out of the gang for three to four years, when he was caught up in a gang war between the Americans and his ex-gang: "I come here around the corner and two [Americans] are just there… [One of them], he grab[s] the gun. I run in here by the flats, to the people. Three shots he shot on me". In the aftermath of that near-death encounter, he had no thoughts of revenge: "I can't do anything, I must just be strong and go on with my new life… Born Again Christians don't fight back. I must pray to God for his protection. So it's a little difficult".

The 'little difficulties' he refers to include the still-present danger of being shot and killed. His own experiences have taught him that this sort of danger might quite literally be waiting around the corner. But from his experiences in the Mongrels, Byron also knows that retaliating to violence comes with the danger of a return to gang life:

> I can't retaliate. Imagine if I retaliate, then I'm back in it… Like, you know this guy C-, [he's a Mongrel]… If you're going to "touch" him, he's going to "touch you back'. Now I can also do that; it's easy. But I think to myself: I can't go back into that life again.

Acknowledging this suggests that he is calling on an understanding of street knowledge, and combining this with a new appreciation for scripture, to play on all the resources available to him. The spiritual realm has its own logic, just as the streets do. The code of the street requires that each violent act be responded to in kind. But theological interpretations of Cape Flats gangsterism believe that religiosity "bears the power to disarm, subvert, and even redeem the powers and principalities that seek to keep communities captive" (Bowers Du Toit 2014). The divine laws redefine strength, by mandating that Byron face violence by turning the other cheek: "the gangs, they can come shoot there. They can come and stab me here. They can hurt my family. I must just stay with this new path". Looking to the Bible to inform one's actions in response to an attempted murder is as much a real world acknowledgement of what happens in the streets, as it is an appeal to the divine for protection – maybe even more so.

Each set of rules has its own rules for performance, and repercussions for deviating from that performance. The Ten Commandments mix with gang rules, as Byron improvises his way through indeterminacies inherent to new experiences as a spiritual man trying to avoid being victimised by gang violence. Most informants noted that the overlap between spiritual and street spaces is likely to be most pronounced in the immediate aftermath of gang life. But we can see that even three to four years after ditching the streets, and a former gangster is established as a spiritual man, there may still be tests, as Byron learned when he was almost shot. Speaking again of his former Mongrel brother C-, Byron indicates why his adherence to his own performance of righteousness must be so exacting:

> Byron: When C- fell [back into the streets], he didn't go back to the gang. He went a little with the alcohol and girlfriends.
>
> DD: So if you get back with the alcohol and girls, partying, eventually it may lead to...
>
> Byron: The enemies, they can hear about this and check [that] you're playing [with disengagement]. So they can come shoot you. That happened too. They did shoot. The Americans did, and the Laughing Boys wanted to shoot on C- because they say: "hey, this person he's playing. He's not serious with a new life".
>
> DD: So, the idea is: if you go into the church, and you live things the proper way, then people are more likely to respect that?

> Byron: Yes, but if you start playing, then [they see] it's just an excuse, you know. So you must be 100 percent.

As mentioned, even a perfect performance of righteousness will not completely protect a gang-leaver; Byron confirmed this sad reality when he was almost killed. Still, spirituality probably gives him the best chance of surviving. The religious repertoire is a guide for action, and it is also a character that other gang members understand, because they have seen it modelled through previous out-of-gang transitions. However, because there have also been a lot of gang members that have "played" with religion and not exited street life, rivals are likely to be highly sceptical of redemption experiments. Out-of-gang conversions must be performed precisely in order to be proven true. The same cultural signifiers that signal street life to the authorities, may now be taken as indications of gang affiliation by community members and enemies; as Byron explains:

> People that have earrings and chains, *takkies,* and whatever. They can just dress like this, and not be a gangster. But other people in this [street] life, they don't see it that way. They think: "this guy, he's still the same"… You must change everything: the ways you speak, even the music you listen to. That time [when in the Mongrels], I use to like a lot of Lil Wayne rap. Even that you must leave, as well. There's more stuff even. The way I wear [my clothes], I mustn't actually wear [them like that], because the people will see: this boy's still a gangster… There's a lot of things you must lose. It's difficult.

Again, we see that the religious repertoire informs a coherent and disciplined performance of change. Associated with it is an exhaustive list of how a person must speak, dress, and act – even what music a person must listen to. Against those waiting to see if the transition is sincere it is protective persona that, if applied consistently, can help ward off possible peril. For the person transitioning out of gangs, it is a model of behaviour that remaps the social terrain of insecurity, making it recognisable and navigable in ways that deviate from the violent norm. However, it must be said that old street dispositions cannot simply be expunged, and replaced by new ones. Because the ex-gangster unavoidably originates in the streets, his or her behavioural system is a composite of the logic of the street and a theology of change. Both repertoires might compete in any given situation to determine a person's actions. For further examples of this dynamic, we can look to Emerson (Elsie's River male, 43 years), who explains the difficulties of responding to a threat during an robbery attempt against him in Parow:

> It is difficult [to avoid violence]. I got into this situation when a guy tried to rob me. Then my ego – the mind-set I had – kicks in. Does this guy know who I am? Who I am in the number? That was a big challenge to me. Then I knew I have to rely on God. His word says: "no weapon formed against you shall prosper". The Bible tells you about meekness. You know what you can do [in retaliation], but you don't.

Both the gangster and the righteous man responded to the robber's threat. Ultimately, the righteous man prevailed. Instead of violent retaliation, Emerson chose meekness. Christian writings provided a script and gave him the internal fortitude to meet his threat without force. He was able to tell the would-be robber: "brother, you can do what you want to do, but you know you don't have to live like this". Indeed, Emerson was ready to accept violent victimisation – as Byron was ready to accept getting shot, or stabbed, or having his family hurt – to not betray the lofty requirements of righteousness: "he's standing over me with this brick. And I'm thinking in my mind that this guy is going to hit me. My teeth is going to, you know, be knocked [in]. I just relied on God". The religious repertoire was activated to make the robbery comprehensible to his new non-street role. He said the robber did nothing in response, and simply "walked away". Meekness had prevailed over strength.

As was the case with Byron, righteousness was played through an unwavering behavioural expression of the divine directives:

> Emerson: I knew I had to operate as a man of God.
>
> DD: What does that mean?
>
> Emerson: That means I cannot operate like I used to – the way I think, the way I dress. Especially if I get into situations like with that guy who [almost] robbed me. Because people are watching to see how I react. The gangs are watching. I knew I had to resist and forgive this guy.
>
> DD: So, in their eyes, as soon as you react differently the gangs say: "nah, this is not [a] real [change]?"
>
> Emerson: Yes, it is a cover. This is a lie… So, you act as someone who is changed. You live that life [completely].

As with other examples, thought, dress, and other aspects of the non-street repertoire are bound up in an internal imperative for non-violent action, which in turn is connected to personal protection through spiritual signalling. Part of its appeal is that religion offers both

a behavioural schema, as well as a moral and social identity within which to situate a new role. In adopting a religious repertoire, Emerson says: “it is a renewal of this gangster mind-set… it helps me to progress. So I know [now] I don’t have to hit someone over the head with a lock”. His quip is tinged with a certain absurdity. Not hitting someone over the head (with anything) seems a straightforward rule by which to live life – just as it should have seemed obvious that Patrick (above) should not respond to a workplace conflict by hitting his boss with a spade. But coming from the violent realities of street culture, there is nothing absurd about this statement. Bashing a threat into submission is the assumed *modus operandi* of the street field, and is seen as so natural and encompassing that it becomes unseen. Repositioning oneself relative to a former street self requires that the remaining effects of embodied aggression be decompositioned. Then can new non-street dispositions become realised as substitute behavioural systems by which one operates.

6.3.2 Internal Conflicts

Sometimes, however, even having a religious code cannot totally assuage the difficulties that come with navigating situations of conflict. In the internal conflict generated by the attempted robbery, Emerson struggled to find the appropriate means to handle his assailant, wavering between rank in the number and his relationship with God. Although Emerson successfully stepped away from a potentially violent altercation, without experiencing or committing a violent act, he was still left staggered by the psychological conflict associated with the episode:

> It was hard for me… When I walked away, that’s when it started. I thought: “how can I let that guy do that? Does this guy know who I am – who I am in the number?” My mind was like turned around. I don’t even have to hurt that guy. I can just give an order to the [gang], saying: “look here guys, this guy tried to do this” and they would have sorted him out… It was very hard. I started crying also, thinking that this thing happened and I did nothing.

The impact of violence-forgone was maybe even more impactful than any violent act could have been. In a peaceful neighbourhood, the violent event is exceptional. But if one is used to only violence, it is peace that is unusual and shocking. As he walked away from his robber, Emerson’s impressions of his world began to shudder and quake, resulting in a temporary crisis of self; the aftershocks he felt illustrate how every violent incident is actually part of a continuous sequence of external social interactions and underlying internal processes working to stabilise interpretations of society and self. The event was a momentary confluence of agency, structure, and circumstance, which is like a single drop

in a larger body of flowing water that has its own relationship to upstream and downstream dispositions. Interactions of this type sit within a person as dispositional residue that is subsequently forged and re-forged in the crucible of the mind. What results flows into the outcomes of past dispositions and is the precursor to a future dispositions, in a dynamic relationship between agency and structure (and circumstance) that can never be the same twice. Through this dynamic and mutually constitutive process, social agents are always in a state of becoming, as are the structures that make up habitus. Constant microsociological dispositioning and redispositioning would prove exhausting if it were not on some level ordered, especially in the chaotic upheaval of the transition away from gangs. Adhering to a spiritual order and script can help keep ex-gang-members from getting lost between competing identities.

Although religious repertoires help to provide internal and external continuity during gang exit, the requirements of righteousness can be extreme, calling for radical tests the ex-gangster's adherence to the precepts of his new non-street persona. This point is brought home in Declan's struggle to cope with the murder of his son, who was shot by the rival Hustlers gang in Mitchells Plain three months before our interview. At first, he had a strong urge to avenge the killing "the gangster way". But in the social landscape of his new life, his moral compass had to be recalibrated. Living life "the normal way" necessitates non-violent directives for coping with emotional hardship: humbleness, forgiveness and non-violence:

> With my son's death, I did go find out who is the guys that shot him and I went up to them with the car. I told myself that I was going face them [and kill them]. But when I came there I couldn't retaliate because of the step I took in my life; and I know I must forgive them, and try to do that every day. Sometimes I [still] want to go see who are these people [that killed my son] and what are their mothers doing… But that is stuff that wants to take me back to the gang. It's easier for to go the gangster way, take a gun, go up to them, and just go finish them off. Then you know you "got your blood", also. But now I can't do that anymore, because I'm in life the normal way.

It is hard enough to personally confront the physical and psychological traumas inflicted through an attack on his family. But Declan must do so while overriding a hardwired repertoire for revenge that threatens to pull him back into street life: making peace with the outside world can be foreign and intimidating to a person that has always sought out conflict. Moreover, from a street perspective, Declan always believed that the spiritual life

was a “weak point”. Participation in church life would make him appear meek, and put a target on him among other gangs. But as a religious convert, he has no choice but to seek credibility in past liabilities. Extraordinary meekness and non-violence are the guiding principles through which a world beyond gangs can be inherited. He must be prepared to forgive the gangland killing of his own son, a killing that was perpetrated by his own arch-rivals the Hustlers, no less. The break from his past self is indeed extraordinary. Just two years before we spoke, he nearly murdered his brother-in-law, who in playing a prank had snuck up and startled him. Feeling he was disrespected in front of family and friends, Declan nearly beat the man to death with a hammer. Today, he is fighting himself to remain peaceful, reacting to the most traumatic forms of provocation as a spiritual man is supposed to: using religion to reconcile the need of live “the normal way”, with an inclination to still live “the gangster way”.

Making peace with the past is as much as an external social process, as it is an internal one. As already stated, religion offers personal absolution (Maruna et al. 2006, 163), which can be a starting point for dispositioning new non-street practices. It also provides a framework for the type of interpersonal reconciliation that can facilitate gang exit. Many research participants said that, to transition out of their violent dispositions, they needed to move beyond years of accumulated resentments, pardoning others for violence, in addition to themselves being pardoned for violent acts. Asking forgiveness from family and friends itself is hard enough. Going to one’s victims and enemies to do the same is even harder. In Declan’s case, his church expected that he make peace with his former enemies. Reconciliation was attempted under very difficult circumstances. It centred on a meeting with the rival Hustlers. This is the same gang he had battled for years, and which had shot his son. What is more, he met one of the gang’s leaders, a man who shot and almost killed him, in Mitchells Plain, a community in which Declan had committed some particularly atrocious violent acts. As he says below, making peace seemed an impossibility, and even making it through the encounter alive could not be taken for granted:

> Declan: I was afraid of the gangs, because I thought they are going to kill me… It was very difficult. The life I lived made it seem impossible for me to find peace. There were times when I knew I can’t go to church because it was another weak point, and other gang members would see me go to church and target me, and now I’m showing weakness. So when I came there [to Mitchells Plain], all the stuff that I learned as a child [in the streets] I got to learn again in the church… At the meeting, [the Hustler’s leader] named all the things that I did… but in a harsh way; and I told him in a humble way: “yes I did do it”. I

asked the he please forgive me, and so he said “alright”, and he was also asking me for forgiveness for what he did.

DD: Is that guy still active in the gang?

Declan: Yes, that guy is still today in a gang. That gang fight is still on. There’s still people dying. He gave me his hand in front of [the other Hustlers and] the community… What [people] sensed there was the Holy Spirit. Because something like that doesn’t happen in the community – the enemy going to his enemy to make peace. Usually they do it the other way [through violence].

Declan was used to being in streets and acting a certain way, moving towards anger, danger, and violence and away from anything that would make him appear weak. In the normal life now, he had to avoid his own hostile dispositions and respond with kindness to the hostility of others. Religion offered an interpretation of life beyond gangs – a way of unlearning the modes and motives of street life in the church. Without such spiritual guidance it is hard to see how it would have been possible to make it through the meeting he described. Truly, it is possible that he could have been killed. Even for others present, violence and vengeance appeared so deeply entrenched in gang relations that decelerations of mercy seemed wholly illogical without a sense of the Holy Spirit. Yet, through the lens of a religious repertoire, the reconciliatory moment could only be understood through spiritual intervention. Regardless of the explanation attributed to it, the meeting proved that in the real world gangland enemies can meet without either of them dying. For Declan, in particular, it reinforced the fact that it is by acting meekly, and by humbly seeking forgiveness, that the world beyond gangs could be inherited. As the master morality that values pride and power is inverted, secular spaces are converted into sacred sites, in a way that has been crucial to the production and understanding of social life in Cape Town (Chidester 2000, 34). Absent other cultural resources, faith can be leveraged as a repertoire and source of capital to reinvent the lives of those looking beyond the limited horizons of street culture.

6.4 Bridging the Gap with Social Capital

Thus far, our analysis has been limited to looking at the cultural resources available to people exiting gangs. Religion, family, and work are all valuable sources of cultural capital in the non-street repertoires that are available to ex-gangsters still living in the marginal spaces of Cape Town’s coloured townships. In coloured neighbourhoods, it is generally taken for fact that low levels of cultural cohesion and high community disorganisation undermine informal social constraints on gangs (Pinnock 2016, 35-38). Social

disorganisation theory sees a connection between the disintegration of community networks and the inability of a neighbourhood to enforce norms that favour non-violence (Sampson et al.,1997, 922). Strong local bonding can improve the efficacy of coordinated social action against gangs (Putnam et al. 1994, 167). Thus, social capital does not simply affect individual outcomes, as was Bourdieu's focus[85], but also impacts on groups and organisational outcomes (Adam and Rončević 2003, 159). Gangs are able to fill a sociocultural vacuum, by organising structures that explore identity and express rebellion, communicate and acquire models of behaviour, and achieve social respect – even if these are generated largely through fear (C. Glaser 2008, 348). So, as gangs have grown through the years, they have become entrenched in coloured neighbourhoods, where it remains "an embedded feature of politics and society" (Standing 2006, 139). Yet, this section shows that in some cases informal social controls[86] can be used effectively against gangs. If not to dislodge gangs from communities, then to help dislodge individuals from gangs: some communities may be able to step in to help gang-leavers whom the gang is unwilling to let go of.

Social capital has thus far not been a focus of this paper. But it has been shown that interpersonal relationships can be used in finding jobs for many people. Also, the sense of belonging that many ex-gang-members find in family and church is undeniable. However, family and community have not thus far been mentioned as a social resource that can be leveraged to protect a person against gang violence. This is partly because participation in street life damages many non-gang social relationships. Ricardo (Athlone male, 27 years), for instance, say that his many years with the Junior Mafias cost him his connection to family and community – both important sources of social capital. But it was the fear of losing his family totally that finally prompted his gang exit:

[85] Since differentials in power between classes and races underpin social relations in Cape Town, capital pursuit is anchored in and reproduces social arrangements. As Hagan points out, where social capital is available, it "is used to successfully endow children with forms of cultural capital that significantly enhance their later life chances" (Hagan 1994, 69). If the social capital available to poor families is denied or destroyed, it can diminish their capacity to provide the cultural capital their children need for succeeding. Children in such families are at a much greater risk of becoming embedded in the criminal economy of drugs, criminality, and violence (Kramer 2000, 129).

[86] External regulation may come about as a result of favourable social reputations or relations, hostile remarks, gossip, ostracism, and other displays of social disapproval, to affect one's social status, reputation enhancement or honour (Bicchieri 2005, 8; Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 733; Crawford and Ostrom 1995, 590).

> [Because of gangsterism] I started to lose family… Okay, I think I actually had enough now. It's time I actually turn my back now, because my eldest brother was shot because of our enemy. He was innocent. He wasn't into drugs, or into gangs or into alcohol – nothing… So what [I was] busy with then was not right. It's bring all kind of trouble to the house.

Family can become the collateral damage of gang wars. If your enemies cannot get you, they will hurt you by getting to the ones you love. After his brother was shot, Ricardo's family situation worsened when their neighbours revolted against his family and tried to push them out of the community because of the gang activities that led to the killing: "I actually saw this is turning people, it's turning my family [and] the neighbourhood, it is turning everybody against me. So at a point when I wanted to get out". Community pressure now intensified family pressure to exit the Junior Mafias. He had to choose: it was either leave the gang, or relinquish his domestic and social connections. He put kinship before the brotherhood. Having already lost his brother, he could not risk amputation from community, and further amputation from his family.

One of the reasons that it is so difficult to get out of gang life is precisely because of the volume of street capital a person has managed to amass. In this paper, street capital has been spoken about mostly as an individual resource. But the dividends of each member's violent power and criminal knowledge has also grown the value of the street capital controlled by each gang. Its leaders, in particular, stand to profit considerably from increases in violent force, firepower, turf size, etc. Street capital in the form of criminal connections and knowledge are directly convertible into economic capital. The cultural capital that you bring to the gang – violence and connections – will make it more difficult for you to get out. As Ricardo indicates, for instance, he is useful to the gang because of the connections he has:

> I was very useful for them at that time because I had lots of connection with guns and drugs, and I had people who would phone me [and say]: "here's your enemy is sitting on the field"… So me quitting gangsterism made them lose out [on] lots of money and lots of connections.

Afraid of losing out on guns, drugs, money, and street intelligence, the Junior Mafias tried to instil fear in Ricardo through violence. At first, they watched and waited for him to regress back into gang life. When it was obvious that this would not happen, they tried to intimidate him by targeting his family:

> There was a time when they wanted me to get back into business with them, which I didn't want to [do]. That was when they started to rob my sisters. [They did] everything to get me back. But I didn't respond and just left them, and let my own family do the right thing: go to the cops and press charges and let [the police] deal with it.

Also, at different points his neighbours stood up against gang threats made against him. As his transition unfolded, family, and community relations would come to be his greatest assets. But coming back to family life can have important benefits in transitioning into normal life. Ricardo received family support in addressing threats by his former gang brothers with the help of his mother and father. For example, he had considerable family support in bringing a case against the Junior Mafias for threats and violence carried out against him and his sisters.

The story of Ricardo's exit out of the Junior Mafias is indicative of the ways that having social capital can facilitate gang exit. Family and community stood up against him when he was in the gang, and stood up for him when he was out of it. However, even Ricardo admits that the extent to which collective action can be effective likely depends on the social setting one is in. In places where gangs are more embedded, like Hanover Park and Manenberg, successful community mobilisation against gangs becomes much more difficult. The Bridgetown area of Athlone, where Ricardo lives, is a neighbourhood of working- and middle-class coloured households. Though it has gangs, they are not as socially embedded as in other parts of the city. It is telling that the two Bridgetown-based key informants in this study both received considerable support from kinship networks to push back against gang threats during their transition out of street life; (the other is Emmanuel, whose story will be told shortly). According to Ricardo, similar action would not have been possible in more gang-affected parts of Cape Town. As told by him:

> Ricardo: Bridgetown is actually a very quiet place you see. Here's not much gangsterism going on here.
>
> DD: Do you think it would be more difficult if you were in a Manenberg or a Hanover Park?
>
> Ricardo: Yeah, 'cause that is places where gangsterism is going on each and everyday. So I would find it more difficult [being] there, in such places. Because you are around crime there everyday, and there you would die very easily.

According to Ricardo's comments, the avenues out of gangs are dependent upon the opportunities of any social space. This should not be surprising. Ricardo is a living example that even working- and middle-class communities like Bridgetown have significant problems with gangs and gang violence. But, on the whole, a Manenberg or a Hanover Park have much more gang activity, as well as lower levels of development. The structuring effects of different social fields in turn structure possibilities within that field, including the possibility to make a successful exit from gangs. Further, with more embedded levels of underdevelopment, community action is less effective – and probably less likely – making gang leaving more problematic.

Emmanuel is another former gang member from the same part of Athlone. Unlike Ricardo, he did not have problems separating from his own gang the Playboys, because most of had been killed in the last years through gang fighting. But the rival Bad Boys continued to test and threaten him at a fruit stand he worked at upon his exit:

> They were already here and they provoked me, talking bad and saying *"jou ma se [poes]"*[87] and that… I never let the bad side take over me even thought there was a knife there and I was tempted to do it, just run over to him and maybe just stab him, but people like came to me and talked to me saying "go on with your business leave them its not worth it".

Though his new workplace bordered Bad Boy territory, Emmanuel managed to resist retaliation partly through the help of the surrounding community. In the quote above, Emmanuel indicates that his neighbours reinforced his own emerging non-violence dispositions. Whereas in the comments that follow, community actually mobilised around him against the Bad Boys:

> The aunties in my court… and my mother's friends, my father's friends, they told them: "you'll not come here and disrespect our people, because we don't disrespect our elders and if you are going to do it, we're going to stand up as one and take you down". And then they would leave.

Again, it is unlikely that community intervention of this type would have been similarly effective in a different social field, with higher levels of gang activity. As mentioned above, Bridgetown – where Emmanuel is from – is not Manenberg (or Hanover Park). When asked if a social pressure could be applied there, he responded: "no, never; in Manenberg, they don't care who you are. They just would shoot you the same moment they saw you

[87] A particularly harsh insult on the Cape Flats.

on their turf". Indeed, this echoes sentiments expressed by Ricardo above, who suggested that a person trying to leave gangs in Manenberg and Hanover Park "would die very easily". The gang exit experiences of Bridgetown-based key informants indicates that there is considerable local variation between street fields in Cape Town. Combined with local cultural and historical context – and state and community interventions – street fields are shaped as the continuous outcome of discursive struggle, in a way that makes them differ from one another (Shammas and Sandberg 2016, 5). Though gangs and violence are present in most Cape Flats communities, their power and overall embeddedness are differently structured. Gang presence in poor, insecure, and socially disorganised communities is much deeper and stronger. Moreover, gang exit is less certain and more perilous in a context where fewer economic, social, and cultural resources are available for those seeking the normal life and those attempting to help them.

It should be mentioned, though, that while social action against gangs might be less effective in the most disadvantaged communities, it still takes place. Even among those living with egregious levels of gang violence, lots of people refuse to resign themselves to its oppressive force. Commendable community-led efforts against gang violence do exist on the Cape Flats (Adriaanse 2016; Serra 2013; *VOC NEWS* 2015). Even as the South African state fails to meet obligations for security provision and community development, it leans heavily on communities in the fight against gangs. Starting in 2011, community mobilisation was one-of-four key pillars of the SAPS *Western Cape Gang Strategy* (SAPS, n.d., 12,18), which had as a key objective the mobilisation and organisation of communities against gangs and their criminal activities. Although the 2017 *National Crime Prevention Strategy* formally de-emphasises the burden on gang-affected communities by removing community mobilisation as a key pillar, it continues to highlight "mobilising communities in gang affected areas" (Western Cape Government 2016) as a "key action" required for effective gang prevention[88]. For its part, at the same time as criticising the ANC's call for community mobilisation as "extremely worrying", the Democratic Alliance-led provincial government rather hypocritically encourages communities to "engage and assist with safety on a larger scale" (Plato 2014). Provincial criticisms of national gang strategies ring even more hollow, considering a statement made by the Western Cape's Minister of Social Development, in which he underscores a belief that when strong civic movement and community activism decline, "crime and gangs take over" (Hartley 2010). Saying that gang-affected neighbourhoods need their "community organisations back" clearly shifts the

[88] The *National Anti-Gangsterism Strategy* replaces the *2008 Western Cape Social Transformation, Gang Prevention and Intervention Strategic Framework*.

onus for action, and blame for the presence of gangs, to the communities. It is a rhetorical shift that is largely representative of a practical strategy of urban development, governance, and security at the national and provincial levels that leaves Cape Flats communities to look after themselves.

I have witnessed such mobilisation against violence take place intermittently throughout my fieldwork. Acknowledging these forms of collective agency is important. Presenting entire geographies or demographics as passive victims of violence is inaccurate. Doing so perpetuates racist and classist tropes that negate the multi-dimensionality of lived experiences in Cape Town's coloured communities. Faced with gang violence that has become routine or banal, without help from an absent and uncaring state, those on the Cape Flats fight where they can. Often their situation seems intractable or terminal, and many eventually resort to violence themselves. As this happens, it is the communities then that not only pays the hefty price but also bear the blame for their own inability to get out of violence. To argue this is to argue that the deficient values of community residents are implicated in their own dilemma because they are to blame for violent interpersonal contact with their neighbours, lack of social surveillance, and the unpreparedness to intervene in altercations and to admonish unacceptable behaviour. Those that blame communities for not doing enough, or insinuate that they should do more, forget that the reason that gangs exist is because of failures of development and security provision. They also ignore the fact that local action against gangs is inhibited by the histories of cultural and social disorganisation that affect coloured people, the consequences of which are still being felt today in collective efforts to mobilise against, prohibit, and penalise violence.

6.5 Returning to Violence

Though Bridgetown is relatively more secure than many other areas on the Cape Flats, it still has a gang problem, which complicated Emmanuel's exit. As shown above, his primary survival strategy is to avoid confrontation: "because then they don't have a reason [to target me]. I don't give them that courage. I keep them far away from me – very distant". When that is not possible, though, he admits that other strategies must be employed. If asked for fruit or small amounts of money for example, he responds:

> Emmanuel: Like give them what they want and tell them it's not that I'm weak but I just don't want you guys to come around. So that's why I'm just giving you what you want now. So don't make it a habit.
>
> DD: And if it does become a habit?

> Emmanuel: Then of course I'm going [to] have to retaliate.

The need to retaliate is another example of how violence can outlive life in the gang, as street repertoires are called on to protect life and livelihood. The embodied disposition of aggressive retaliation persists and can be activated by external stimulus after gang exit:

> I'm like still violent in my own way. In the way you talk if you going to talk to me in the wrong way, or so, I'm going to react violently then… So I consider myself still as violent, if I must be.

These comments illustrate the ways in which street dispositions can continue even after gang membership has been knifed off. Because the street field is a social space with porous frontiers, the borders of street culture are not always easily delineable. Even outside of gangs, street moves can continue to articulate a person's dialectical exchange with the world, as newly emerging dispositions come into conflict with old ones and the continued structuring influences of habitus.

Emmanuel tries to avoid violent confrontation most of the time, as part of the performance of his new non-street persona; for instance, he can avoid conflict by denying opposing gangs the "reason" or "courage" to act violently. Another strategy is to pacify or mollify potential aggressors through material concessions – such as small offerings of fruit or money. In extreme cases, he looks to family and community for help. He also suggests that if his new non-street role position is continuously threatened, a return to street repertoires may be necessary to defend that ground that has been gained:

> To keep [the Bad Boys] away from me, they mustn't know that I'm scared in any way. Because they're going to get a weak spot on me, and they're going try to break in by that weak spot. Once they do it, they're going to get a hold on me and then they're going to tell me what to do… That is why I try to keep strong. I try to keep the weakness inside and the strong part outside.

Without adequate protection from the state, and no credible employment alternatives beyond his fruit stand, Emmanuel is realistic. He believes that he must act decisively if non-violent strategies fail, he must protect what he has gained in whatever ways that he can. It seems then that moving away from the street requires sustained performance of non-violence, using the cultural and social capital that is available to him in his particular social space. But protecting life and livelihood means performing aggressive acts when necessary, staking a claim to *any* space in the world by projecting violence to those that try to encroach on it. Emmanuel is trying to position himself more firmly away from gangs, and

the street field they dominate. But street culture intersects with other aspects of social life in Bridgetown. Unable to leave Bridgetown for a safer community, he navigates the overlapping fields of street life and normal life by blending street and non-street repertoires.

Of course, a return to violent behaviour may undermine the success of role repositioning. As has repeatedly been mentioned already, others may call into question the reliability of the ex-gangster role, which may result in increased threats and violent victimisation On the other hand, internal contradictions between street actions and normal aspirations may contribute to a crisis of self, which leads to the decompositioning and ultimate collapse of the new role:

> You crying to yourself… Sitting alone in the room maybe saying: "yeah, Lord why did I do this? Why do I always have to keep giving an anger face to the people, or to this guy, or that guy? Instead of smiling and taking their hand, or saying: "are you alright?". But the moment you do that, that gives them the courage to do to you what they want – to just because you greeted them, so getting respect [through violence] is a way of them disrespecting you. That's the way it is.

Only a year into being out of gangs, he is one of those I spoke to that are in the early stages of gang leaving. At the time of our interview, Emmanuel had completely de-identified and de-embedded from the Playboys. Yet, his inner life discloses a person still tragically caught between being normal and acting street. Unsurprisingly, he appeals to religion to provide him with a sense of order in the tumultuous transition he is making. Trying to be normal, but still threatened by the street, Emmanuel vacillates between these two opposing repertoires. Still, it cannot be said though that the struggle between righteousness and violence occur solely on a personal level. The difficulties associated with the internal agentic struggle to re-make the street dispositions are also wrought by the external structuring pressures of life on the Cape Flats. As a result, Emmanuel cannot ask the Lord to exorcise the inner demons that dispose him towards violence, without also dealing with the devils that torment him in the street.

6.5.1 Two Final Cases of Violence

Most of the research participants included in this study indicated that consolidating non-street life meant focusing on family, religion, and work, trying to stay clear of gang associations and violence. Though this is not a quantitative study, discussions did indicate that violent behaviour had decreased considerably after leaving. But as we saw from

Emmanuel's experiences, sometimes avoiding violence proved difficult. Indeed, there were quite a few instances where research participants indicated participating in violent acts, even after quitting gangs. It is important to consider the reasons why violence might still occur outside of that gang. Even those that have been out of gangs a long time cannot totally escape the streets, and the confrontations that result in violence. It seems that street capital must, at times, be relied on for protection. Whether a person is a gangster, an ex-gangster, or has never been in gangs, living in insecure Cape Flats communities means dealing with threat. Street life and normal life are not autonomous social spaces, but can overlap irrespective of a person's intentions to step out of the former in favour of the latter. The following are two examples of former gang members – a male and female – that had each been out of gang life for over a decade. Neither can be said to be in immediate danger of regressing back into gangsterism. Indeed, both now work in different ways in the area of gang violence prevention. Yet, both described instances in which they returned to their street repertoires to deal with threats to their person and their possessions.

Ashwin (Athlone male, 51 years) is a former American and 26 that now works against gang violence as community activist and research assistant. I have known him since first arriving in Cape Town. A couple of years ago he told me of an altercation with a phone thief he had on a minibus taxi while travelling to the city centre:

> There in the taxi, I did see my phone is gone. You know *mos*, the taxis they can be jammed up. So I felt something there by my back. I knew I had it on me [before I entered]… I turned and am asking the people around. I then see that there is this young guy close behind. And I think: "no man, this guy is not coming correct. He has my phone". So I started on him. But first I asked to see if he has my phone. Like not too-much angry, but just to test him. He said "no", but I see he is like *skalem*[89]*,* man. Because I've seen characters like him many times.

Already there are indications of Ashwin's street self re-emerging. His inclination to test the man implies a nuanced knowledge of what is and is not *skalem*, learned over many years of living, observing and experiencing criminal behaviours. Indeed, a person cannot assess another without assuming a mastery over a subject. I know that he has reputation of considerable violence from his time in the streets, and in prison. Though long out of the

[89] Crooked or deceitful

gang and getting on in years, Ashwin is still an imposing man of considerable stature, who presents a credible threat of violence:

> It continues like this. Now I'm applying even more pressure, [but] still talking to him – and the people start to be interested too. I say: "*naai*, this cannot go [on]". I am mad, you see. There is only one way to now handle this thing… I smacked him hard – like with the backhand, like you can hit a woman… You know, I am working against these violent things. But I come to a point where that [violence] is all this man [can] understand. I hit him then very hard.

That flash of violence was enough to retrieve the stolen phone. Though violence was his eventual solution, it must be observed that Ashwin's immediate response is not hostile. He progresses into hostility. The altercation begins with him speaking with the thief, reasoning with him, as would be expected in any 'normal' exchange between two people. Words fail to resolve the situation, indicating that another strategy is needed. That is when the situation escalates from normal interaction into criminal altercation. Because he is now dealing with criminality, Ashwin is pushed back into the street field. Although he is no long in a gang, or himself involved in criminality, he still knows how to move like gangsters and criminals move. Feeling that his hand is forced, he turns to the only form of persuasion he thinks this man can "understand". The sharp application of violent force comes has a precision that points to the dexterity of a man used to solving problems with his fists. Even knowing to target this particular assailant, by simply feeling "he was not coming correctly", signals a street sense that most people are unaware of. Even after being out of the gang for as long as he has been and in that time working to intervene in gang violence, his street sense has not disappeared. Though it is seldom used now, it seems it can always be called upon:

> There are times in this community activism work, where I come to the guys [I'm working with] by the number. Because I was long in the number [26], I can use it to my advantage then, you see. But it is a dangerous… You do not know how they see you now. Do they think: "this man is pretending in this activism business, but you see how he talks the number to us".

Even in working against gang violence, street capital can be useful. But its use is dangerously double-edged and must be used with discretion. Applying it with too heavy a hand imperils the ex-gangster, possibly also doing violence to identities formed in non-street social fields. Put simply, too much street activity back in the street field can push one back into the street. If this is true, it would seem that the external validation of the non-

street self is always being tested against previous street roles, even many years after gang exit. Also, that street senses, knowledge, and skills are still present so long after quitting the gang implies that decompositioning does not lead to total disappearance of street capital, but to its relative devaluation of new cultural capital in the non-street field. Dispositioning of new non-street repertoires and capital expands the behavioural tools available for interactions in different social fields. It may be that, as increasing dispositioning confirms non-street action and decompositioning counters it, reasoned dialogue is given primacy over hostility or relying on the number; such street sensibilities are still available, should their usage be demanded. Although a former gang member may not to want a return to the streets, sometimes return unavoidably happens. It may come in the form of a criminal encounter in the obligatory social proximity of public transportation, or in the street-adjacent workplace that leverages street capital as professional experience and skills. Reengaging street repertoires may also be required in an unfortunate return to incarceration:

> I think sometimes: what must I do if I go back to prison? Because, you see, these things can happen, even now. Will I then return to the number? Or will I enter with my spiritual or activism side? I was one of those [prison gangsters] that was threatening the religious guys that are leaving the number.

Though there is no reason to think that Ashwin should be re-incarcerated, his are the musings of a man that has spent a quarter of his life in prison, and significantly more than that in street gangs. With much of his character shaped by experiences in streets and prison, it is easy to imagine how this part of his life cannot easily be forgotten. The community activist has emerged from the gangster and prisoner. So, the present actually exists as a complex amalgamation of previously lived selves that combine through the nested interaction of agency and structure. Ashwin has chosen to leave the streets and prison for community activism, but many of the same forces that pushed him into gangs originally are still present in his life:

> I have conversations with some of my old [gang] friends. They also experience these challenges. Even though we're so long outside, it's always coming from the back of our minds. It's always that you can make a mistake and go back to prison, even though you don't want to be there… Because sometimes the treatment by society and the challenges get too much. We struggle in our communities to get something to survive on. Yes, so that feeling is there. The fear comes, and it goes, and it comes – that anxiety. Now we have started a

> family, you know, all of these responsibilities, and life is just tough for an ex-convict. I think I have it better off, but even through my own [financial] crisis, I think: "hey, I hope I can be in self-control and not go back to prison, for doing a wrong thing that will look right at the time that you do it".

I have watched him struggle financially over the last two years, as the project funding that paid his salary was hijacked by political wrangling. The resultant economic instability left him hustling to make ends meet, picking up advocacy and research work where he could. No doubt, the same survival skills that helped him succeed in gang life continue to inform normal life. Though much has changed in his life, much has also stayed the same: so long removed from the gang, he is once again caught trying to make ends meet. It is perhaps expected then that he would not take for granted a life lived outside of prison and off of the streets.

Like Ashwin, Joanna has been out of gangs for more than ten years and is also working to help young men and women in gangs. She had worked for Ceasefire as part of the organisation's mission to stop the spread of violence, and recently returned to school to study social work. And, like Ashwin, she was without work and struggling to make ends meet at the time of writing this paper. Unable to pay her tuition, Joanna worried if she would be able to collect her diploma after finishing her studies. Despite the financial hardship she was facing, she was intent on staying off the streets. After transitioning out of gangs, she put away her street persona and stopped participating in gang activities:

> I tell people, my name is Joanna, but I've also got my nickname '*Skim'*. Those two names carry different weights. If you call me Joanna, then you're going to call me on the rehabilitated person. But if you call me *Skim* then that person was rude. Like I tell people a lot, don't call me that name again because that is who I used to be. And for me, if I think back now, me, myself, I didn't like that person. Really, because that person was rude, nobody fucked with that person, that is how she was… Joanna has a way more softer approach. *Skim*, a fly must not even sit on her nose.

Street culture is typically presented as masculine in its essence (Bourgois 1996, 414). Mullins (2006), for instance, describes the "gender capital" that can be accrued through the violent performance of a "street masculinity" (Mullins 2013, 153) that dominates femininity and subordinate masculinities. But the gang experiences of women like Joanna, as well as others in this study, show that for women – just as for men – the gangster can embody a repertoire that demonstrates the cultural (and material) value of a violent act. Female

participation in gang violence blurs the seemingly indissoluble link that is often drawn between manhood and violent performances. When a gangster girl partakes in violence, she emphasises that violent behaviour is not some inevitable offshoot of habituated masculine action, but that it has utility as a survival tool across genders[90].

As part of her street repertoire Joanna calls the street-generated persona of *Skim,* a character that she played while in the Backstreets. That gang nickname was once regularly called upon to fight on behalf of the gang. But while it is fair to say that Joanna's gang participation is buried so far into her past that she is unlikely to ever be a gangster again, the character of *Skim* has only been stored away. Despite protesting that people not refer to her as *Skim*, I also hear that the street persona can be accessed when needed: "sometimes *Skim* comes out… Even with some of my participants [when I worked for Ceasefire], I couldn't be Joanna. I must be *Skim*. I must show you who I am otherwise you're going to take advantage". As with Ashwin, who sometimes used the number during community work with gangsters, she also goes back to her street sensibilities in a workplace where street life overlaps with normal life. The street capital *Skim* still characterises can be useful for addressing gang members who may have aspirations to leave gangs, but still operate according to the dispositions of the street.

But the streets can bleed into the everyday in other ways, as well. Living in Hanover Park, being pulled back into the streets is as simple as being outside, simply standing on the street. The social fields that define gang life and normal life are not totally mutually exclusive. For example, Joanna describes an altercation with "one of the [Ghetto Kids] big bosses' girlfriends". It occurred some years after she had already left the Backstreets:

> It was a hot day like today, everybody's outside... That was really a huge fight. That day I told myself I had to prove myself… because there were too many people in the street. Who are you to disrespect me like that? Tomorrow they're [all] going to do the exact same thing. This is Hanover Park. If you don't stand up for yourself in Hanover Park, everybody's going to walk over you. You think you're all that because you're with the big boss [you can disrespect me]. I had to make a point that day, seriously. And she never spoke nonsense to me since that day.

[90] A detailed analysis of female participation in Cape Flats gangs was not possible due to word restrictions. The chapter discussing this was removed from the original thesis and will be published separately (see: Dziewanski 2017).

It is more than a visceral expression of anger or aggression. Joanna was pushed back into her street self through the violent challenge she faced. She was being disrespected in front of her family, friends, and neighbours. There is a clear performative element to this "huge fight". With the community watching, a clear calculation is being made: if she does not aggressively pay back the disrespect she faces at that moment, it will be forced to pay it back many times over in the future. In choosing to fight, Joanna is reengaging the embodiment of a street repertoire and street capital she still has at her disposal, despite no longer belonging to a gang. In that instance, the repertoire was accessed to manage a street confrontation with a woman affiliated with the Ghetto Kids. But gangsters are not the only players on the street field. She tells me: "I [also] fought with a lady one day, a woman that lives here around the corner. She was no gangster though… but I fucked her up pretty good". The altercation is explained away as another necessary return to *Skim*, in reaction to somebody that is likewise trying to disrespect her:

> I was sitting here in the yard, she came to talk her *kak* with me. She came in here [to my yard], she was forcing for a lift to Elsie's [River], or wherever, [with a man that lives with me]. The more I tell her the man is sleeping, and then [the more] she started swearing, I was *lekker* tipsy already. I hit her outside the gate. It told her: "no man, you're rude". You're sitting on your premises, somebody comes and talks nonsense with you, what are you going to do? I told myself: "no man, if I allow this other people are also going to do it". There are times when you still have to act tough.

Joanna needed *Skim* to come out to deal with a rude neighbour. By fucking up the neighbour she was punctuating a message sent to anybody else that cared to try their luck disrespecting her. Acting tough had nothing to do with securing turf or fighting for a flag on the battlefield. It was required just to secure her personal space within her community. The two incidents just described demonstrate the on-going struggles over the boundaries of street fields, illustrating that despite not falling under the official rubric of gangsterism, street fights are generated by, uphold, and advance the values of a street culture that even non-gangsters can be caught in. Gangsters are perhaps apex predators in the social ecology of violence in a place like Hanover Park, but the community food chain includes many other actors as well. Each is fighting for their own, amongst the limited economic and social resources available on Cape Town's urban periphery. Gang violence compounds an ethos of terror in places like Hanover Park, but is not the cause of it. What Ashwin was describing was no gang fight. It was two women fighting for respect. Their violent altercation was a function of the structured scarcities that result from a lack of

security, lack of jobs, and lack of other sociocultural resources, pitting neighbour against neighbour in social spaces where only the strongest survive.

6.6 Conclusion

It should be clear by now that it is one thing for an individual to declare that he or she has quit a gang or to say that he or she is intent on abandoning the gang lifestyle, and completely another for an individual to successfully leave. Not surprisingly, out-of-gang transitions are labour intensive. They are carried out with great effort and time; the dispositions of street habitus, which has been inculcated in the long-term through repeated successful applications of street repertoires, must firstly be decompositioned. At the same time, a novel non-street self needs to be dispositioned through the social and cultural material relevant to normal life. Without internal and external validation of that role, those seeking to disengage and desist can be pulled back to the gang. For example, some form of reconciliation and reintegration may be needed with family and community. Also, former gangs may try to impede gang leaving in order to retain the valuable cultural capital associated with one's capacities for violence and criminal enterprise. Most problematic perhaps is convincing enemies that one is no longer a threat, or simply surviving for long enough that lingering 'beefs' were forgotten. Just because somebody leaves the streets does not necessarily reverse a rival's wish for revenge. As a result, adherence to new roles must be continuous and disciplined. Other scholars have found that flexible cultural repertoires can keep people most safe in the uncertain world of township life (Lindegaard 2017). This study indicates that former gang members have different experiences. Because non-street repertoires are acted out in relation to past criminality, the ex-gangster must show him or herself to be reformed in a rigorous performance of domesticity, professionalism and righteousness. Announcing that a person wants and plans to change is the easy part; the real work is in translating words into a durable and stable engagement with family, work, and faith, as knowledge and skills related to the new non-street self are integrated into everyday life. But if his or her relationship with the world shows that there is insufficient investment in the practices of the 'new self', then it will be devalued and eventually dismissed.

For these reasons, it is not just about a so-called 'change of heart', or mind-set, but is about having that mind-set validated through your real world relations. Decomposing the constitutive behavioural material of the self requires time. The half-life of a propensity towards rage and bellicosity appears to be years, rather than days or months. Deliberate and consistent application of these non-gang and non-violent repertoires engages a type

of non-street dispositioning through which durable new identities can be cognitively, emotionally and socially consolidated. The cultural capital associated with the dispositions of normal life is acquired through a composition of domestic, workplace, and religious repertoires. There is an interconnectedness in the living of domestic, work, and spiritual life. The application of the repertoires associated with each sphere of life can reinforce the other; money is earned through work to purchase food, pay household bills, send children to school, and the like; spirituality offers a blueprint and tools for handling conflict and repairing relationships in family and work life; and domestic relationships are fundamental to religious identities. For each of these key repertoires to take hold, they must be integrated into one's inner and outer self through the reinforcing interactionality of everyday life. Every time a non-street repertoire is called on over a street repertoire is a corrective and generative experience that further dispositions the dispositions of normal life.

Signalling that each of these identities is taking hold requires that an ex-gangster make changes to the way that he or she speaks, dresses, and acts – even how they refer to themselves. As this happens, *Sabela* is supplanted by solicitousness, submissiveness and scripture. Shirts are buttoned, pants are pulled up, and *takkies* are taken off. Most important is the way that an ex-gangster deals with conflict. Violent behaviour is one way of dealing with emotional tension in conflict situations. It is part of a repertoire that is most obviously related to the street field. But we have seen above that there are other ways of dealing with conflict: humbling oneself, walking away, forgiveness, etc. These are the poses and performances called of a person busy with family, work, and faith. Such performances of the repertoires are required in the social field of normal life. They are crucial to validating to others, as well as to oneself, the kind of person one is trying to become.

Even if a person can survive the gang exit, he or she must still overcome the structural constraints related to the many practical responsibilities of normal life. A decent and steady livelihood is essential to the successful practical performance of normal living. Absent job opportunities, being normal becomes very difficult. Disconnectedness from valued social and cultural resources makes it doubly difficult to access employment. Then there is the everyday violence that compounds the structural and symbolic oppression poor people of colour living in Cape Town's townships are caught in. Thus, it can be difficult to separate the social fields of street life and normal life, even after a person has exited the gang. Violent behaviour definitely exists outside of gang associations and activities. That this is so, indicates that violent acts are structured and socialised in ways,

and for reasons, that can outlive gang life. The ubiquity of the street field reflects the structuring effects of inequality, exclusion, and insecurity more generally, meaning that it is not possible to comprehend the stories outlined in this study without contextualising within the broader social space of Capetonian society.

On the Cape Flats, stories of gangs, violence, prison, and death are a form of "street talk" (Sandberg and Fleetwood 2017, 370) that reproduces the frustration, injustice, and violence of the street field. Telling stories about successful criminal activities and daring gang fights can be an important source of street capital, where other opportunities for empowerment seem impossible. Gang narratives reflect the street field as a deeply ingrained part of habitus, which is manifested in a collective narrative repertoire about what is possible in the disadvantaged communities like Hanover Park, Manenberg, Mitchells Plain or even Athlone. However, the prevalence of such stories themselves perpetuates the idea that life in the Cape Flats is a prison or death sentence. The limited socioeconomic horizons of those growing up in economically and socially marginalised areas comes with an absence of stories (read: perceived opportunities), which further binds people to the street field. Although gang stories are produced by the field, and inculcated in social actors' street habitus, agency operates through individual adaption and creativity in ways that challenge the typical norms and myths. It was shown above that the street field is not a settled site, but a dynamic and interactional struggle over what constitutes symbolic capital. Changing the gang narrative for those that are in gangs already, means showing that other stories can be told and supporting those looking to counter the accepted notion that getting out of gangs is 'impossible'. The stories told in any social space establish "schemes of perception" (Bourdieu 1990, 13) that define what is practically possible. Like this, narrative transmits and reproduces social structure. Expanding the types of stories included in this research, for example, to include examples of successful gang leaving can creatively extend repertoire schemes perceived in the limits of the street field. Doing so can counter the oppressiveness of the gang narrative, and show that living on the Cape Flats is not synonymous with life (and death) in the streets.

Telling such stories has other important practical implications, as well. Key to facilitating out-of-gang transitions is asking what conditions make the acquisition of non-street social and cultural resources more likely. On one hand, early and frequent exposure to various types of sociocultural experiences may make it easier for people to create non-street repertoires later on. But this requires more than cultural field trips to central Cape Town. It requires a fundamental restructuring of the persistent dimensions of racism and class segregation that define the city. The long-term interactional nature by which people's non-

street practices are constituted over time, offers some insight into how the complex web of economic structural forces, sociocultural exclusion, historical legacies, and individual agency might be reshaped. The extent of structural oppression and symbolic violence on the Cape Flats means that isolated policy initiatives, or even short-term political or economic reforms, are likely to help the plight of those living on Cape Town's margins. If their lives are to made better, they will have to be integrated into the city in ways that redistribute social, economic, and cultural resources currently concentrated among a small portion of the city.

7 STRUGGLING TO LEAVE THE STREETS

This chapter focuses on the life of Gavin, a key informant that I came to know well during my time in Cape Town. The first part of the chapter chronicles Gavin's entry into gangs. Gavin's early life history moves concepts developed previously out of an unseen, abstract world into the witnessable personal efforts, travails, failures, and successes of life on the Flats. Shedding light on one person in this way illuminates the lives of others caught in similar predicaments, revealing the shadowy symbolic order that they are working against. It also shows the behavioural and structural impediments to moving on from a life of violence. Gavin's move out of gangs is particularly instructive, demonstrating that, though gang violence has considerable influence in coloured neighbourhoods, the structuring power of gang violence is by no means deterministic. To think of Gavin's gangsterism as predestined labels him, and all young coloured people in his situation, as a gangster – long before he ever takes a tattoo or picks up a gun. Seeing the specificities of his struggle provides a more humane lens from which to view gang violence. Doing so brings analysis back to the localised, everyday lived experiences of those living with violence – whether as perpetrators, victims, or both. Indeed, Gavin is able to take action to move past the multiple forms of structural, symbolic, and gang violence that work against him. Gavin's experiences offer important clues to the phenomenology of street culture, and an in-depth sense of how street habitus can be reproduced and resisted.

7.1 Born into Gangs

Gavin has spent approximately half of his life in gangs, both on the streets and in prison. When I met him in 2014, he was 26 years old and a high-ranking member of both the Mongrels and the 28s. He had just been released from Pollsmoor Prison after serving ten years for murder. Following his release, he explained what it was like for him coming out and why he had returned to the Mongrels:

> [The gang] gave me rank in the gang and said I could run the gang of youngsters. I took the job, seeing it as my only way to survive. When I came out of prison I wanted a job. I got a matric [in prison] but couldn't get a job. And here I get this big job to sell drugs and making money… and I felt bigger than ever before – bigger than before I went to prison.

There is a significant focus in South Africa on education as a way of accessing a better life[91]. Indeed, lack of education and low commitment to school are considered to be contributing factors to joining gangs internationally (see: Public Safety Canada 2007; "Youth Violence: Risk and Protective Factors" 2016). For those already in gangs, a lack of education and skills is an obstacle to disengagement (Cooper and Ward 2012b, 253); and yet, young men like Gavin struggle to find employment even after passing their matric and attaining the (much-coveted) matriculation certificate[92]. One reason is that the focus on qualification neglects the practical knowledge and support needed to capitalise on high school credentials[93]. But there is another important reason why young people like Gavin struggle to find work: they are barred from accessing the social and cultural resources needed for attaining professional success. In other words, they do not have the necessary social and cultural capital for finding work. With his attempts at finding employment frustrated, Gavin returned to the gang – the mode of self-preservation he was most familiar with. Unable to find work, Gavin stated: "when I was released, I was just like [I am a] gangster. I was like I don't give a fuck about life anymore. I had nothing to lose". Limited in the social and economic spaces he could occupy, he turned again to the significant cultural capital he had built up over the course of his life as a gang member.

He had begun accumulating street capital early on, at home. Gavin's original point of entry into gangs was an older brother, whom he describes as his "everything". Growing up in an impoverished and violent urban settlement on the fringes of Ottery, this sibling modelled a way of achieving success and self-assurance. "We stayed in a shack, but he always provided", Gavin recalls. Of his relationship to his father, he says: "I wanted to run away because of my [abusive] father. But my brother advised me not to run away but to stand like a man – face the challenges. He built me very strong as a boy". Gavin was socialised in to be "strong" from an early age, and throughout his life came to embody the hardship of his social field through a street habitus that would push him into gangs and prison.

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[91] Lack of education is a given risk factor associated with the presence of gangs and gang participation (Cooper and Ward 2012a, 149). The suggestion is that, in South Africa, education policy reform plays an important role given that youth unemployment co-exists with an under-supply of skills in certain areas of the labour market (Gustafsson 2011, 4). A 2016 statement by the Government of the Western Cape that announced the launch of a three-year project to employ youth stated that a "better educated and more highly skilled workforce is the [Cape's] most pressing long-term priority" (Schäfer. 2016).

[92] High school diploma

[93] Students get little career guidance and support (Graham and Mlatsheni 2015, 45-46). School career-guidance programmes are not comprehensive, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools (Mudhovozi and Chireshe 2012, 168).

Gavin's older brother was also a member of the Mongrels, and was shot and killed when Gavin was thirteen. Gavin became a Mongrel to seek revenge. Although he says that he "was born for" gang life, in actuality it was during his upbringing that he learned to be a gangster: "I grew up my life in it… I knew too much and I said to myself I understand [gang life] because I witnessed it and it was the easiest way [to survive]". As a young man, Gavin found a map for his own way into gangsterism projected through his older sibling:

> I use to tell my brother I wanted to be like [him]. He then told me: "no, I don't need to be like him because I'm a good football player". But I wanted all the things he had, because I saw it every day… He told me: "it's very dangerous". But I didn't give a damn. I also wanted money… And I saw how they were stabbing and shooting people. I saw [the gangsters] giving life to the kids. They were like role models to all the kids. Despite him telling me of the negativity, I still wanted to be like him.

Money in your pocket, food on the table, and respect in the community are emphatic arguments for a life of crime, which can easily stifle even the most well-intentioned guidance. Anyway, 'do as I say' has little meaning when one's options are limited to making it through football[94]. So, Gavin was drawn into gangs. Later, instead of recoiling from the obvious same dangers that had killed his kin, he shifted closer still: "I saw him suffer in front of me. Unfortunately he didn't make it. I thought when he is dead I need to become him now, and when I joined the gang I received all the love". The mythologised character of his brother was a role that Gavin figuratively stepped into. Facing death was easier because death had been made a routine and expected part of gang life: "no danger came through my mind. I witnessed danger. So I was used to it, and thought: why must I be scared of it? I knew we all must die"[95]. At that point, he was only a thirteen-year-old

[94] Research on parenting has similarly suggested that it is transference of modelled behaviours from parent to child, as opposed to genetics, socioeconomic status, and even levels of parental control (Duncan et al. 2002, 25-28).

[95] High levels of ambient violence shape what is considered normal behaviour (Burton 2007, 116). Some Cape Flats neighbourhoods resemble an on-going conflict, where gunshots, police sirens, and funerals are regular occurrences. A pattern of "terminal thinking" (Garbarino 2000, 118) has been observed in youth traumatised by such environments, in which they are unable to envision any long-term future and become resigned to the belief that a violent death is inevitable. People continually confronting death live their lives by surviving on a daily basis. A conversation I had with a former Dollar Kid, over a pizza lunch in Athlone, is a tragic illustration of just why it is so difficult for long-term considerations and aspirations to co-exist with rampant violence. The youth I was speaking to was known for eating a lot, and on this particular occasion he was in particular good form – consuming the better part of a large pizza. Jokingly I inquired why he ate so much. His response was

whose family history had instilled in him a sense of what it means to be a gangster and provided him with a very narrow vision of the good life, or of life in general.

7.1.1 A Different Path

That is not to say that Gavin did not have relationships with people that modelled a different type of behaviour for him. He did. Looking at these relationships, as well, is instructive in illustrating the multifarious and often contradictory influences that affected him before he joined the Mongrels. Two friends from his youth, especially, represented a different life:

> They both finished matric and got good jobs today. They were positive. The one was always there for me. His mother made me feel at home at their house. But when I went home, I was surrounded with a lot of bad friends and we did a lot of wrong things.

His friends relied on support from family: “they had good support systems – like their mother and father. They were always there for them. The one had an older brother who finished matric and made it, and he looked to him as a role model”. However, comparable domestic repertoires were lacking in Gavin’s household. Where they were provided, this was done by his gangster brother, whose rhetoric attempted to steer Gavin away from gangs, but whose actions actually brought him closer to them.

Gavin’s experiences are an example of the saying that you cannot be what you cannot see. It is not a belief in violent acts *per se* as an acceptable form of behaviour that brings about violence. It is a belief in what one can reasonably be that does so. If there are limited non-street repertoires from which to assemble a future self, it should not be surprising that a young person might not be able to envision a life beyond the streets. Ideas about life potential are tightly bound up in the decision-making about whether to act violently or whether to take a more peaceful route. As Gavin explained about one of his friends:

> I remember once we were in a fight at school and he told me: he can fight, but he didn't want to jeopardise his education. So he resolved the conflict positively. He was more dedicated. But me and my other friends were more dedicated to the streets.

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sadly prescient: “I eat today, because tomorrow I might die” (Hanover Park male, 17 years). Six months after that conversation, he was dead – executed while employed on a public works project. He had been out of the Dollar Kids for over a year, but was killed for his past involvement with the gang.

The overpowering presence of street repertoires that modelled violence in Gavin's life, and the lack of alternative models, meant that he was unable to imagine a life where education had any use for him. In saying this, it is important to remember that the models themselves are not simply behavioural manifestations of character that are communicated between people. They are the physical embodiment of the structural and symbolic constraints that act on bodies through street habitus to limit opportunities for action in the first place. The resultant speech, dress, and action are all forms of street capital that in different ways respond to marginalisation and exclusion.

Growing up, Gavin's non-gang ambitions were limited. In addition to being a gangster, he aspired to one of the gaudiest examples of professional success stereotypically associated with young men of colour: the athlete. He would later trade his footballer aspiration for the equally inaccessible trope of the rapper: "when I was in primary school, I was always telling my teachers I will either be in prison or a football player… I will be a gangster, or a football player, one of the two". In particular, the legacy of Hanover-Park-born footballer Benedict "Benni" McCarthy[96] figures prominently for young men like Gavin. McCarthy was often referenced with pride in interviews as a coloured man who had made it from the Flats to find international success:

> When I was a kid, my big dream was always to go to Europe like Benni, or the Brazilians. I like them man. Because they all did make it out of the ghetto. And the other side when it comes to gangster, you know that's another side that's a side of my brother and them… how they live with money, cars and everything.

The soccer field and the street are juxtaposed in a way that presents McCarthy as one model for success and his brother as another. Few of the many young men that start off with dreams of football stardom ever attain them, to be sure. But Gavin's experiences do point to the positive role that sports can play in modelling life options beyond gangsterism.

Gavin's life also shows how a desire for belonging and purpose essentially ties into ideas one has about life and the future. Unable to find a sustained connection through football, he looked to gangs. On a practical level, attachment is more than just an emotional bond. It is also a connection to ways of knowing and being in the world. As Gavin separated from the non-gang influences in his life, he was more likely to become a gangster:

> When I play football for my clubs, every time the coaches or the players that I get really close to, that I feel will really help to push me, you see, it's like they always

[96] McCarthy was born in 1977 in Hanover Park and was successful playing professionally in Europe.

> leave… Now when they leave, I fall back into pieces. That is breaking me inside. I think, now: what must I do? Because I know when I go home obviously I'm not getting all the love and support from my friends, and all these things. And that's why it's always on my mind, that it's always gangster, or rather I will be a football player.

Discouraged by football, and unable to see any other life beyond gangsterism, Gavin sought proximity to violence. The bonds of his youth were overridden by stronger, countervailing bonds he had to gangs. As a Mongrel, and later a 28, he would find social approval, belonging, and a sense of purpose. He would also find repertoires of behaviour for making sense of his world and succeeding in it. Although he was not famous like Benni, the ghetto fame Gavin achieved as a gangster made him a hero and allowed him to – for a time – escape his social and financial marginalisation.

7.2 Moving Deeper into the Game

The bullet that killed his brother sealed Gavin's fate as a Mongrel: "when he died, there was nobody else. It was just the old school gangsters around and they saw me as the chosen one". For Gavin, carrying on his brother's legacy was almost prophetic. On joining the gang, he said that "my mind-set changed. From there, being a gangster, there was no light, or no way out. I was very young at the time. I started believing I was a boss or a leader, as young as I [was]". It was at this point that Gavin's detachment from other aspects of his life and his community gave way to an even deeper connection to the Mongrels. He was further inculcated with a street knowledge through a process that was as much paternal as it was parasitic:

> There was one older gangster in particular, after he came out of prison he showed me a lot of love. He was a Mongrel and a 26. The day they shot my brother this guy took me away from the scene. Because I didn't want to leave. He told me I'm a man and not to cry. I went with him. He [also] told me not to worry and that must happen in this game; and he made me believe I'm a man. Then my brother's gang started investing in me more to become a gangster.

Older gang members represented street capitalised behavioural ideals that valorised strength and stoicism in the face of death. Adopting these ideals is a way of coping with loss that makes death more normal but also more likely. But it is also a necessary strategy for dealing with the violence and trauma that often come to define life in Cape Flats communities. There are many other ways in which more experienced gang members actively provide guidance to younger ones. Gavin explains: "they told me everything. How

to walk, talk, [and] what to do in prison. How you need to handle things". Just as his brother had, the older Mongrels also socialised Gavin into gang practices and helped him amass the street capital he needed to thrive on the streets.

And so, Gavin joined the Mongrels. The street repertoires that he had acquired up until that point were added to and reinforced through a bastardised initiation rite performed by gang elders. He learned how to be a gangster, and a man, and was inducted into the collective mythology of the gang: "the history of the Mongrels is all about blood… And that's how we lived, because that's how we were taught and raised". Through the gang, any given expression of violence could be located socioculturally. The violent act was situated in a type of history and culture otherwise denied to coloured people. Even the imagery of the mongrel – a dog of no definable type or breed – bears a likeness to the ambiguous place of coloureds in South Africa, especially poor coloured people. The Mongrel finds pride in this lack of identity and honour in fighting through a life of punishing austerity:

> You know that word 'Mongrel'… it means to like fight for survival. It's like a dog. If you look at a dog on the street you fight for survival. You will do anything just to survive… You know there's dogs that doesn't have owners. What must they do? They must survive. They must survive on their own. For me I used to look at dogs. I'm like, wow, that dog doesn't have owners but look at him, [he's] grown. How did he get that big? He did survive. He did hustle hard for food to eat. He did get his food. So I said to myself: you know I'm a dog, which means I need to hustle hard, to go and get my money. I need to go and get anything what I need.

Faced with accepting his fate meekly or fighting at all costs for his survival, Gavin chose the latter option: "if you look around how a dog lives, he got no heart. He don't give a shit. That make me believe I'm a dog. I need to live cruel". As a Mongrel, Gavin fully internalised the model of the street hustler, connecting to the symbolic power of the street dog. The very characteristics of his marginalisation became a basis for strength. To be forlorn signified freedom and independence; contending with structurally imposed hardship became synonymous with tenacity, street smarts, and hustling; violent cruelty was identified with dignity and the ability to stare down the hostile gaze of a society set against him.

If need be, a gangster is heartless, with no fear of or regard for others or what will happen to him or her. Perpetration of violence requires dissociation from the consequences of the

act. But dissociation is not necessarily indicative of a sociopathic desire to inflict pain. The act of killing requires emotionally blocking out the victim and focusing on oneself (Lindegaard 2009, 47). Doing so facilitates the directness and decisiveness necessary to build a violent reputation:

> You know, to kill somebody is like – wow, man! – I don't know how to explain to you that. You must have a heart. You must have guts to kill somebody – broad daylight, or in front of people… You know it's either you going to die after this, or you go to jail. So what you do, you already know it: I'm going to die [and] I don't care if I'm going to die, I'm just going to do it. But the other people, you know, [they] are going to think twice before they are going to do it while you already just did it.

Gavin's comments demonstrate the manner in which gang violence is used and valued. Gang members seek out a proximity to violence. Not recklessly or sadistically, but intentionally. Killing is cultural capital, which can be exchanged for prestige and reputation – that is, for symbolic capital that can be exchanged for material and social favours (Bourdieu 1977, 171-174). Importantly, Gavin's experiences highlight the imperative relationship between words and action. To be of any practical value, cultural capital must be made material socially. First, reputation is actively built up through deeds, which are the bricks and mortar that make up a successful gangster. Second, success and respect require a deftness that is linked not simply to street smarts, but also to a disregard for repercussions.

However, once you have created an expectation, you must live in it. Earning a reputation for violence is the first battle in the long war to sustain it. Speaking of his own experiences with creating and maintaining his street credibility, Gavin explains:

> You need to work to earn [your reputation]. You need to work hard… To keep this thing you need to fight for it. Because people are going to come to take your title. They will do anything in their power to get you off your title. So you need to fight. No matter if you must kill, or what you must do, just to keep your title. Even though you [are] on top, it doesn't mean you can relax now.

The continual violent competition ensures that killing becomes self-sustaining. Violent behaviour becomes a social act that sets the bar for measuring others seeking respect and power. In this way, violence is the metric against which the street-value of individual reputations is appraised; it is also the mechanism for attaining and sustaining reputation, as well as the retributive response to provocative acts. In short, violence defines life on the

streets; with each violent act, the streets are dispositioned into the gangsters' life. Gavin's need was to avenge his brother's murder which brought him into the Mongrels, and the need to pursue and reinforce his reputation as a ruthless killer sent him to Pollsmoor for over a decade for murder.

7.2.1 Life in Prison

Once in prison, Gavin also joined the 28s. In doing so, he further stepped into the repertoire his brother had laid out for him: "I joined the 28s because of my brother. I just wanted to be like him. He was a 28". As it is on the streets, joining a gang in prison is a means of coping with hostile conditions, and perhaps even more so: "you see it as a way to survive. If you [are] not a prison gangster, your life will be hell: you will be used – raped… So I joined the 28s". The number mirrors and reinforces the way that violence is used outside the prison's walls. As with street gangs, the prison gangster is typically born through violence. Inmates become *ndotas* through an initiatory ritual process of stabbing a warder and subsequently submitting to the consequent violent punishment (Farrington 2014, 91). Stabbing a fellow inmate and warders is a way of building your reputation in jail and formally moving up the hierarchy of the prison gang (Lindegaard and Gear 2014, 48). Aggression is a form of cultural capital that becomes directly linked to an *ndota's* status in prison. But not all violence is equal in value: "[w]hen you stab, the warders will beat you, there and then, in front of all the inmates... If you cry out, or moan, just once, your stabbing means nothing. It is as if you have stabbed nobody" (Steinberg 2004a). This additional preformative element connected to each violent incident further entrenches an ideal in which violence is to be expected and accepted.

Popular conceptions of violence in prison gangs see a function of violence, and its subsequent punishment, as a demonstration of the dissolution of individual interests in the face of the interests of the gang (Steinberg 2004a). Practically speaking, the violent prisoner is more likely to be put into isolation. Therefore, a close proximity to violence in prison builds reputation and rank, but draws inmates away from the potential for rehabilitation – just as joining, and participating in, street gangs strains the connection between the individual and his or her family and community. Indeed, many young coloured men seek out a prison record, moving even deeper into gangs. A rap sheet may be seen as a major stigma in mainstream society, but among gang members it symbolises positive cultural assets and a source of prestige (Strocka 2006, 141).

Interestingly, though, the direction of Gavin's life began to turn in prison. He finished high school while incarcerated, despite his place in the 28s:

> I attended classes and all these things and started joining the rehabilitation classes and I was told there is life after prison… They told me I'd be good in the corporate world. But I didn't know the meaning. I only knew the underworld. I never knew what everyone was on about because I wasn't used to that world.

The distinction created between what Gavin termed the "underworld" and the "corporate world" circumscribed the two fields he was attempting to navigate. Education was an opportunity to shift from one world to the other. By taking in what was being taught to him, he was accumulating the institutionalised forms of cultural capital associated with scholarly achievement (Bourdieu 1986, 50-51). But his high school classes were also access to an alternative vision for his life and cultural capital in its embodied state: "I attended all my classes just to equip and develop myself… I kept building myself in classes". He is still doing that today. In our conversations after his release from Pollsmoor, Gavin also frequently spoke of building himself. He does this in his determination to break into the corporate world: an indicator of dominant Cape Town society that he established in prison and still refers to.

7.3 Determining One's Future Self

Gavin is an exemplar of intelligence and determination in deathly conditions. These may be the weapons he relies on to redefine his world. They are also an extension of the grit and street smarts he used to succeed in the underworld. But this perseverance does not simply exist as some disassociated personal characteristic. Throughout his life, Gavin has always stitched together available repertoires as a way of, first, making sense of his present circumstances and, second, making sense of his future. What Bourdieu (1988, 782) labels a "feel for the game" is an anticipatory position, through which a person intuits the future states of play from its current state. It paints in broad strokes the imagined futures or prospects a person may have (Vigh 2006, 174). Making sense of ourselves through our life narratives is dependent "not only on where we *are*, but where we're *going* [emphasis in original]" (Charles Taylor 1992, 47). But the task of orienting our new selves in the world is dependent on the ordering of that world, so that we can orient both where we are and where are going. It is has been noted that, though it may be in informed by the past, transformative action during criminal desistance points toward the future – and hence the future self (Sampson and Laub 2005, 37).

When he was young, Gavin's vision for the future was represented by both his older brother, and football player Benni McCarthy. Today, Tupac Shakur is a special source of

inspiration. The dead rap star represents a two-sided repertoire that both helped push Gavin into gangs and is now helping to pull him out:

> You wanted to live the same as the rappers… I grew up listening to Tupac. I can relate to his music because I witness these things every day and what I'm going through… In our minds, our dreams were to go to prison because we knew when you come out you going to be a mirror to someone else like Tupac. Everyone is going to look to him.

It has already been said that Tupac modelled a powerfully potent persona that transcended marginalisation, intersected with gang life, and could be understood regardless of nationality, age, or even language. As a boy, Gavin spoke only Afrikaans and could not understand any of Tupac's lyrics. "I just see the big boys, they always moving Pac-style… And I'm just a little motherfucker, moving with my brother and them", he said. In this way, the repertoires of behaviour connected to Tupac's persona and story reinforced gang life. Gavin's brother was the embodiment of strength, financial success, and personal empowerment. When his brother was killed and Gavin joined the Mongrels, he looked to Tupac's mythologised image for a role model. Rather than a moral framework, both characters represented visions of what is possible for a young coloured man growing up in poverty: "Tupac was a super-big inspiration to me, when I was in prison… [The warders] allow me to come into my cell with a Tupac poster and a Bible". It was in prison that Gavin's life began to change. His juxtaposition of rap and religion are significant. Both represent the two most prevalent social resources available to him. In prison, especially, there are few social resources to counter the omnipresent mythology of the gang. Tupac was one of the few worldly role models that Gavin could follow, and Jesus was another. Religion is one of the valuable personal and social resources in prison contexts (Clear and Sumter 2002). Like religion, hip-hop is a complex and dynamic form of popular culture that offers a rich narrative for the construction of personal impressions of self (Perry 2004, 3). Rappers like Tupac offer perspectives on the workings of the world and insights into how to move in it. Indeed, case studies from Cape Town underscore how the political aspects of hip-hop can offer a coherent ideology to resist the circumscribed realities of gang-dominated lifestyles in pursuit of alternatives (Pieterse 2010, 439). Unfortunately, the ironies of globalised street culture are that it fetishises the ghetto cool that (mostly black) rappers project through hip-hop, but marginalises those that seek to personify it.

Even still, Tupac is a constant social and professional reference point on Gavin's horizon. The rapper is continually inserted into our discussions and correspondence. There is a level of identification with Tupac that closely mirrors Gavin's adoption of his older brother's repertoire: "I'm Tupac… I'm the chosen one, bra. That nigga help me out of hell. God used him to inspire me". A huge part of what propels Gavin relates directly to his aspirational relationship with Tupac. So, with one eye on his hero – as a professional, social, and political signpost – Gavin is making his journey out of gang life by trying to convert the stacks of notebooks he filled with lyrics during his time in prison into hits; he says he wants to set an example, "like Pac [is], for another kid like me, that is coming from the gutter". Tupac is a hugely ambivalent figure that simultaneously represents Gavin's past, present, and his future in different ways. In seeing himself as Tupac, Gavin sees his future and a reason to persist in accumulating social and cultural capital. It is a figure that once was associated with gangs and violence – just as Gavin's brother was. The rapper now represents a vision for a better life and a better self. But a projection of one's future self is merely a skeleton that gives vision to the future. It is the beginning of action. But it must be shaped and given body. Otherwise, it has no life. It is exactly this process of giving life to the skeleton of his future self that Gavin is painstakingly trying to undertake as he tries to exit gangs. While others look to family life and spiritual life, Gavin largely forgoes the repertoires associated with these aspects of normal life, focusing on becoming professionally successful. That he is able to do so points, perhaps, to the uniqueness of his situation. The urban settlement that he lives in is controlled exclusively by the Mongrels, meaning that he does not have to prove to other gangs on a daily basis that he is not a threat. His struggle has largely been proving to his own former brothers that he is no longer of use, and adequately protect himself against those – be they Mongrels or neighbours – that might perceive his transition as weakness.

7.4 Getting into Gangs is Easy

Gavin's journey to leave gang life behind has been a testament to the adage that when it comes to gangs: "getting in is easy, getting out is impossible". Although obviously – and thankfully – hyperbolic, the statement indicates the arduous and protracted journey that gang members face getting out. Gavin's charisma, smarts, and perseverance make him better equipped than most to make the transition out of gang life. Indeed, Gavin is using many of the same character strengths that drove him to success with the Mongrels to doggedly pursue a rap career. Even now he has to hustle to scrounge together opportunities for housing, funding, training, and employment that can keep him off the

street. But despite the considerable support he's received[97], Gavin has had to struggle to consolidate his life away from the Mongrels and 28s.

He has been back to Pollsmoor a number of times since his initial murder sentence. The first time, in 2015, after a night of drinking, he opened the door to a police car to help a friend escape arrest. In doing so he violated his parole. The violation occurred after Gavin had been cheated of a month's wages for a job he had. He was desperate and explained: "maybe I am just born to be a gangster". It is a refrain that I have heard from him often over the years I have known him. Usually his dejection was repeated after some major setback – whether it was: failed attempts to find work, or being targeted by an attack, or being incarcerated. Each time he returns to prison, he returns to the 28s. At the time, he told me over the telephone: "you do what you do to survive. When you're in this place, you have to be all in. You must have the prison mentality". Life outside has been difficult, as well. Between 2014 and 2016, he was shot at numerous times and almost killed – attempts on his life that he attributes to others perceiving him as "weak" for exiting the gang. Gavin's history with gangsterism is also a constant threat: "I still don't walk past the enemy [territory]. I don't want to commit suicide". If he goes to see family in other areas of Cape Town he must "always find out who is fighting there" to determine which parts of each community are safe to visit. Spatial immobility plays itself out in several ways, most apparently limiting access to economic and social capital by opportunities to look for work and connect with family and peers. During a discussion about employment, I naively suggested looking for work in Retreat, which is controlled by the Junky Funky Kids – a gang that has a long-standing war with the Mongrels. His response was simple: "you want the Funkies to put a bullet in my head? I can only go where there's Mongrels and 28s – done. Those motherfuckers won't look at me as a changed man. They only see [a] gangster". So, Gavin drags his past around like a weight. When he takes off his shirt, he resembles a newspaper, the tattoos on his chest a testament to fifteen years on the streets and behind bars. He is reduced to trying to camouflage himself when navigating the cultural contours of the city:

> I have to wear long sleeves for jobs; and not just for jobs, when I enter decent areas… I always protect myself. If you don't know me, it would be easier for us to communicate. But as soon as they see my tattoos they become judgmental.

[97] He was able to secure room and board at Camp Joy for almost three years. Later, he received funding for multiple trainings and participated in a six-month leadership programme that took him to Uganda, and managed to use me as a contact to get a job at a café in Cape Town.

On the one hand, Gavin seeks access to, and approval from, the “decent areas” of Cape Town. But the micro-judgements he experiences are aggressions that must continually be defended against. While still a gangster, that self-defence would be asserted through aggressive authority. Now he submits and contorts himself to fit the requirements of others. This particular struggle is about his body – as capital. Not as a means of labour, but as a pass for admission to those parts of Cape Town where the city’s economic wealth is deposited.

His cultural constraints limit the resources available to him for fashioning strategies to transcend Cape Town’s symbolic order. The strategies he can pursue are dependent upon the opportunity to enter different cultural spaces, where he can possibly access diverse cultural repertoires and amass cultural capital (Hannerz 1969, 177-195). Leveraging public imaginings of gangsterism is one such strategy. In this regard, his persona as a rapper is heavily tied to Cape-Flats-inspired gangster rap and a gangster identity. As well, in other arts programmes that he has participated in, he has largely drawn on his gang repertoire: playing a hardcore gangster in a theatre production about the dangers of joining gangs, acting as a gang member in a television series, participating in a photography exhibition focusing on tattoos and transition out of gangs, and giving presentations at Cape Town high schools about his experiences in gangs. Even his participation in this research project is premised on his experiences with gangs and violence. In performing gangsterism in these spaces, Gavin is leveraging the repertoires and cultural capital he has at his disposal. He steps into the limited space he is afforded by a society that has little utility for coloured youth outside of their ability to confirm and reproduce the antagonistic storyline of the young coloured criminal; he does so to move himself further away from his own history of violent criminality.

But Cape Town’s structural inequities have formed Gavin and delineated the city for him. In this regard, Gavin is an example of the impediments faced by many coloured men and women accessing much of Cape Town. Although he attempts to get entry into dominant Capetonian society, he is ultimately ‘betrayed’ by the colour of his skin, the way he speaks, his sense of fashion, and his mannerisms. Signs specifying that ‘right of admission is reserved’ are ubiquitous around South African venues – including many in Cape Town. These are barely coded examples of the continuation of apartheid’s racist legacy and the continued policing of race and class (Fick 2014). The restrictions are signifiers of the very real barriers still present for non-white and non-affluent Capetonians. Speaking to me about accessing nightlife in the City Bowl, he says: “me and you must do more to explore Cape Town in the city… We’ll go clubbing in the city, at the white clubs… Introduce me to

the white devil girls". He sees his entry into these spaces as facilitated by a proximity to whiteness. Sadly, our experiences together validate his perceptions. A notable example comes to mind during a weekend visit to a popular club, trendy among North American and European travellers. I walked into the establishment with no problem, while Gavin was stopped and barred entry without reason by the security guard at the door. We had both paid entrance. But it was only once I motioned to the security guard that we were together that he was allowed in. This seemingly insignificant scenario betrays a whole range of class and racial relations. When I asked him about it, Gavin suggested that he was not let in because he "looks gangster". It is true that his baggy pants and oversized shirt do not obviously indicate affluence. But Gavin could have been any young coloured man seeking entry into a privileged space. It is telling that the security guard's intuitive appraisal of Gavin was that he was *persona non grata*. The exact motivation for this cannot be known. What is obvious, though, is that the door to that club remained closed to him, and was only pried open with the help of a white companion. But whiteness is not simply validation. Like violence, it has come to embody forms of cultural capital that grant access to privileged spaces, and economic, assets in Cape Town. Seeking proximity to whiteness is analogous to moving towards gangs and violence, in that both represent cultural resources that can be leveraged for social and economic success. Sadly, it is my experience that, within the Capetonian context, being near whiteness generally means being near affluence, which in turn can be a valuable social resource. As an example of this, he managed to convert the connection to his white researcher friend into a job at a café in central Cape Town.

7.5 Acquiring Cultural Resources

It must be noted that, in seeking proximity to whiteness, Gavin is not merely attempting to become a "coconut" (Lindegaard 2017). To label him as such would be inaccurate and unfair. Our conversations disclose a far finer appreciation of the relationship between affluence and race, and the cultural signifiers of both. As he explains it, the bursaries, trainings and programmes he pursues are an important means of attaining the cultural resources he requires for succeeding as a rapper. In his mind, each programme is a stepping-stone on his way towards his dream of "becoming Tupac". Our exchanges about a leadership programme in which he participated in late 2016 and early 2017 were especially revealing in this regard:

> I try hard to understand your white culture man 'cause I was born and raised with black and coloured culture… Just to speak English is enough because here [in Cape Town] there like is two different languages… I've never been

> surrounded by white people like thus before in my life, bra. So I just learn out of them. You know, Cape Town is all white. That's why I just want to understand white people as an artist [and an] emcee.

It is clear that, Gavin's focus on "white culture" – and its associated 'white spaces' – is not just about chasing whiteness. It is about obtaining the tools necessary for success as a rapper, and his related pursuit of getting out of the ghetto, which he sees as being possible only to those possessing the appropriate cultural capital. It is this cultural capital that he is seeking:

> You know, for me the advantages that [the course] gave me, it makes me see the opportunities better in life – especially in Cape Town… Because [the course] is full of white people… So that's actually the advantage in the things that I learn out of them.

Being around white people is about obtaining the cultural tools necessary for success outside of the Cape Flats: "I am learning to be white, bro. Who would have thought that I would be eating with a knife and fork?" This rhetorical question is both a statement of cultural aspiration and an acknowledgement of the racial and class walls that have defined Gavin's opportunity, and which he is now slowly breaching. On another occasion, as we were eating in a restaurant in Muizenberg, he again alluded to the use of a knife: "this used to be my best friend. And now? I eat with it. I use it to cut my food". A knife – like a repertoire – is a tool. Its usefulness depends upon the skill with which it is applied to the context it is being used in. The changing symbolism of the knife in Gavin's life represents the transformation he is attempting. It is also significant considering the early exchanges we had about his participation in the leadership programme, and apprehensions Gavin had about fitting in: "it's all white Americans, bro. So I will be black and come back with a white mind. It's better than a prison mind – [better than] *Sabela* and shit".

That he was so mindful of the challenges that he would face in terms of assimilating to the other participants of the programme is indication of the difficulties of his previous experiences with Cape Town's cultural divisions. This exchange took place more than three years after he was released from prison for murder. The statement was an obvious reference to the many years he had lost to incarceration. But it was also recognition of his deficiencies in the type of cultural capital valued in the social field of his training programme, which sits side-by-side with the white affluence of Cape Town's city centre. Gavin's aspiration is towards the same mainstream Capetonian society that discriminates against him because of his race and class. That which signifies success on the streets is

stigmatised in the so-called mainstream. Time invested in becoming a gangster has yielded a "negative value" (Bourdieu 1986, 48) of cultural capital, as it is judged through the eyes of dominant society. The ways in which Gavin talks, dresses, and acts all indicate his outsiderness and will have to be deconstructed before he is accepted. But in a city with inequities as vast as those in Cape Town, the cultural distance between populations is hugely frustrating. For those, like Gavin, seeking to transgress the structural and symbolic boundaries that demarcate Capetonian society, the journey to exit gangsterism is lengthy and arduous.

To excel in those parts of Cape Town that Gavin aspires to, he seeks to accumulate the language, behaviour, and other forms of cultural knowledge that define those spaces. Even initial experiences in an unfamiliar cultural space can be dislocating and frustrating. About a week into the programme, we were in touch again. During this particular exchange, Gavin expressed his frustration with being unable to access the cultural capital to integrate: "this white life is hard to adapt to, bro. The lifestyle and stuff… I'm learning, but they're too corporate. So the ghetto must first fade away. I still don't fit in, bro". He later was more specific in describing the differences between the life he was used to and that of the spaces that were mostly white and comparatively affluent:

> Their lifestyle [in this programme] is not like the [Cape Flats] style. It's not like the ghetto life. The way that they speak. The way they talk. They do things politely – respectfully, you know. They not aggressive. They not full of anger or talk with pain. They talk more with emotions. And I wasn't used to voices of emotions you know. Every time when they like talk to me, I'm like this is like: "wow, this is emotions [and] I don't understand emotions"… My voice was always full of pain. I was always hard, you know. And I'm like: "wow, do I make this people scared, or what do I do?"

And so, as Gavin was trying to make his change, he used those around him to model his own behaviours to the new circumstances he found himself in. Just as he had watched his brother and other older gang members on the streets and in prison to thrive, in his own way, in his world then, he used the same processes for repertoire formation and cultural capital accumulation now. But as he did so, he often found that the street-based repertoires for action he had perfected earlier in life, and through repeated use came to embody, now obstructed him as the circumstances that he moved in changed.

Similarly, of the café he works at, which is marketed to Green Point's affluent consumers of trendy cuisine and coffee culture, he says:

> I can see how people move, and I can move like them. But when it comes to thinking, it's very hard to think like these guys… I always ask over and over the same questions. I'll ask one day and then the next day again… Like: "what is *Jalapeño* or what is *habanero* [sauce]?" I have both in my hand, but I don't know which one is which. Like if I had *tik* and *unga*[98], I will know this one is *tik* and this one is *unga*. But with the sauces, I have to bring you [the customer] both and just let you choose… and that's how it moves. It's like knowing what's in front of you, but not knowing what it means. So, to adapt is hard.

The comparison is so obvious, it requires no commentary. What is interesting, and does deserve commentary, is how Gavin has evolved into his workplace repertoire from the time of his initial job interview. While I was not present for the discussion itself, it appeared to be a jarring experience. In the aftermath of the interview, Gavin proclaimed: "why did you bring me to this fake place? This place isn't gangster like the Cape Flats, man. It's fake shit". It was a provocation that was meant to attack and disarm the feeling of dislocation he no doubt felt at the time. Being introduced to a world where cultural worth was defined by an astute knowledge of condiments must have been as disorienting as it would have been for me to stand on the corner trying to sell *tik* and *unga*. While I no doubt would have been deathly inept as a drug dealer, he has kept his job and thrived in it. As Gavin has become familiar with his new social space, he has come to embrace it, saying: "what drives me the most, is the environment of [the café]. Just to be there. The money is shit. [But] no matter how shit the work is. At least I'm in the environment". It seems that being gangster is just a matter of perspective, and time. Certainly, the "fake" café culture he criticised initially is just as much a construction of Capetonian society as are the Cape Flats. Both are structured by an exclusive symbolic order that define who and what has value, and makes such valuations seem appropriate. Now that Gavin has started to infiltrate the city, he has also begun to buy into its exclusive market of culture exchanges.

But, again, this should not be misconstrued as him selling out. He is working strategically to better his position. Though he does not make much at his job, Gavin says that he makes enough to survive. With the little money that he has, he buys himself something that he "can see", like a little television, some DVDs, or some clothes, in order to keep himself motivated and show himself that he is progressing. More than that, he indicates that working is a way of staying out of the Mongrels. In speaking about how his new professional repertoire is viewed by the gang, Gavin says:

[98] Heroin

> They see exactly that [Gavin's] not a threat and not a benefit [to the Mongrels]… He's like just a normal person, that just moves to work; or [is] walking up and down with the people; or just staying there by my mother [and father], with them. I'm like more in the normal way of living.

As with others, whose gang leaving experiences have been described above, being at work helps Gavin stay out of gangs. Through the constant performance of the workplace repertoire, he seeks to embody the dispositions of the "normal way of living", in part to show to his former brothers that he has left the gang. In so doing, he is suggesting that he has relinquished the street capital he used to rely on, and is now earning legitimately as a workingman; he is also earning legitimacy as a workingman:

> In the early stages [of exit], they would *Sabela* [at me], and all that. Or say that: "this happened to my brother, or some other guy"; then they come and they expect me to do what I had to do… To retaliate quickly to deal with it. But I would try to leave it. You knew me then, it was hard. A lot of stuff was happening – shootings, and the stabbings, and fights, and stuff. It was tough to avoid it all… But then, you know, they were like we've tried everything in the book. But this guy is just like still normal. He's not the same anymore. They don't even worry anymore. They don't try to come and test me anymore.

Over time, the Mongrels have come to accept that Gavin is changing. Persistent performance of normality has resulted in a dispositioning of non-street cultural capital, and a concurrent decompositioning of street capital. Even in the relatively short time that I have known him, I have seen him seemingly evolve considerably in his array of behaviours. Where Gavin was once typically reckless and aggressive, he has now become more thoughtful and measured with his action. Even though the Mongrels rarely test Gavin anymore, provocation still comes in other forms. To provide a concrete example, a few months ago he was robbed of his phone. It was a significant loss that amounted to about a month's wages, and cut him off from the world for three months – before he was able buy a new one. Yet, he took the loss the day he was robbed, hoping that it would pay off in the long run:

> You do get tested. For example, somebody can threaten you, or somebody can rob you. Like I got robbed. For me, I thought I can retaliate, but I was like, fuck it. I'm not going back to that life again. Because this sort of thing can trigger me back to violence… And if I now go get my homies to retaliate on this guy, then

> when they need me to fight I'll have to help them back. That's how the game goes, and that's how you get back into the game.

Instead of being contentious, he chose to be conciliatory, as others were shown to have done above when similarly confronted with violence. He is willing to sacrifice the price of a phone and the personal cost of potentially being assaulted (or worse) in order to avoid gang life. On some level, it is the type of trade-off many others make when confronting township insecurity: stay away from trouble, avoid making it worse when it finds you, and otherwise try to steer clear of the streets, all the while eking out a life for themselves on the Cape Flats.

But unlike many others, Gavin is trying to transgress sociocultural space. The effort he makes to stay away from gangs is foundational to his overall endeavour of leaving behind his disadvantage altogether. As he has transitioned further from the streets, acting non-violently has become easier. While it is easy to ascribe this change to a clichéd shift in an internal moral compass, to interpret Gavin's changes as a transformation of morality or values is simplistic; it is as much a matter of shifting opportunities. The more he is able to practically perceive and participate in other forms of living, the more his bourgeoning ex-gangster persona will develop. So far, the significant changes he has made have been the result of a gradual acquisition of additional cultural capital, which he has purposefully sought out via interaction with social and cultural spaces that he was otherwise excluded from:

> The world that I come from, I was born and raised into that, and there was always people that have taught me how to deal with that life. There was always people that I was watching how to deal with that life... But now going forward I don't have that mentality. I don't have the education. I don't have the experience, most importantly. You know I have nothing, and I don't have like a mentor like somebody that can teach me or lead me or walk with me this road… You know, and it's going to be hard for me because I need to do my own research now… In five to ten years, then I will understand everything. But for now, I don't understand nothing… [To get to where I want to be] needs a lot of work. And for you to do the work, you don't think how you will do it, you know. How you will lay out a structure, the points [along the way], the everything?

Gavin is referring to a form of education that has less to do with academic credentials or professional qualifications than the embodied cultural resources that he believes will provide him with a framework for succeeding in his new world. The practical skills gained

from a training course in film and media, or a leadership course, are secondary to the opportunity to understand, acquire and practise modes of thought and expression that can later be exchanged for social and material wealth.

Making it outside of the Cape Flats means disinvesting from the cultural resources accumulated over decades in gangs, and collecting new knowledge and skills. As this occurs, there will be a "cultural lag" (Swidler 1986, 281) that exists between taking advantage of new opportunities by abandoning established ways of living (Swidler 1986, 281). The cultural resources that had become central in Gavin's experiences as a gangster are those that he is more fully invested in, and they anchor the strategies that can be developed to thrive in different environments. As he explains: "people say: 'hey, you've already battled things that is much more hard than what you going to battle'. But that was about drugs and guns. This is different. Now I have to change my mind-set."

7.6 Cultural Spaces

But as I have already stated, his mind-set is changing. These changes are especially evident looking back on the initial drafts of this chapter, which I wrote around a year ago in mid-2017. At that time, Gavin poignantly expressed to me how his so-called mind-set is itself an extension of environment. Indeed, the "pain" that Gavin speaks of above is a reference to how structural and symbolic oppression contorts thoughts and actions to produce a person that is an individuation of where he or she lives:

> [Cape Flats communities] is not like Camps Bay or Constantia[99]. You know, where people go emotional – go easy when they talk. You need to be the place to survive – to know and understand the place. The place is hard, so you need to go hard to fit in… If you're going to go soft, you're not going to fit in. You [are] going to become like a carpet. They're going to walk over you.

To "go hard" is a reaction to the oppressive grind of urban underdevelopment, a way of steeling oneself to a life of austerity and adversity, embracing hardness in order to stand against hardship. Durability is considered a requirement for avoiding being treated "like a carpet". Gavin became hard by embracing the hardship he experienced growing up on the Cape Flats. Without alternative repertoires at his disposal, he transferred this repertoire to

[99] Both are affluent parts of Cape Town.

interactions in other spaces, insisting in our conversations that he could be no other way if he remained in the *kampies*[100].

Just as street cultural scholarship ties street behaviour to cultural space, Gavin said: "staying there in *kampies*, the gangsterism will come again". Gavin took cues from his surroundings, displaying a street habitus that became embodied in an attachment to the cultural space of the kampies that delimited his social universe: "you need to fight to survive in there, no matter who you are. Survival is the core. You need to fight to get to survival. That's just how it is". Such expectations for behaviour were long ago sown in Ottery's hardened soil, which was cultivated and grew in intertwining lives among the labyrinths of sheet metal, faded wood, and dust that delineate the settlements hidden there. But contrary to these earlier opinions, Gavin has managed another way:

> Now I'm just thinking smarter, maybe not harder. Instead of going hard, you just go smart, and that's how you survive – making the right moves. Because I, like, almost made that environment, so I know it very well. But now I just see it different… The right moves now, are always going to work, or going to school, or talking positive to the people. So that they [in the gang] can always see that change.

Gavin uses his knowledge and feel for the field that he "made", and is still cannot fully escape, to intuit sociocultural moves and to act accordingly. But what moves he even considers possible is captured through imagined outlooks and timelines, just as his motivation to achieve these will be dependent on his ability to picture better prospects for his future self. With the right cultural capital and social networks, he may become aware that there are other games to be contested, with more abundant fields of play:

> Gavin: I never had a choice to live [outside of gangs]. I never had a choice to not go into crime. Now I can see the meaning of choosing between right and wrong.

[100] *Kampies* refers broadly to an urban settlement. But Gavin often uses the term to refer to the small Ottery settlement that he lives in. I remember the introductory lesson I received before entering this space. Gavin counselled: "you must be a motherfucker [to be respected]. You must just be like: just don't give a fuck and go gangster bro". When pressed about what he meant, he replied laughing: "you musn't show people you fear… they will take you for a *poes*". Indeed, I realized from my many visits to the *kampies* since, there is the constant, and very tiring, sense of being tested, as people incessantly press up against one another: shouting, daring, swearing, grabbing, lobbying, dancing, and pushing their way to get whatever space they can. I can easily imagine how the long-term effects of this abrasive environment result in a rough and callused demeanour, that protects and desensitises a person to its constant social friction.

DD: But you did have a choice?

Gavin: To have a choice, it's like you have to see two opportunities. But if you don't think that this other life is possible, then there's really only one choice. If somebody shows you that you have more choices, then you're seeing for the first time… Before, I never saw it. Now I can see, if I do this, it will go like that. If I choose another way, then it'll go like that.

Gavin's fraught transition from gang life shows that violent acts are not at the core of those that perpetrate them. Repertoires – both violent and non-violent – are constantly being developed and tested against the constraints and opportunities of environment. In the *kampies*, there is a collective anticipation that a person will go "hard"; but if other ways are proved possible, then other models for action can be developed. Because other countervailing repertoires are scarce, or not achievable, gang violence becomes a salient frame for seeing the world. Then as gang repertoires are modelled as successful ways of pushing back against poverty and marginality, they become increasingly expected in personal and collective action. One person adopts this strategy, has success, and provides an example for another. If such a trend continues, the currency of violence gains value. Eventually, violent behaviour becomes the norm – in the sense that it is anticipated and expected. Violence resonates because it is successful socially, and not some function of morality. But once a person like Gavin is presented with other options and provided real opportunities to pursue those options, other definitions for what is normal seem possible. Testing these possibilities and finding some success in them turns them into reality – in time. Keeping alive, staying out of the Mongrels, avoiding prison, getting a bursary, completing some training, finding a job, buying a television and some DVDs, these are all corroborations of a possible future narrative that sees Gavin finally escaping the *kampies* – and leaving street life behind for good.

7.6.1 Coloured Mentality?

But while a coloured man may escape the *kampie*, he says he cannot escape the impression people have of him as a "robber, stealer, drug dealer [and] killer". The apartheid-era *skollie* stereotype is still oppressively present in explaining how coloured men are perceived today. It widely colours perceptions of young men like Gavin:

That's what people see… They see trouble. For me, it's hard to break through… But a guy can have gold teeth and baggy pants and he's just some guy trying to take care of himself.

So, Gavin is deeply aware of this marginality and the disadvantages associated with it. This is, in part, what pushes him away from his colouredness, which he associates with economic and social citizenship. Although he senses the unfairness of social perceptions of coloured people, he also draws on a pejorative interpretation of coloured mentality in situating coloureds in South African society, saying that "it's true what they think about coloureds... gangsters, gangsters, gangsters – that's the mentality that we have, you know". Colloquially, the symbolic inferiority of coloured people is expressed in "coloured mentality", which creates an image of coloured people as "docile, confused, and happily oppressed" (Marco 2011, 104)[101]. It is a result of years of society telling coloured people, and them telling themselves, that they are nobody and will never be anything other than gangsters – that they simply do not matter, unless as a homicide or incarceration statistic. The result of the disorienting practices of apartheid-era cultural cancellation, this pernicious thinking persists in the present. Today, coloured mentality has been internalised as symbolic violence; it still afflicts coloured people, manifesting unconscious ways of responding to oneself and one's community, as these are reflected back and distorted through the prism of social power relations.

It is interesting that the specifics of the coloured mentality Gavin describes also reflect the characteristics needed to survive in places like the *kampies*. According to Gavin, "there is a coloured mentality: very deep, hard, aggressive [and] painful". But there is ambivalence in the way he sees himself and others in his position. Gavin makes an indirect connection between the position of Cape Town's coloured population and structural and symbolic exclusion. But he also acknowledges that there is an element of this position that is self-inflicted in, and even inherent in, the way that coloureds think and behave:

> I just want to put it to you like [black people] also live like shit. But we [coloureds are] just bad… When it comes to the black community, they show more love. They help each other… We as coloureds, we already live under pressure that's amongst one another… We destroy each other.

Gavin, of course, presents an inaccurate picture – both of the supposed dysfunction of coloured people and the functionality of the black community. In doing so, he perpetuates a perception of the coloured population that underlies the persistent idea of an aggressive

[101] The term is attributed to a defective way of thinking, the origins of which can be found in deference to whiteness and associated connections to slave mentality (Adhikari 2006, 480). Notions of coloured mentality also draw on essentialist ideas about race, suggesting that there are particular beliefs and practices associated with being coloured (Sanger and Clowes 2006, 40-41).

and lazy coloured community that is unable to come together to solve problems that are ultimately of its own making. The symbolic threat of the *skollie* was externally constructed and imposed on coloured people. The sociocultural disorganisation experienced by the coloured community during apartheid impedes the creation of salient countervailing cultural repertoires. As a result, fallacious impressions of a coloured mentality remain imprinted on coloured people. They have been internalised, reinforcing the continued spatial and symbolic marginalisation of coloureds, allowing coloured people to think the coloured community as legitimate recipients of violence. Indeed, these internalised stereotypes continue to create and widen schisms among coloured people themselves, as they seek to differentiate themselves from the *skollie*:

> Even many of the coloureds that is speaking in English, they see we as coloureds in Afrikaans is the bad ones – is the drug addicts, is the gangsters, is the killers, is the murderers, is all of that, you know.

The specific term 'English coloured' does not exist widely in the contemporary popular South African lexicon, but it is referenced sometimes. Historically, the usage of English has been linked to class distinctions in South Africa, with "White South African English" (McKinney 2013, 23) being connected to wealth and social status. As a result, white middle-class speech norms are being adopted as a show of sociolinguistic prestige (Mesthrie 2010, 13). Gavin's reference to English coloureds identifies language as a cultural marker that underpins constructions of colouredness in contemporary South African society. How people speak is a signifier of cultural proximity to affluence. But it is more than that. The notion of abstract colouredness, and the divisions that exist within coloured identity itself, is operationalised through a racial class divide. A key boundary that defines these divisions is the space between the township and the middle class, with racialised class distinctions spatially mediating the distinction between what is respectable and what is not (Jensen 2008, 57). Thus, there are repertoires of different types of colouredness that are positioned against each other. They represent affluence and respectability, as well as opportunity:

> I'm always was asking myself: "what is the difference between me and [English coloureds]?" I stay in a shack and they stay in houses. But we both live in Ottery. What do they have and what do they see that I don't see? They see the opportunities better than I do in these gutters… They understand English. They understand the city… even though they [are] coloured. They don't think like me,

> because for me thinking is in Afrikaans. I only think as far as the gutters… I only think as far as Hanover Park [and *kampies*].

Capetonian respectability politics designate English as a marker of coloured congruency with mainstream values and as something that separates decent coloureds from *skollies*. Language is also an obvious cultural asset. Practically speaking, it is directly related to employment, with an emphasis on written and verbal communication. More than that, however, English is cultural capital that facilitates access to privilege and opportunity in Cape Town. It represents progress, whereas Afrikaans is associated with apartheid-like constraints. As explained by Gavin, English coloureds have jobs and money because they "understand life better", whereas "Afrikaans coloureds [still] speak the apartheid language".

The divide between English- and Afrikaans-speaking coloureds represents the disparities between the haves and the have-nots. Language delineates those coloureds that were able to progress in the Rainbow Nation as it transitioned and grew. Those coloureds that were left behind remain excluded and trapped in poverty, just as they were during apartheid. Their social and economic position is a reflection of the inequalities that continue to afflict a supposedly new South Africa, in which apartheid-like structures still oppress major portions of the population. Speaking English is about class. It is inextricably tied, not just to the practical and symbolic characteristics associated with social mobility, but to the potential to consider mobility to begin with. Whether one is an English or Afrikaans coloured is not simply about how a person speaks and acts, but is representative of the structural boundaries a person faces and what a person even thinks is possible. Deprivation is not a matter of innate ability and inability, as was believed during white rule. It is about having a frame through which one can perceive the world, one that is limited by a social position infused with the destructive racial symbolism that has not gone away since democracy was instituted in South Africa.

The wholesale remaking of Cape Town's symbolic order is an improbable, long-term collective hope. But individual acts of violation of the spatial limitations imposed by class, race, and economy reconfigure the world that Gavin and other young coloured men and women inhabit, helping to envisage a more accessible and equitable Cape Town.

> I came to a point where I can say: "fuck it, I can also do this type of things". And today I can climb up on mountains. I can play with water in the sea. I can do all this so for me, it's just like, so it was never about the white man it was about me as well… You know, I just said to myself many times: "fuck this about being

> black or white and coloured. I'm a human being". You know, what you can do, I can do.

By refusing to follow the rules that maintain the symbolic order that oppresses him, he is taking a political stance against that order and even actively working to undermine it. There is a danger of infusing action with an unwarranted political inclination. But if there is something true in the saying that "concessions of politeness always contain political concessions" (Bourdieu 1977, 95), it follows then that oppositional acts are committed against the necessity for politeness that maintains a particular way of thinking and living – that privilege some and oppress others. Even within the symbolic order:

> Actions of subversion... have the functions and in any case the effect of showing in practice that it is possible to transgress the limits imposed, in particular the most inflexible ones, which are set in people's minds... The symbolic transgression of a social frontier has a liberatory effect in its own right because it enacts the unthinkable. (Bourdieu 2000, 236)

Thus, a counterpoint can emerge, even if briefly, to probe the conditions under which the weight of symbolic order may be destabilised or challenged. As Gavin attempts to leave gang life behind and transgress the boundaries of his divided city, his transgressions, however small they may seem, create a certain image of the coloured man, as he would have him be. At the same time, in reimagining his own life, he is reimagining Cape Town as a more equitable and just society.

7.7 Conclusion

There is presupposition that once a person has become a gang member they are implicitly different from other people. In some ways this is true; gang members do take on important behavioural strategies that can oppose mainstream society. But defining gangsterism according to the absolute nature of gang membership reinforces the idea that members only have an allegiance to their gang and to violence. Such an absolute view of participation in gangs not only parodies people as one-dimensional killers, it concurrently kills any aspiration and intention these people might have outside of gangs. Despite living most of his life in gangs, Gavin was never absolutely a gangster. At different times, this meant being a soccer player, a killer, and a drug dealer, or a prisoner and student, or an aspiring rapper and a young coloured man trying to make it out of gangs. He was a person playing different, and often contradictory, roles that changed depending largely upon the circumstances and opportunities presented to him. His experiences highlight that the realities of gang life may be far different from what many people envisage. Leaving gangs

was similarly complex, contradictory, and convoluted. Gang exits are gradual, and often destabilised by relapses. Gavin has barely survived his own, cheating death to find a life that was, in many ways, more uncertain and precarious than the life he had lived earlier. Skipping from bursary to bursary, he has only in the last year found work, but ended up in prison on a rape charge anyway. What is more, he is still living in an informal settlement, and is everyday assailed by the material insufficiencies and simmering anxieties of living in need.

To most people, Gavin is still just a gangster. So, he has bartered his gangster persona for social and professional benefit. But Gavin does so in the hope that society may finally acknowledge that he is something more than that. This hope keeps him going. He still believes that through repeated engagement with social and class spaces that have been foreign to him his entire life, he will come to understand their mannerisms and language with the same fluency as he does the *kampies*. Armed with sufficient social and cultural capital, and the right opportunity, he will finally be able to leave gangs behind. While many look to the family man or the religious man for inspiration, he doggedly keeps an eye fixed on himself projected into profession success. Acquiring steady employment is the first step towards this. This is his current professional repertoire. Other efforts to find and collect new social and cultural resources have been incredibly deliberate, representing an agent-driven pursuit that is typically neglected when talking about those struggling against poverty and violence. Getting one person out of gangs is not the same as dismantling a system where gang violence is the norm. Still, Gavin shows that it is possible to resist the overwhelming force that is attributed to most explanations of the social durability of violent behaviour. When this one life is extrapolated to a community, one begins to form a sense of how gang violence becomes normal, and how it might become less so – topics that are further explored in the concluding chapter to this work.

8 CONCLUSION

This closing chapter consolidates the research findings outlined in the preceding pages. This paper showed how street culture is sustained through Cape Flats gangs, but also how moves beyond customary interpretations of street life can challenge the crushing power of gangsterism. Some gang members can build enough street capital to dominate the street field, and get beyond the socialised boundaries delineated by habitus. Others are able to break beyond the streets totally, accumulating the cultural capital of normal life by taking on domestic, workplace, and religious repertoires. The following sections consider how these new ways of seeing gang culture (and gang leaving) can inform violence-prevention efforts, and offers some initial thoughts on what this could mean for the way that gang interventions are undertaken in deprived urban spaces like the Cape Flats.

8.1 Beyond the Street

Cape Town's gangs emerged from South Africa's asymmetrical transition into democracy. The specific forms of structural and symbolic violence enacted through apartheid, and sustained by neo-apartheid, are central to the origin story of the street culture that reproduces gangsterism in the city. Describing gangs in this way does not excuse or justify the violence they commit. It is an explanation that accounts for the fact that, in Hanover Park, Manenberg, Mitchells Plain, Ottery, and other communities, gangs continue to exploit and exacerbate the harsh societal fractures that brought them into being, and continue to give them meaning. The value of the violent street culture that gangs are embedded in is established in relation to other available strategies for attaining the human capital needed to lead a meaningful life: security, material goods, respect, and so on.

Where opportunities are in short supply, gangsterism is manifested as a set of adaptive behavioural practices that are available for pursuing life's objectives. Gangs represent a form of opposition and aspiration for peripheral populations squeezed by the many exclusions of Cape Town's classist and prejudiced symbolic order. Gangsters can dominate others and earn important street capital, but they also internalise and reproduce a street habitus that sustains the classism and prejudice that structures their lives. Theirs is a strategic choice made in a field with few options, rather than some sadistic personal turn. As Kennedy (2011) points out, even gang members would likely prefer neither to be subjected to violence nor to commit it, whether it is because they genuinely wish not to or because it brings trouble from other gangs and from the police:

> It is important to recognise that, in such an environment, all involved may show a high propensity toward violence, and thus play a part in maintaining a dynamic that sustains the violence, *without necessarily actually supporting the norms that undergird such behaviour* [emphasis in original]. If faced with a situation in which one must react to a slight with violence or become victimized oneself, many will choose violence, even while not wishing to or believing that the world should be governed so. (Kennedy 2011, 278)

It is very difficult, however, to opt out of the violence, as enemies, peers and even the community are often willing to take advantage of perceived weakness. Each violent incident is embedded in a street repertoire that is a model for action projected into the world. Practically, it stakes a claim for the respect and dignity of the person committing it. Symbolically, it represents all coloured men and women similarly fighting for their lives. A gang member that finds success through violence provides a model for others. Each time it is committed, the violence is more likely to be seen and reproduced – by one person, and then by another, and another, and another.

The pervious chapter described Gavin's entry into gang life in Ottery. He followed his older brother into the Mongrels and 28s, and subsequently went to prison for murder just like his role model did. However, Gavin's initial predispositions towards gangsterism did not mean he was predestined to die in the streets. Four years ago, he left gang life, just as others in this study did. Their stories highlight that change is possible. Old ways of behaviour are transformed over time, in a process that is more lived, than learned. Social and cultural resources are accumulated interactionally, incrementally, continually, and circuitously. For example, as Gavin continues to move away from gang fights, he fights instead for a better life, using the few opportunities that he is given to increase his reserves of non-street social and cultural capital. His refusals to accept violence, or to act violently, are symbolic in projecting behavioural strategies, just as the violent acts that defined his previous life were. If he succeeds in the normal life, Gavin becomes a model for a different type of behaviour – one through which it is possible to attain material and social personhood outside of gangs. Those that attempt to leave gang life face a tough struggle. But they do face it. Gavin's exit out of gangs is transformative for him, and allows him to move beyond the structuring forces of street habitus. Within this study there were also other notable examples of efforts made by former gang members to mobilise economic, social, and cultural resources to move away from street culture.

Decompositioning of street life occurs as the dispositions of the old gang role are broken down, and a gang member moves beyond the embodied nature of street habitus. New roles require new ways of acting. In general, this study found that the dispositions of normal life require an enduring composition of domestic, workplace, and spiritual repertoires, whereby non-street social positioning transmogrifies into the dispositioning of normal life through the years. This is the difference between de-identifying and even de-embedding from a gang, and replacing old ganging practices with new ones; successfully disengaging from the street life and meaningfully living the normal life both require socioeconomic and sociocultural resources. We saw that former Cape Flats gang members have been able to successfully create new and meaningful lives by resourcefully applying available social, economic, and cultural capital to the persistent performance of domestic, workplace, and religious repertoires. They did so amid continuing poverty, injustice, and insecurity, and the criminalisation, stigma, and threat that comes with being an ex-gangster. Their stories are important for those men and women looking to similarly step away from gangs on the Cape Flats and for those researchers, politicians and community workers that are trying to help them accomplish this.

Former gang members' narratives support the idea that more must be done to facilitate the acquisition of the domestic, professional, and spiritual sociocultural resources for those that look to leave gangs. Projects (like Manenberg's Fusion) that aim to offer a repertoire for understanding what a person can be beyond criminality are more likely to find success where other initiatives fail (UNODC 2016, 26). Other organisations that applied similar strategies to support gang-leavers in this study were Chrysalis Academy and Ceasefire. Such local interventions must be adequately resourced and supported by the state, and its partners, in a way that facilitates local successes that can be adapted to scale. Each successful transition into normal life achieved through such programmes models similar possibilities for others to have families, get jobs and live in a spiritual community, thus expanding the limited horizons of those still living in the streets. Smoothing transitions into normal life requires that gang members looking to escape gangs are connected to non-street forms of social and cultural capital. Identifying and expediting the acquisition of capital through non-street repertoires is essential for assisting gang members. Counsellors, community workers, parole officers, parents, and friends can benefit from better understanding the compositional structure of the normal life, when speaking to people about leaving gang life.

In terms of regulating the harmful, automatic behaviours that underpin violent action, cognitive behavioural therapy has shown promise as a possible model for intervention

(Park 2017, 5). This approach teaches concrete methods of better relating to one's environment that can reduce aggressive and anti-social behaviour (Blattman et al. 2017, 1185). Programming models like those of Ceasefire can help address the repertoires of revenge associated with retaliatory killings (Safarloo 2015). From a policy perspective, any retributive policy of criminal justice that cuts people off from participating in society, finding work and seeing their family in order to reinforce the discomfort felt through incarceration, is only likely to undermine objectives towards social rehabilitation and reintegration. Further, we saw that there is no set formula for transitional process. Those that leave gangs, do so through the cumulative decompositioning and dispositioning processes associated with their gang exit; they engage individualised compositions of family, work, and spiritual life that allow them to transgress the street field and street habitus.

This study also showed that changes to structural conditions are required to make the distribution of non-street cultural capital more equitable in Cape Town, and thus more accessible in the context of disengagement and desistence processes. This means that in addition to interventions at all levels, actions should also exist in an institutional legislative framework that favours redistributive justice more broadly. Fair, humane, and effective criminal justice is also a necessary adjunct to endeavours fighting gangs and violence. But real security is a social characteristic that is grown endogenously. In this sense, it is the result not of a police strategy, but of a social system that produces streets that are safe to walk freely in the day and nights without gunshots. Collective sociocultural resources are accumulated just like individual capital is: incrementally, continually, and circuitously. Taken together, the individual life narratives presented in this paper reveal the multidimensionality of forces by which social space is continually being contested and shaped. Street habitus does not impose itself on the individual as a monolithic and synchronous system, but is dynamically and variably negotiated through individual interaction. If enough individuals are supported to interact in a particular way, sufficient force can be generated to struggle beyond the impasse of the overwhelming objectivism often found in the social theorisation of street culture. Moving beyond the street rebalances Bourdieusian criminology by returning to its practical dimensions, replacing structure (and agency) with interacting social actors. Taking this intellectual turn chooses to see people in gang-affected communities not only as objects of perpetration and victimisation, but as the subjects of their own personal and collective stories. People's interface with street culture is not entirely, or even mostly, reactional. It is *interactional.* By extension then, the symbolic orders that marginal people are embedded in, which are often presented as absolutely structuring, are themselves also being structured through the reciprocally

deterministic action of people and their environments coming together and acting upon each other (Bandura 2001, 23-24). In this regard, the analysis above offers broad lessons for how social change can be expected to come about and, by extension, for how violence prevention projects and development initiatives might be more successfully undertaken.

8.2 Thinking Practically about Gangs

But what are the practical implications of an increased focus on the practical dimension in gang research on the Cape Flats? Generally, analyses of Cape gangs, and related social issues such as violence and criminality, are presented through two lenses: criminal justice and public health. We have already spoken about the criminal justice perspective. At its worst, seeing gangs in this way results in the reifying criminalisation of poor and marginal people as violent criminals (Standing 2006, 281-282) and calls for harder policing and longer prison sentences that ignore the social determinants of Cape Flats gangs (Samara 2011, 134)[102]. Incarceration can worsen the behaviour of inmates and consolidate their place in criminal networks (CSVR 2010, 5). The number gangs that many inmates join serve only to normalise gangsterism, thus further destabilising the township communities to which most of them eventually return (Pinnock 2016a, 117). Ideologies of criminalisation can also lead to victim blaming, that is used to legitimise the defunding of social programmes (Chreptyk 2012, 9). The belief becomes that those dealing with social problems bring these upon themselves and are unworthy of state support. Sadly, it is a belief that even those receiving government support have to some degree themselves internalised (Patel et al. 2012, 33).

Contrary to what advocates of the criminal justice perspective typically argue, this paper has repeatedly shown that gangs are not just a problem that affects Capetonian society; they are Cape Town. The very real and complex challenges associated with gangsterism in the city requires more than dragging gangsters before judges and locking them in prisons without consideration for the developmental and security challenges that have put them into conflict with the state to begin with. Unequal access to the state and economy leaves large portions of the Mother City's population without the prospect of employment, little in the way of social benefits or grants, and lacking adequate policing and the provision

[102] Even the 'Cape Flats' label produces a false inside-outside dichotomy between Cape Town's townships and its city centre and suburbs, ignoring what is an interconnected urban ecosystem. The separation acts as a moral fortification between the civilised progress of the inside and the chaotic and barbaric underdevelopment of the outside. Violent acts and their causes are exclusive to a particular geography, as the Cape Flats becomes shorthand that equates to reduced opportunities, high levels of social disorganisation and endemic gang violence.

of other public services. If one considers this, Cape Flats gangs cease to be the product of some warped or psychotic personality, and become instead a recognisable response to the flaws of the society in which they exist. What is more, it has been shown that gangs are not defined by distinctive or deterministic organisational qualities. They vary in their composition and character, as much as they do in their multiplex connections to those identifying with the streets. Indeed, some violent virtuosos are able to participate in gangsterism in a way that subverts most common gang definitions. Yet, the extent of their criminal cunning and connections leaves no doubt that their place in the taxonomies that explain Cape Town's underworld must be respected. A street-based analysis of their lives, as well as the other lives considered above, calls for a modelling of gangs that re-envisions them as subjectively experienced, but socially produced phenomenon. Seeing gangs like this shows what they are, while also taking into account the reasons for how and why they come into existence in particular social spaces.

Whereas the criminal justice perspective usually ignores linkages between gangsterism and society, the public health approach takes into account the social origins of gangs. It is an approach to gang and violence prevention that has seen considerable global interest in the last decades[103]. Increasingly, the discussion about violence in South Africa is also being framed in this way, with public health thinking making its way into policy (Butchart and Emmett 2000, 3-25; Civilian Secretariat for Police 2016, 14-15). Seeing gangs as a public health issue aims to improve health and safety by managing the risk factors that predict whether a person will become a victim or perpetrator of violence (Neville et al. 2015). Prominent anti-gang initiatives such as Ceasefire[104] uses an epidemic control method to reduce violence, by anticipating where gang violence may occur and intervene before it erupts and engaging the communities to change behaviour and norms that support gangsterism (Cure Violence, n.d.).

[103] The *World Report on Violence and Health* (Krug et al. 2002) was the first global review of violence as a public health issue. More than thirty governments have organised national launches or policy discussions about the report, and resolutions endorsing the report and calling for its implementation have been passed in a number of forums, including the World Health Assembly, the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights, and the African Union ("World Report on Violence and Health" n.d.).

[104] Ceasefire is perhaps the most recognisable gang intervention in Cape Town. It has been featured prominently by the Western Cape Department of Community Safety and the City of Cape Town's Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading initiative – a development programme that promotes urban security in communities around the city. During its piloting phase, the project received considerable local and international media attention (see for example: Kretzmann 2016; Gonschorek 2013; Newman 2015) and was being expanded to Manenberg at the time of writing (Sesant 2015).

Given that gang violence is a major contributor to premature death, disability, and injury in Cape Town, it is not extraordinary that it be treated as a public health issue. Actually, it is not that seeing gangs as a health issue is wrong. But the findings presented in this paper suggest that it is the way that gangs and violence are presented within the public health frame that is problematic. In some ways, public health is aligned with the worst aspects of positivist criminal justice approaches to analysing and addressing gangs. For instance, the language of public health contributes to a perception of people as vectors of aggressive pathologies, without sufficient consideration for the nuance of their lives. This way of talking about people is stigmatising and dehumanising, as it reinforces the idea that those vulnerable to violence are perpetually on the verge of displaying the violent symptoms of criminal illness. Further, there is an obvious tension between the real world gang participation depicted in this paper and a language of risk and resilience that reduces people to the sum of the risk factors acting on them[105]. Public health advocates see preventing violence as the identification and isolation of risk, targeting it in a systematic way that is meant to generate a corresponding change in rates of violence experienced by communities or individuals (Gebo 2016, 377). But it is obvious that neither membership in gangs, nor participation in violence, can be treated as pathogens that can simply be diagnosed and treated. Yet, gang members are defined as data points – or the product of predictive analytics – that visualise the viral spread of gangs and violence in communities (United States Department of Justice 2017).

Rather than seeing gangs as a scientific problem to be solved, or an antisocial problem to be policed, ethnographic street-based narratives embrace the mirco-complexities through which agency and structure interact over gang members' lives, in a process that is dynamic, sometimes contradictory, and never formulaic. Debates around the conceptual problematisation of gangs are not merely theoretical. There is a relationship between the character of academic understanding and the forms of policy and programming it subsequently enacts. Looking at gang entry and exit through the qualitative lens of street culture enables us to understand gangs with greater empathy and to react with interventions that are responsive to those they are intended to support, but which are

[105] It remains impossible to predict whether or when a particular individual will commit an act of violence, and most of those at high risk never become violent: "although the level of risk [of violence] increases as the number of risk factors accumulate, risk is not necessarily cumulative over the course of an individual's life" (Hazen 2008, 252). Research on South African youth indicates that, even though many of the risk factors for offending are common, the exact combination of the risk factors that have given rise to a person's engagement in crime varies (Leoschut and Bonora 2007, 102).

necessarily demanding of the societies that give rise to gangs in the first place. By reincorporating the practical dimension in street cultural research, we are declaring that there is no longer the individual and the society, or the subject and the object, but only individuals interacting with other individuals.

There are some overlaps with nascent applications of systems thinking and complexity science to the way that development problems are both understood and tackled (Ramalingam and Jones 2008). For instance, Rihani (2002a, 13-14) advocates a definition of development as messy and uncertain, which is driven mainly by millions of local actors and is subject to an open-ended evolutionary process that can take many paths. Ramalingam (2013, 14-16) also suggests that an assessment of aid should start with a realistic appreciation of how societies and institutions develop as interactional and adaptive complex systems. Others have made similar comments regarding global politics (Harrison 2012), societies (Byrne 1998), economies (Beinhocker 2007), cities (Jacobs 1961), as well as the public policies (Geyer and Rihani 2012) and aid interventions (Harford 2011, 115-153) that are situated in these different milieus. In response, Barder (2009a, 1-2) argues for moving away from a planning approach to aid[106] by favouring networked relationships that change the determinants of how aid is distributed and undertaken and favours intelligent design based on evolutionary variation and selection.

No matter the specific approach pursued, the metrics for social progress should also be indicated by the capacity to create and recreate circumstances where gangs and violence are increasingly rare and in which development and security becomes a more prominent characteristic of Capetonian society. That does not mean imposing or engineering security strategies. Sustainable change is possible only when it is self-perpetuating through the dynamic of localised interactions. Policy makers, community workers, police, and others working on the Cape Flats, can help to create and implement policies and programmes that influence the choices that people make and, thus, to shape the emergence of neighbourhoods that are more prosperous and secure. Yet, despite the not-insignificant knowledge available about the individual, community and social risk factors driving gang

[106] In general, international development has been treated as a reasonably predictable activity that should respond to laws of universal applicability. Since the *Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action*, there has been an even greater concentration on planning as a way towards greater aid effectiveness (OECD 2005, 2008). Results-based management is being used to help achieve, measure, and report aid outcomes (OECD 2001, 6). Emphasising planning and results creates a logic model that assumes a predictable path towards development results, along which the right resources, planned in the right way, within the right timeline, will achieve the right results.

membership and violent offending, we are yet to design an effective response. Part of the fault for this is no doubt due to the power and embeddedness of gangs in Cape Town. But part of the blame is also the way that 'the problem of gangs' is approached. The life histories of gang-leavers are illustrative of the iterative and cumulative but unpredictable relationships that each individual has with his or her family, neighbourhood and society. Leaving gangs and violence occurs in ways that cannot be separated from society through tough-on-crime measures, and which cannot be calculated through public health data. So if one can better learn from how street cultures came about, then the poisonous power of violence can serve as a type of antivenin. Supported with sufficient resources, and at a sufficient scope and scale, Cape Flats communities can change. A street-based approach would put greater emphasis on the localised interactions between social actors over time. These are individual brush strokes that make up the 'big picture' of how Cape Town is composed, and how the fault lines of inequality and injustice can eventually be redrawn. Interpersonal exchanges criss-cross, layer, and bleed into each other; every successful gang exit (or trigger being pulled) is an individual 'brush stroke', which is at once a singular act and the representation of a symbolic landscape of collectivized subjective action that frames, and reframes, the objective limits of life on the Cape Flats.

8.3 Final Thoughts

In facing their situation, township dwellers have a choice. In choosing street life, they can identify with the powerful and strive for power by doing violence to those weaker than themselves, thereby compensating for their own pain. But the nature of the street requires that the violent crimes they commit are then committed against them in return, reinforcing the fact that this substrata of Capetonian society is paying many times over for the violence it originally suffered. Violence is thus reproduced and, where all one sees is violence, it becomes an understandable choice. Those that decide to leave gangs, do so against considerable odds. The men and women that leave gangs represent a resolute opposition against treating one act of violence as an alibi for another. In acting against their own gangster dispositions, they are reshaping their own lives, and offering an alternative vision for their communities, their city, and their nation. With sufficient support, the human geographies they inhabit can be remade according to this vision. Without it, gang leavers return to live within the limits of the habitus that pushed them into gangs. Sure, they are happy to have survived the street life but, unable to thrive in an unfair symbolic order, they are no better off than before they entered the street. But because the social fields that define street life and normal life are nested in the same unjust symbolic order, the forces driving gangs and violence will continue to be structured and socialised in

ways that outlive street life. Stopping both requires a fundamental restructuring of Capetonian society. The long-term interactional nature by which people's non-street practices are constituted provides clues about how social transformation may occur.

Supporting a micro-ambitious approach that considers the formative agent-structure relationship of habitus can provide a new way of navigating gang and violence prevention. This is an opportunity to move not just beyond the streets, but also away from criminal justice and public health approaches, as well as the overly reductionist and overly pessimistic perspectives connected to each. The ability to appreciate the holistic and uneven complexities of gang exit and gang leaving leaves one unconstrained, to see each in its specificity and in its entirety: as an act that is meaningful in the life of the gang member, and as a behavioural manifestation of the social structures that helped bring it about. Societies are healthiest when they appreciate their wholeness, relinquishing the need to suspect and separate. For this reason, the prospects of the Mother City and the Rainbow Nation can only be as bleak or as bright as the prospective lives of those struggling to get by on the Flats. Wayfinding a path towards progress will require small steps, which, when taken together, can help to advance security across the expansive sands of the Cape Flats. Such a move calls for an endeavour that empowers all Capetonians in the disparate – but common – project of ensuring that security and prosperity is the right of each of the city's residents, in the spirit of the still-unfulfilled promises of a new South Africa.

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