

Beaten bad

The life stories of violent offenders

Chandré Gould



‘Once authority has deteriorated to the level of mere power, (the threat of violence) the next move to actual violence is no longer a moral problem: it is a matter of survival’¹



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Executive summary

This monograph presents the findings of a life history study funded by the Open Society Foundation for South Africa and undertaken as a partnership between the Institute for Security Studies and the Department of Correctional Services from 2010 to 2015. It does so through relating the life stories of offenders who have been incarcerated for violent crimes. It describes and analyses the factors that drive and/or inhibit repeat violent offending, and offers suggestions for identifying and responding to recidivism.

Identifying the indicators of risk before young offenders resort to violent crime, and implementing the appropriate interventions, may help to reduce violent crime and re-offending in the long term. The intention of this study was thus to provide detailed data on the life histories and life circumstances of repeat violent offenders in South Africa.

Through the life stories presented in this monograph it becomes evident how the respondents' individual characteristics, their relationships with family, their untreated trauma, and their exposure to violence and crime, combined with harsh punishment and the absence of supportive adults, interact to inform their use of violence.

The stories narrated here show that these offenders' experiences of violence were not restricted to discrete settings – violence experienced at home was mirrored at school and in their communities – and that each of these experiences of violence had a compounding effect. Exposure to domestic violence also had a serious impact on respondents' lives and educational outcomes.

The combination of structural violence (e.g. high levels of poverty, lack of access to quality education) and physical violence, in the absence of warm, trusting relationships, is shown to cause complex trauma and lay the basis for further violence. Simple dualities such as victim and perpetrator serve little use in this context. Here, the children who become violent men are mostly victims themselves – of trauma, racism, bullying, corporal punishment and brutalising institutions. Their families are often dysfunctional or broken and they continually encounter adults who reinforce their distrust of authority figures. While this is not to suggest that the men are blameless for the often-cruel acts of violence perpetrated, it does imply the need for a more compassionate response than we have taken up to now.

The narratives inform the conclusion that the best chance we have of preventing violent crime is to ensure that infants and children are not exposed to violence or toxic stress at home, and are warmly cared for. It is equally important to ensure that children are protected from violence at school.

Preventing recidivism at the point of incarceration is immensely difficult to get right and the least likely to succeed in reducing violent criminality in the long term. Indeed, none of the men interviewed

was deterred by the risk of long prison sentences. While prison may offer an important opportunity for reflection, skills development, education and intensive programming, a more comprehensive approach is needed to reduce violent crime in South Africa. Such an approach needs to provide universal programmes (e.g. improving gun control) and targeted interventions to support individuals and families at risk (e.g. those living in poor, high-violence environments).

These interventions should be aimed at reducing children's exposure to physical and emotional abuse, and to intimate partner violence. And once they have been exposed we need systems in place to address this exposure, to reduce long-term harm.

There is a strong policy basis for the provision of programmes to support and encourage positive parenting. While various South African programmes have a demonstrable effect in improving parenting and child outcomes, the country is years away from implementing parenting programmes at anything like the scale required. Parenting programmes are also not a cure-all: they need to be one of a range of interventions across the life course.

In addition, interventions at the family and relationship level need to be supported by change at the societal level; in particular through addressing working and childcare conditions for parents. Accessible and safe early childhood development centres and after-school care facilities are essential, as is parental leave after the birth of a child (for both parents).

None of the men interviewed was deterred by the risk of long prison sentences

This study shows that there are three major opportunities for identifying and responding to recidivism. The first of these is truancy, which is a significant indicator that something is wrong and is likely to get worse. This was the case across all the stories. It is imperative to establish a protocol that teachers can follow when they become aware that children are skipping school. Such a protocol should include drawing on the support of other service providers, for example school psychologists and social workers. However, for this to work there have to be enough school psychologists, and they need to be able to offer intensive interventions.

The second is children who are in conflict with the law. Transitioning places of safety from harsh, prison-like environments to places of care that are therapeutic rather than retributive has not been achieved yet. The study also highlights the importance of ensuring that magistrates understand criminal trajectories, are aware of the harm that may be caused by early incarceration and are able to divert children away from the criminal justice system.

By the time the criminal justice system engages with men who are set on a trajectory of violent offending, it is usually too late to ensure a dramatic change without considerable investment. Thus, the third major opportunity to identify and respond to recidivism is when offenders first come into contact with the criminal justice system for petty offences. Unfortunately, this is also the time when they are least likely to be the recipient of any kind of programme. We should consider whether we are getting the best returns from making programmes available only to those offenders who are spending long periods in correctional facilities. It may be wiser to focus programming on first-time offenders, and those who are incarcerated for between two and 10 years.

The foundations for violence and criminality are laid one to two decades before society feels the effects. The way in which we respond to children who experience violence, neglect and abuse in 2015 will determine the level of violence we will experience in 2025.

Abbreviations and acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
ASPD	Antisocial Personality Disorder
CD	Conduct Disorders
CSVR	Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
CTS	continuous traumatic stress
DCS	Department of Correctional Services
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HPA	hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
NICRO	National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SAPS	South African Police Service
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNISA	University of South Africa
WHO	World Health Organization

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This study has benefitted from the input of many individuals and institutions over a number of years.

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death row was still incarcerated. This work is not reflected in the current monograph, but will be included in future publications.

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Introduction

Background to the study

This monograph presents the findings of a study funded by the Open Society Foundation for South Africa, undertaken as a partnership between the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) between 2010 and 2015.

The aim of the project was to describe and analyse the factors that drive and/or inhibit repeat violent offending. As such, it has sought to contribute to our understanding of repetitive criminal behaviour through undertaking a life history study of persistent offenders who engage in violent crimes. The project was motivated by the notion that the identification of indicators of risk before young offenders resort to violent crime and the implementation of appropriate interventions may, in the long term, contribute towards reducing levels of violent crime and re-offending. The intention of the study was thus to provide detailed data on the life histories and life circumstances of repeat violent offenders in South Africa. Such information, it was hoped, might be used to:

- Inform sentencing policies
- Enable the early detection of indicators for repeat offending
- Inform rehabilitation programmes and interventions

The findings, as will be shown, are also of relevance to the departments of Justice and Correctional Services, Basic Education and Social Development, since they point to the need for early intervention to support and enable positive parenting and to the urgent need to address the use of corporal punishment in schools. The study also highlights the necessity of a response and a greater level of intervention when there are early indications of stress in children's lives – such as truancy – that, if left unresolved, can lead to a trajectory into criminality. In the presence of family dysfunction, teachers are likely to be the first people able to identify behaviours that are early indicators that things are going wrong in a child's life. They need to be trained to identify these indicators and will need a strong and responsive referral system to social workers and psychologists for further intervention.

This study was informed by and builds on data from quantitative studies such as the Youth Victimisation Survey² and qualitative research such as that undertaken by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 2008.³

In short, this research was motivated by a search for answers about what makes some people turn to a life of violent crime. Underlying the study is the belief that through a better understanding of the commonalities and differences in the lives and experiences of the men who commit violent crime, it

might be possible to find ways to intervene early enough to prevent the onset of a criminal trajectory, and improve the way in which we respond to offending and offenders.⁴

Through the life stories of the men interviewed we are able to see how their individual characteristics (such as temperament and cognitive ability); their relationships with family; their untreated trauma; and their exposure to violence and crime, combined with harsh punishment and an absence of supportive adults who communicate openly with them, interact to inform their criminality and use of violence.

Writing this monograph was an enormous responsibility – I was trusted by each of the men who shared with me their life stories. They allowed me to intrude on their most intimate and personal memories and trusted me to keep those safe and tell their stories with integrity. While each person consented to being interviewed for the study after being informed about the research and why it was being done, they could not know then, and nor did I, how their stories would be represented and interpreted. They may find in reading this report a version of their lives, analysed and interpreted, that they no longer recognise. And many of the men will find the specifics of their lives absent, as a report of this nature cannot reflect in detail each of the stories. My challenge was to write these stories respectfully and empathetically. I hope I have achieved that.

Structure of the report

The first five chapters of this report, following the chapter on methodology, are detailed narratives of men who participated in the study. They have been selected because they are exemplary of the issues that were raised by other participants. You will first meet Peter, who grew up on the Cape Flats, was sent to a reformatory early in his life and was ultimately convicted of multiple counts of murder, committed during a brutal gang retaliation. The second narrative is that of Ryan, who was born in Durban but lived for part of his life in Mpumalanga, and then moved many times to different provinces. Ryan committed many property crimes but was only convicted of one violent crime in his life: the brutal murder of his own brother. Velabahleke's story is the third to appear in the report. He grew up in Thokoza, on the East Rand of Gauteng, was involved in the political violence that wracked the country during the transition from apartheid, and was ultimately incarcerated for his role in robbery and murder. Mosiuoa was born in Soweto, to a family of activists who participated in the struggle against apartheid. He spent most of his early life between Kagiso and Soweto. He participated in political violence in Sebokeng, drove taxis during the height of the taxi violence in Gauteng, and ultimately was arrested for his role in a cash-in-transit heist. This section of the report concludes with Zibonele's story. Zibonele was born and raised on a farm in the Free State. He started working on the farm when he was 14 years old, but moved off the farm as an adult and into an informal settlement in Kroonstad, where he committed the rapes and murders of three young girls for which he is currently incarcerated. These chapters describe their lives, their criminal trajectories and the factors that set them on a path of criminality.

The final two chapters offer a discussion of the findings, with reference to additional narratives and recommendations for action, followed by the conclusion.

You will find in each of the stories that are presented here, that the men who perpetrate violence have, in all cases, experienced at least as much violence in their lives as they have carried out. With that being the case, the clear distinction between perpetrator and victim becomes blurred. In most cases the perpetrators of violence against these men were their own parents, peers and educators.

Most will never be brought to any kind of justice or be called criminals. This realisation calls into question our simple national narrative in which criminals are violent 'others' at war with good citizens. Through this report I offer a challenge to the simple duality of victim/perpetrator and the simplistic understanding of violence and how it is perpetuated in society.

Methodology

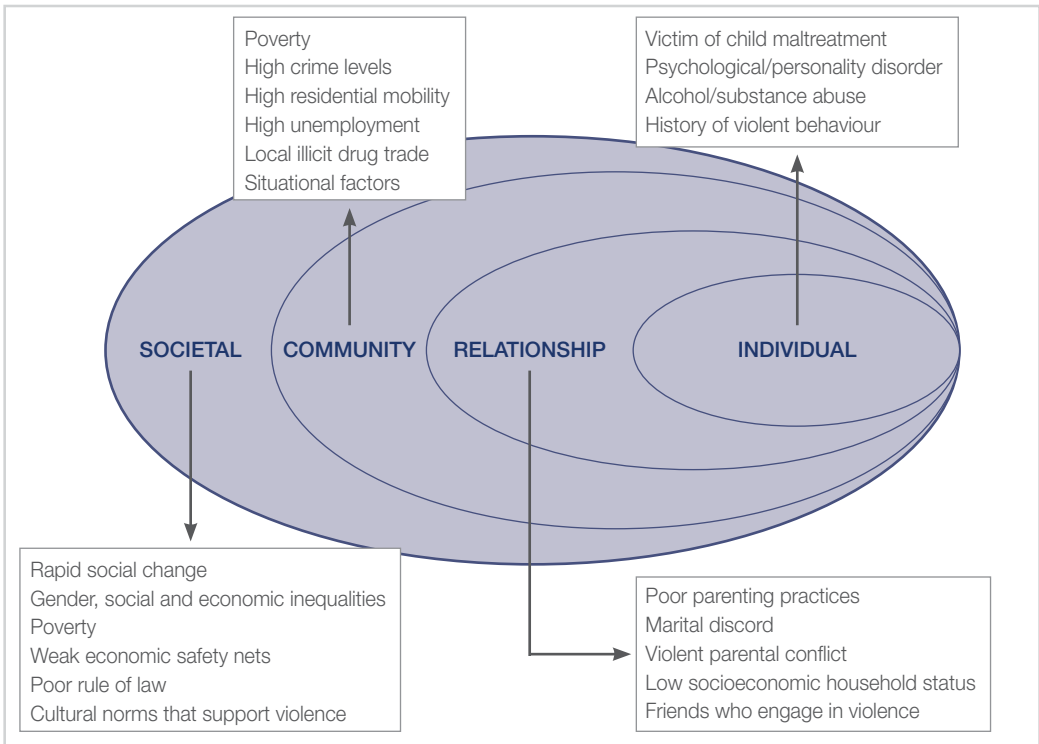
Theoretical approach

Any number of theoretical framings can be used to make sense of the relationships and interactions between individuals and their contexts, and how our environments inform experience and responses to those experiences. Increasingly the discussion about violence in South Africa is framed by a public health approach – this we see making its way into policy.⁵ The public health approach to preventing violence⁶ offers a helpful framework (referred to as the ecological model – see Figure 1) for understanding the relationships between the individual, family, neighbourhood and society, and how these influence and inform the use of violence. When looking for solutions, this framing forces us to look not only at the individual but also at the structural conditions that inform and even determine behaviours and responses. The public health approach offers us a language of risk and resilience; it identifies the factors that increase the chance that someone will use violence, and the cluster of factors that may protect an individual from becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence.

Risk and protective factors have been identified through extensive quantitative research at a national and international level. Given this framing we can begin to think about how to reduce the risk factors and increase the factors that protect against or build resilience to violence. However, this approach suggests that individuals are an agglomeration of risk or resilience factors, and it can only go so far in providing an understanding of how these factors influence and inform the trajectory of an individual's life; how that may vary from person to person; or how the sequence or timing of stressors can influence an individual's response. The complexity of individual lives and the many factors we may not be able to identify and separate into clear, measurable variables mean that research such as this can offer depth, nuance and additional understanding of how many factors (including those not identified in Figure 1) influence the course of a life.

In order to make sense of how lives are informed and shaped by exposure to risk and what may act as a buffer against these risks at all levels of the ecological model,⁷ we also need to turn to neuroscience, evolutionary biology, psychology, criminology and even literature⁸ such as biographies and autobiographies.⁹ We also need to consider how race, class, age, masculinity and self-esteem or self-efficacy¹⁰ function to increase or decrease the risk of victimisation and perpetration of violence. In each of the different disciplines a different language, a different framing for viewing violence and the lives of those who commit violence, is offered. It is increasingly necessary, in my view, to find ways to draw on each of these to make sense of why in South Africa we are plagued by persistently high levels of violence, why we seem to turn so quickly to violence, and what we need to do to change that.

Figure 1: The ecological framework: examples of risk factors at each level



Source: World Health Organization (WHO) Violence Prevention Alliance, The ecological framework, <http://www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/ecology/en/> (reproduced with permission from the WHO).

The choice of subjects covered in the interviews was informed both by the public health discourse and by criminological theory relating to criminal trajectories. However, ultimately this report presents the biographies of individuals, revealing them to be complex beings whose lives are influenced and informed by a multitude of experiences and their individual responses to these. There is some tension between the language of risk and resilience, offered by the public health approach to understanding and responding to violence, and the ethnographic approach of this research, which presents individuals as more than just a sum of risk factors. The contribution of this study is to offer narratives that embrace complexity, sometimes reflect contradictions, but hopefully enable us to understand and respond to violence and the people who perpetrate it with greater empathy and with interventions that are responsive to those they are intended to support.

Criminal trajectories

Since we are interested in the trajectories of the lives of offenders and their criminal careers, this study has drawn on criminological theory in this field. Wheaton and Gotlib provide the following definition of a trajectory:

A trajectory is the stable component of a direction toward a life destination and is characterized by a given probability of occurrence. A trajectory refers to the tendency to persistence in life-course patterns, but not necessarily as defined by unchanging probability of a life outcome. Rather, a trajectory can be defined by a linearly increasing probability over time, by a nonlinearly decreasing probability, or by other combinations of these possibilities.¹¹

A trajectory may be determined, as you will see in the narratives that follow, by stressful experiences in childhood, which in turn affect educational achievement and the ability to form prosocial bonds.¹² Thus early childhood experiences may set an individual's trajectory by affecting their cognitive development, their self-efficacy and their ability to form relationships with others, and in turn their ability to achieve at school. Once a trajectory is set, often what follows appears to have a cumulative effect.¹³ This being the case, it was important to ensure that the interviews conducted for this study should be able to identify those factors that inform or determine a trajectory.

Stressors

A multitude of factors determine the effect that an event will have on an individual's life. One of these factors is the timing of the event in relation to others. For example, an experience of bullying at the same time as the loss of a parent will have a much greater impact than one of these experiences on their own. The interactions between stressors may be as important as the nature of the individual stressors themselves, in determining their impact on an individual's life course. Focusing on individual stressors rather than seeing them in relation to one another may lead to an incorrect assessment of the effect of a particular stressor.¹⁴ Thus this research sought to cover a broad range of events in each offender's life, and to establish their sequence in order to identify those that had an impact, or not, on their trajectory.

Given that the timing of life events in relation to other factors may have a long-term effect on behaviour or the trajectory of an individual's life, the research methods needed to provide a picture of the participant's life in such a way that the relationships between events and other factors become apparent. For this the literature about life event calendars¹⁵ was instructive, and informed the decision to map the offenders' lives on a timeline drawn by the interviewer and respondent on a sheet of cardboard during the interviews. Since life event calendars as described in the literature are used as research tools for surveys, it is the principles of calendar methods and the findings about recall accuracy that are particularly relevant to this study, rather than the way in which the questionnaires for life calendar research are set up.

Lin et al.¹⁶ investigated the validity of using a life event calendar method to determine the interaction of stressors on an individual's life. Their study was concerned with the accuracy with which participants remembered things that had happened. They were able to do so using a sample of individuals who had been the subjects of multi-wave studies in 1979, 1980 and 1982. In 1993 and 1995 they conducted an additional two waves of the survey during which they included a life calendar covering 1979–1994.¹⁷ Since the respondents had previously provided data about events in their lives, the researchers were able to check the 1993 and 1995 responses against the earlier responses, to check the accuracy of recall data. They found that there was a greater chance of under-reporting (not reporting certain events) than over-reporting (reporting events that did not occur). This was a positive finding because over-reporting is a more serious problem for researchers than under-reporting, in that it would involve the construction of an event by the respondent. In addition, the researchers found the fewest errors in under-reporting in relation to intimate and family experiences. They also noted that the recall errors were more likely to occur from forgetting the particular timing of an event than from forgetting the event itself.¹⁸

Lin et al. argue that in order to understand which stresses result in a particular life course, or a particular change in a trajectory, one needs to consider a range of factors and their interaction.¹⁹ The life event calendar method allows for just such a juxtaposition of information.

The key feature of a life event calendar is the use of two dimensions: domains and time units. Domains are essentially the issues that will be covered, while time units relate to when they happened.²⁰ In this study we were concerned with early childhood, teenage years and adulthood – in other words, a range of experiences leading to and including incarceration. Lin et al. focused their research on changes in the respondents' life experiences, on the basis that changes induce stress and possibly also distress. Two types of life changes were identified: those that resulted in a change in demographic and role status, and life events. They identified five types of change in demographic and role status: (i) change in marital status; (ii) births of children; (iii) changing education experiences; (iv) employment changes; and (v) residential changes.²¹ Life events, on the other hand, include the death of a family member, serious accidents, changes in financial status, and so on. In addition, in order for an experience or event to qualify for inclusion in the life event calendar the event had to be negative – i.e. undesirable. While the methods used in this study do not replicate those used by Lin et al., the interviews were informed by an intention to understand the intersection between events, and their timing in the respondents' lives. These included changes in marital status, births of children, change in residence, change in education status, and so on.²²

Julie Horney, writing in Meier et al.,²³ described a research project that sought to incorporate the criminal event perspective into the study of criminal careers. The study considered the context in which violence took place 'while placing those violent events into the broader context of an individual's life and criminal career. The basic research strategy combines levels of analysis by considering multiple criminal events occurring across time within individuals.'²⁴ For the purposes of the study that is the subject of this monograph, a series of interviews was conducted with participants during which, among other things, the details of the crimes committed by the participants were discussed and elaborated. However, since the purpose of the study was not to determine the modus operandi of crimes, as, for example, Rudolph Zinn's study was,²⁵ much less emphasis was placed on the details of the commission of crimes.

In relation to the validity of self-report data as well as the life events calendar method, Horney referred to at least two other longitudinal studies that provide evidence for the validity of self-report data through the use of the life calendar method. She quoted Caspi et al.²⁶ in referring to four design features of life calendar data collection: '1) the method uses visual aids; 2) the method inquires about streams of events rather than about isolated events; 3) the method records the incidence, timing, and duration of sequences; and 4) the method places questions about life events into the context of more easily remembered life events'.²⁷

Horney had computerised most of the elements of the life events calendar, but used a paper calendar to help jog the memory of respondents. They started their interviews with questions about living arrangements, prompted by questions such as 'Where did you live each month?', 'Who lived in the house with you?', and so on. This, she reported, helped respondents to remember events that they would otherwise have found difficult to recall. The Horney study addressed the issue of data verification by including questions in the interviews that could be checked against prison records. This informed the approach adopted in this study, where information offered by participants in the study was checked against prison records and, where possible, through interviews with family members.

The interviews for the study by Horney took between two and five hours – she believed that the fact that they were able to use a comfortable room and give the respondents coffee and cold drinks helped the interviews. The interviews were conducted by PhD students who had received extensive training, and she argued that it was more important for the interviewers to have good techniques and treat the respondents with dignity than it was for the interviewers to have similar characteristics as or backgrounds to the respondents. The interviewers in her study sat next to the respondents and entered their answers directly onto a laptop, which could also be seen by the respondent. She argued that this offered a number of advantages, including that the participants could see what was being entered, which assisted in building trust. This too informed the way in which interviews were conducted for this study, where the cardboard sheet on which key events in the respondent's life were noted on a chronological timeline was placed in full view of the respondent and entries discussed and agreed upon by the researcher and respondent.

The literature indicates that adverse family circumstances contribute significantly to risk for violent and aggressive behaviour during adolescence and in later life. Exposure to violence in families is also indicated as a substantial risk factor for later aggressive behaviour.

Child maltreatment is associated with three typical pathways of disruptive behaviours, namely authority conflict (stubbornness, defiance); overt conflict (minor aggression, fighting and rape); and covert pathways (shoplifting).²⁸ In addition, adolescence-only maltreatment has been shown to significantly increase the odds of delinquency, internalising problems and externalising problems.²⁹

Apart from child maltreatment, there is also evidence linking maltreatment and domestic violence to violent and aggressive behaviour. A study in Colombia found that children exposed to both domestic violence and maltreatment were more likely than other children to display aggressive behaviour, e.g. carry weapons and knives, and respond to stressors with physical aggression.³⁰

Hill and Nathan investigated the association between childhood adversities, conduct disorders and violence.³¹ They found that violence among violent offenders was in part related to diagnoses of adult Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD) and of childhood Conduct Disorders (CD). They also found that both social violence and partner violence were associated with reports of inter-parental violence, but only social violence was associated with reports of childhood CD and adult ASPD.³² The study did not find that inter-parental violence leads to childhood CD, but there may be alternative explanations for this.³³ It can nonetheless be concluded that exposure to domestic violence during childhood is a significant contributor to the perpetration of intimate partner violence later in life. Informed by this literature, the interview protocol included references to experiences and perpetration of intimate partner violence, corporal punishment at school and at home, and parental neglect. The interview protocol for this study is attached as Appendix 1.

Research process

This study was conducted between 2008 and 2015.³⁴

In December 2008 a proposal to undertake this research was submitted to the DCS. It was approved by the department's ethics committee in January 2009. The development and finalisation of a partnership agreement between the ISS and the DCS was finally concluded in May 2010. This delay enabled the researchers to undertake a literature review;³⁵ develop the methodology through

consultations with, inter alia, the CSVR and the HSRC;³⁶ and develop the research tools and sampling methods.

Ethics approval for the study was obtained from both the DCS and the University of the Western Cape.

An advisory panel discussed and refined the methodology.

Pilot study

A pilot study was undertaken in October 2010. Interviews were conducted by Chandré Gould and Lukas Muntingh, with the assistance of Tizina Ramagaga. It was agreed with the DCS that the study would take place at the two public–private partnership facilities (Mangaung and Kutama Sinthumule). At both facilities the head psychologist was the contact person. The decision to undertake the research at these two facilities was informed by the following factors:

- The inmates at these facilities (together totalling 6 000 inmates) are all serving long sentences, and originate from different parts of the country.
- According to the contractual agreement between the DCS and the companies managing the facilities, the positions for psychologists and social workers have to be filled (which is not always possible at DCS facilities). This was an important ethical consideration, as our protocol demanded that inmates be referred to a psychologist or social worker if the need arose (e.g. if they were traumatised by the research process).

Meetings to brief the staff at the two facilities were held to:

- Inform them about the research objectives and process
- Establish a protocol for reporting reportable events and dealing with trauma resulting from the interviews
- Determine a method for identifying individuals who meet the inclusion criteria (see below), and on that basis identify 10 individuals (at each facility) to whom the study could be introduced and assess their willingness to participate in the study

Sample selection

The respondents in this study were male³⁷ adults over the age of 18, who had been convicted of more than one offence, of which at least one was a violent offence (defined by the South African Police Service [SAPS] as murder, attempted murder, rape, assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm, common assault, indecent assault, aggravated robbery and other robbery). The sample was intended to be demographically representative of the national correctional population with reference to age (30% below age 25 and 70% above age 25), race (Asian 0.5%; black 80%; coloured 18.5% and white 1.8%)³⁸ and sentence length. In addition, it was the intention that respondents should originate from a range of locations in South Africa. Although a sample of this size can in no way claim to be geographically representative, care was taken to ensure that the sample was not overtly skewed in respect of geographical representation. In addition, the respondents must not have been eligible for release within two years of the first interview, to ensure sample stability.

At Mangaung the database manager drew up a list of inmates who fit the following criteria: multiple offences, of which at least one was 'aggressive'; and whose minimum non-parole period would

not be completed before 2013. The list was printed with the following fields: name, prison number, type of offences (economic, sexual, aggressive, escapes), date of birth, age, place of birth. From the list of 175 offenders that met the profile, 10 were selected with an age range of 23–53 years. Their places of birth were in six different provinces. The selected 10 were then discussed with the psychologists to verify that they did not meet the exclusion criteria, being mental illness, drug detoxification and acute depression. None of the 10 did.

The 10 inmates were scheduled for interviews the following day, during which two researchers briefed them about the project, one at a time, in the visitors' centre. The languages spoken were isiZulu, Sesotho, Setswana, English and Afrikaans. Inmates were informed that they would receive no payment for participation, nor would participation have any effect on their parole dates, sentence length or services received in the prison.

One of the inmates selected was unable to meet the researchers as he had been hospitalised. Nine inmates were thus consulted, of whom eight indicated their willingness to participate in the study. One of these inmates was appealing his sentence, leaving a pool of seven inmates from which to make the final selection. Three were randomly selected to participate in the pilot phase of the study.

At Kutama-Sinthumule the inmate database system did not have equivalent capabilities and it was thus not possible to generate a list with the same restriction criteria. It was, however, possible to obtain a list of all offenders serving sentences of longer than 25 years. From this list, 10 inmates who had not yet served their minimum non-parole period, or who would attain this in the next three years, were selected. No additional criteria were considered, resulting in a more random selection. The profiles for these 10 were drawn. The information provided on the profile included name, age, place of birth (not filled in for most), crimes, disciplinary steps in prison, movement within the prison (between sections), next of kin, parole date and sentence length. The profiles were screened and three cases were de-selected: one inmate was appealing his sentence and two did not meet the multiple conviction requirement. This left a pool of seven inmates from which to select respondents. It was determined through a discussion with the psychologist and psychiatrist that none met the exclusion criteria and three were randomly selected for interviews the next morning.

During the interviews, one inmate noted that he did not have any relatives outside prison who could be interviewed. Since restricting respondents to only those who have family or friends who can be interviewed would result in an unnecessary and unsupportable bias in the sample, it was decided that this inmate should be included and the methodology would be amended for the pilot project.

Interview process

The six inmates selected to participate in the pilot phase gave informed consent for the interviews to take place, and were interviewed three times. Before each of the interviews, consent was again requested and provided on forms that were signed by the participants and researcher. The first round of interviews lasted between two and three-and-a-half hours and sought basic biographical information about the participant. Each interview started with the time and place of birth, and family arrangements in early childhood; established if and when the participant attended school; and covered experiences of school and school leaving, peer relationships, family relations, and relations with teachers. We would work slowly through the main events in the respondents' life in their early childhood, teenage years and adulthood, including substance abuse, friendships and associations with peers, intimate partner relations, first sexual experiences, interaction with the criminal justice

system, and use and experience of violence (including domestic violence between their caregivers). We spoke about the political and social context, if relevant, and moves from one geographic area to another, experiences of working, first arrest, criminal trajectories and experiences in correctional facilities. It was important during this interview to establish respect, trust and rapport between the participant, the researcher and the research assistant.

The second interview focused on the criminal trajectory of the participant and offered an opportunity to return to issues raised in the first interview around which more detail was sought, or to clarify issues. During the final interview additional detail was gathered and the participants were asked if they would like to be referred to a social worker or psychologist. They were also asked to reflect on the experience of being interviewed.

The principal researcher conducted the interviews while the assistant researcher took notes about the attitude of the offender and the process of the interview, operated the audio recorder and translated where necessary. The principal researcher marked events that were related by the respondent on a large sheet of cardboard.

In all the interviews respondents used the timelines constructed during the first interview to point to events that had taken place, remember issues and remind the interviewer of what they had said before. The sheet provided something for the respondent and interviewer to focus on and certainly seemed to aid recollection. It was also easier for the researcher to go back and point to incidents when there were questions of clarity. The sheet enabled the interview process to 'jump around in time' without losing the thread of the interview.

While the interviews were guided by the protocol (Appendix 1) and began with gathering details related to the participant's early childhood, they were not structured and allowed to flow from one issue to the next, in no set order. The interviewers needed to use their intuition about which matters to follow at any particular point, and when to come back to ask for more detail.

It became apparent after a few interviews that owning a gun was a significant event for some of the participants – it marked a change in their behaviour and an escalation in their crimes. The earlier in their lives they came into possession of a gun, the earlier they became involved in serious violence. It was thus necessary to add questions about gun ownership in the interviews conducted for the main part of the study.

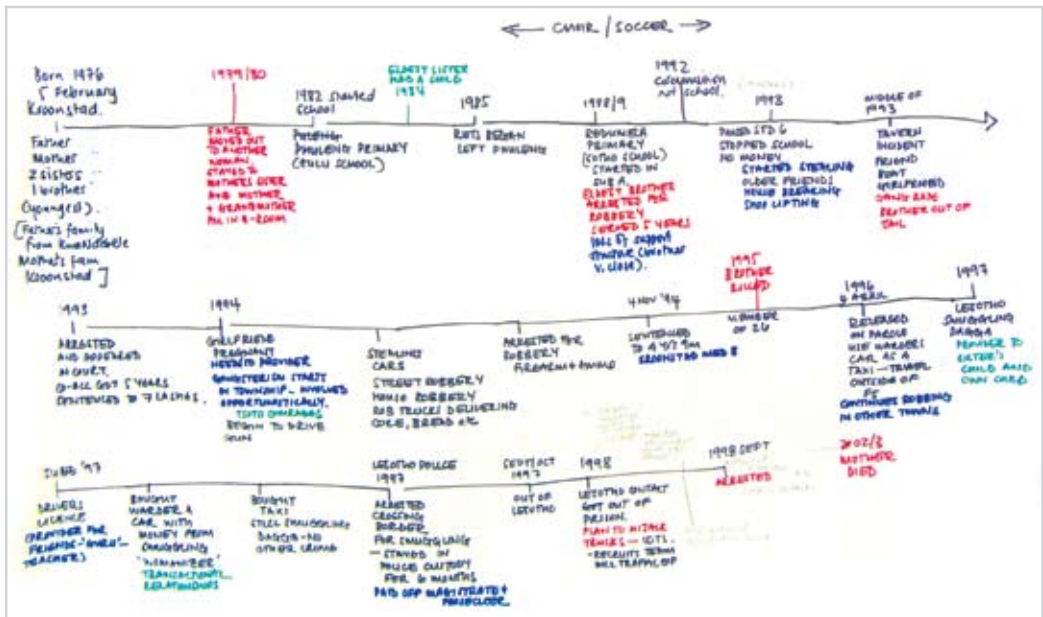
Additional data collection and verification

Permission was obtained from participants to access their criminal and prison records (SAPS 69s³⁹). Between the first and second interview the prison records of the inmates were drawn and checked against the information given by the respondents during the interviews. Perusing the respondents' records proved to be a valuable exercise. In one case it was found that the respondent had a rape conviction that he had not disclosed during the interview, which we were then able to discuss in the subsequent interview. However, there were instances in which it appeared that the criminal records of inmates were inaccurate or incomplete. In one case only one sentence and conviction was recorded on a respondent's criminal record, despite his having told us that he had been charged with and had appeared in court for several other offences. Most participants told us about many more crimes they had committed than they had ever been charged with or convicted for.

Contact was made and telephonic interviews conducted with family members of three of the participants in the pilot, but we were unable to reach others telephonically. In cases where telephonic interviews were conducted with family members we found that they were willing to discuss the participants' lives, and confirmed much of what had been said during the interviews with the inmates.

The pilot showed that it was possible to access offenders who met the criteria for inclusion, came from different geographic areas in South Africa, and were different ages and races, and that the interview technique was effective. Data from the pilot were incorporated and analysed as part of the study and the same techniques used for the rest of the study.

Figure 2: Example of a timeline



Main study – participant selection and interview process

A delay in obtaining funding after the pilot interviews had been conducted resulted in the bulk of the interviews taking place during 2013. All of these interviews were conducted by myself at Mangaung Correctional Facility. This was for logistical reasons (the travel time to Kutama was much longer) and because attempts to secure access to other facilities had failed. Two part-time research assistants from the University of the Free State who were fluent in isiZulu, isiXhosa, Setswana and Sotho were appointed to assist in the research process. They were Pule Pittele (who was completing his LLB) and Sipheshile Mahlaba (who was completing her Honours in Psychology). ISS junior researcher Reitumetse Mofana also provided support and assistance throughout the study. Pule, Reitumetse and Mpho Mtshali (an ISS intern) also assisted with the transcription and translation of interviews.

A list of 2 930 inmates at the facility was drawn up that included their prison number, offence type, offences, age, nationality and sentence end date. All inmates convicted of sexual offences only were excluded, as were those who had only one conviction, two foreign nationals and one person who had participated in the pilot. Of the 2 930 in the original set, I was left with 135. A total of

26 inmates were randomly selected from this list to take part in a briefing about the research. They were informed about the research project and asked if they wished to participate. Of these potential respondents, four declined to participate and three had to be excluded due to mental illness.

The interviews were conducted as described above, but it was determined in most cases that a third interview was not necessary.

Transcripts of the interviews were produced, and all interviews conducted in Sesotho, isiZulu, isiXhosa and Setswana were translated into English. As was the case in the pilot, the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to nearly three hours. Each generated a timeline of significant events in the offender's life.

Table 1: Overview of respondents

Assigned name	Age at time of interview	Date of birth (year)	Place of birth	Sentence length and crimes for which current sentence is served
Khauhelo	56	1957	Fouriesburg	Life sentence for murder
Zibonele	55	1958	Kroonstad (Free State)	80-year sentence for having abducted, raped and strangled three girls aged eight, 12 and 19
Peter	48	1963	Bonteheuwel (Western Cape)	57 years for murder, assault and kidnapping
Ngingedwa	47	1966	Pendraai, Philippolis (Free State)	19 years for stock theft, housebreaking and murder
Mosiuo	46	1967	Dobsonville, Soweto (Gauteng)	Life plus 15 years for murder and robbery
Ryan	44	1966	Durban (KwaZulu-Natal)	Life sentence for murder and assault grievous bodily harm
Amukelani	43	1967	Richie (Northern Cape)	18 years for murder
Spamandla	42	1971	Theunissen (Free State)	26 years for aggravated robbery
Velabahleke	40	1973	Thokoza (Gauteng)	51 years for aggravated robbery, murder, possession of ammunition and intimidation
Johannes	39	1974	Bloemfontein (Free State)	Life sentence for murder
Xolisile	39	1979	Sebokeng (Gauteng)	57 years for murder, attempted murder, assault, firearm possession, escape, aggravated robbery, housebreaking and theft
Fuza	38	1975	Soshanguve (Gauteng)	49 years for murder, robbery and firearm possession

Assigned name	Age at time of interview	Date of birth (year)	Place of birth	Sentence length and crimes for which current sentence is served
Kotsi	37	1976	Kroonstad (Free State)	105-year sentence for truck hijacking, murder, attempted murder and theft of a firearm
Tholakele	36	1977	Qwaqwa (former Bantustan)	12 years for aggravated robbery and murder
Thuto	36	1977	Wesselbron (Free State)	Life plus 15 years for robbery and murder
Siphesing-funwa	36	1974	Warmbad (now Bela-Bela, Limpopo)	55 years for murder, robbery and possession of a firearm
Sqalekiso	35	1978	Rustenburg (North West)	55-year sentence for murder, attempted murder and robbery
Hluphizwe	31	1982	Lusikisiki (Eastern Cape)	34-year sentence for murder, possession of a firearm and aggravated robbery
Hlupha	29	1981	Tembisa (Gauteng)	40 years for murder and aggravated robbery
Sehlolo	23	1987	Zola, Soweto (Gauteng)	24 years for house robbery

Some respondents were interviewed in 2010 and others in 2013, thus their ages at the time of the interview may differ even if they have the same date of birth.

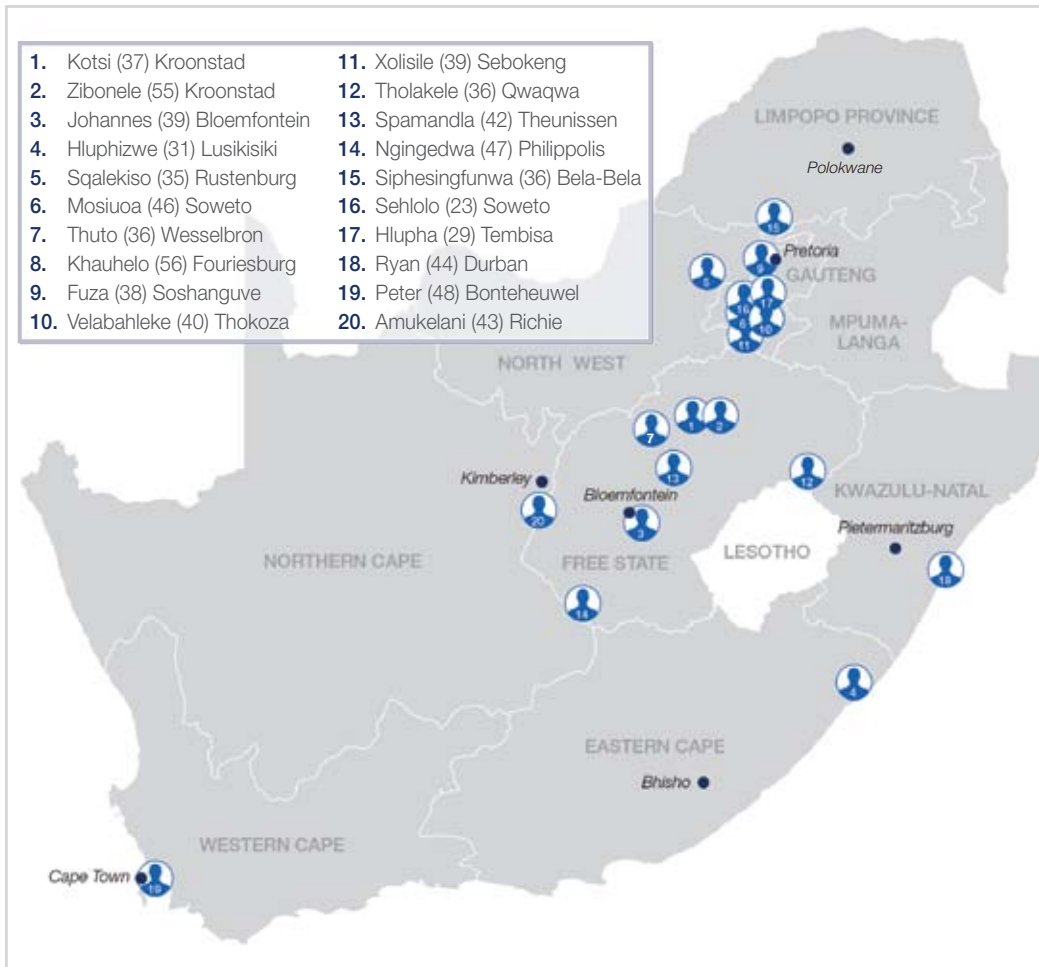
Source: Author's own.

Data analysis and reporting

The data analysis, undertaken between November 2014 and May 2015, was informed by the narrative approach discussed by Presser.⁴⁰ The first phase of the analysis involved working through the transcripts to arrive at a sequential order arranged in the following thematic areas: early childhood, family life, school and school leaving, peer relationships, substance use or abuse, first offence, subsequent offences, intimate partner relationships, and experiences of the criminal justice system. Common themes and issues were identified and data from the narratives compared to identify commonalities and differences between participants. In addition, contextual information was gathered and incorporated into the narratives, as were data from the interviews with family members.

In addition, during this phase of the research process I undertook a field trip to the Free State to trace the lives of seven of the participants, to gain a better understanding of the physical contexts of their lives and to verify information given during the interviews. During the trip I held discussions with members of the police, family members, neighbours and teachers at the schools the participants had attended. In one case I was also able to interview family members of the victims of a double murder that had taken place on a farm near Senekal in the Free State, committed by Khauhelo and for which he had spent several years on death row. This trip provided additional contextual information that has been incorporated into the narratives that you will read in this report.

Figure 3: Geographic distribution of participants



Source: Author's own.

Reflections on the interview process

An interview about someone's life does not yield a neat chronological account. The timelines offered a visual representation of events in apparently chronological order, but that is not how the narratives emerged. When a participant was a good storyteller and expanded on narratives about his life, as was often the case, I encouraged and enabled this storytelling so that what could be interpreted was not only the details of what was told, but how it was told, and what held particular significance for the participant.

Often the interviews developed into something more like a discussion than an interview. During such discussions something small may have been mentioned in passing, or a story about an event – such as a first crime – was told and returned to. Each telling was an elaboration – new insights, new information was given in each new account, so that the narratives became layered. Since the subjects covered in the first interview were often picked up again in the second interview, a single event or series of events might have been discussed several times, yielding more information and nuance with each telling.

Although respondents had been selected on the basis of the number of their convictions, including for violent offences, the details of their crimes were not known to us at the start of the interviews. I deliberately did not check the nature of the convictions before conducting an interview because I did not want that knowledge to interfere with my approach, or influence the kinds of questions I asked from the start. There was an element of anticipation as we journeyed through the narratives, waiting for the moment when the respondents would share the details of the crime for which they were incarcerated.

Although you will find in this report an emphasis on the violence experienced by the participants in the study – at home, at school and in their communities – this was never the first thing respondents spoke about. The absence of references to violence in the home and at school, in many cases until prompted, was significant and suggests one of two things: either the violence was not regarded as ‘noteworthy’ by the narrator, in relation to his own selection of what is noteworthy; or the narrator avoided referring to it. Several participants who spoke initially of having a good, respectful relationship with their fathers, in response to questions would later reveal their fathers to have been violent towards them and their mothers.

Limitations

The men who participated in this study had all been arrested, charged, convicted and sentenced for crimes they had committed. It is possible that their experiences may not be comparable, in some indefinable ways, to those of men who have committed the same crimes but have not been incarcerated.

Also, memory is unreliable – it consists of fragments that we hold on to, construct and repeat to create narratives of our lives. At different times we may reflect vastly different narratives of our lives. The stories told by the participants and disclosed in this report are also constructed. That is not to say that they are not accurate reflections of events, merely that they are narratives mediated through a multiplicity of factors – who is listening, what questions they are asking, where the telling takes place and at what time in the narrator’s life the story is asked for, and exchanged. The questions researchers may ask are necessarily informed not only by their line of inquiry (what they want to know) but what the researchers see as relevant or important. This means that there will be any number of issues that are ignored, silenced, never present.

I have experienced hints of those silenced narratives in several ways. There were some interviews that followed the same pattern as many that went before, starting with basic, easy, practical questions and tracking the course of the respondent’s life. But throughout the interview I felt as though I was not ‘getting’ the person, as though we could not understand each other. Not because we lacked a shared language, but because we lacked a shared paradigm for engagement. In these instances I felt I might be asking the wrong questions. This was particularly the case with Zibonele, who was convicted of raping and killing three girls in quick succession in 1991. My research assistant and I were both confused by him and his responses, frustrated in some way, perhaps because he could not seem to speak about what had led him to such brutal acts of violence. It was only in the analysis of the interview, and having been able to draw on psychoanalytic theory and neuroscience, that it was possible to begin to make sense of why this was the case.

No researcher is a neutral observer, and my own biases are multiple. I grew up white in apartheid South Africa, I only speak English and Afrikaans fluently, I am middle class, and naturally have been

influenced by my own experiences and studies. I hold beliefs about violence, about how children should be raised, about what constitutes a 'normal' or desirable childhood. These would have influenced the questions I put to respondents.

One question that may be asked is whether a white woman has the legitimacy, the credibility or even the 'right' to write about the lives of black men. Race matters. It has shaped not only my own experience but also that of the men I interviewed. And while very few directly associated themselves with political activities or political parties – and most felt alienated from anti-apartheid activism – racial prejudice and structural violence were central to how their lives were lived. Yet, as trust and understanding was established between the three people in the room (myself, the research assistant and the person we were interviewing), almost without exception the story itself and the chance to tell it to someone who was interested seemed to overcome any barriers between us. Often the questioning was difficult at first and slow, and some people were more naturally inclined to 'storytelling' than others, but towards the end of the first interview, and usually during the second interview, barriers would come down. Sometimes that required me to sit quietly and listen, adding the occasional question and allowing my research assistant to take the lead. Sometimes it seemed that it was easier for the participants to tell me (an outsider) about their lives because they did not expect the same judgement from me as they might from someone who shared a similar background and expectations of their behaviour. And sometimes race became an overt subject of conversation between myself and the men I interviewed.

This monograph is the result of a first round of analysis of the data. It is by no means exhaustive and I hope that the extensive, rich data gathered will be subject to further analysis over time. The monograph focuses on the criminal trajectories and particularly the early life experiences of the men who were interviewed. Several subjects that were covered in the interviews have not been dealt with in as much detail as they could have been, including:

- Details about the nature of the relationships the respondents had with women, including their intimate partners. It is my hope that this will be the subject of a future report or article.
- The experiences and understandings of respondents in their interaction with the criminal justice system, and particularly their experiences of incarceration.
- The modus operandi employed by the respondents in the commission of crimes, which could also be the subject of a future report.

In relation to the first exclusion, it seems important to note that the role of women in the narratives of respondents varied greatly. A few of the men seemed largely uninterested in relationships with women. Some started having transactional relationships with women and girls very early in their lives, and had many such relationships over the course of their lives, while others had one dominant partner and several girlfriends 'on the side'. There were some for whom rape was 'fun' and others who rejected men who commit rape and hated the idea of forcing a woman to have sex. These differences seem worthy of further exploration.

In the course of journeying through the lives reflected in this report, one has fleeting glimpses of some of the women who played a role in the men's lives, as mothers, wives, girlfriends and victims of their crimes. In several of the narratives mothers were conspicuously absent. When they were present they often did not appear to play the protective or nurturing role that one might expect of

mothers. Their own lives were often so difficult and fraught that nurturing relationships with their sons appeared simply not to be possible.

Often, in the South African discourse about violence and its prevention, we tend to speak about and present women only in terms of victimhood. Given the stubbornly patriarchal nature of our society and the high levels of intimate partner and sexual violence, in which women are predominantly the victims, this may seem appropriate. Yet not all of the women who appear in these narratives are 'victims'. Many of them play an active role in ensuring that the patriarchal notions of authority, power and status are reinforced. In the same way as it does not further our understanding of or response to violence and crime to frame offenders only as 'perpetrators', it does not advance the struggle for gender equity to present or consider women as hapless victims. Women have an important role to play, not only in perpetuating the cycles of violence but also in breaking them. Enabling women to be active participants in preventing violence requires us as a society to accept that gender equality is in the interests of both men and women, and that the framing of women as mere victims undermines those efforts.

Chapter 1

From ‘piss pot to shit pot’:⁴¹ the life of Peter

When I met Peter in October 2010 he had been in prison for almost 20 years. He was light-hearted and friendly, and he spoke readily and easily. We were alone for the first interview, in the tiny consultation room at the end of the visitor’s hall at Mangaung Correctional Facility. The second and third times I interviewed him, in early November 2010, I was assisted by Tizina Ramagaga. Over these three visits we spoke for more than five hours about his life. All interviews were conducted in colloquial Afrikaans, the language in which he was most comfortable and confident. Between the second and third interview with Peter I interviewed his sister, Emma.

Peter was keen to be part of the research process because he felt that it would ‘mean something’ if he could contribute to a project that was intended to prevent others from following the same path in life as he had. When I explained that I would not use his name in the final report he was disappointed and said he would like to be named, so that his contribution could be recognised. This led to a difficult decision because I was not, in all likelihood, going to be able to show him the final report before publication. In the end it was not possible to grant him his wish, because in naming him it would be possible for those who know him to identify others he names in the story, and they have not been afforded the opportunity to participate in the research, nor to give consent for their names to be used.

Since we don’t remember in chronological order, and we don’t always relate stories in straightforward temporal progressions, the timeline of his life was intended to help us navigate his story and keep a clear idea of the sequence of significant events. But for Peter, and several of the other men I interviewed, this was not enough to help him remember exactly when certain things had happened. At times as he told his story he became confused about how old he had been when certain events had taken place, and often he could not remember the order of events. In the end, how he told his story, how the events unfolded in his recall and how his memory and experiences built up over time and influenced his decisions and behaviour, is more important than temporal accuracy.⁴² What we choose to tell people about our lives is a reflection both of what actually happened and what gives our lives meaning, and in creating meaning our stories don’t only reflect, they also influence and inform our behaviour.⁴³

How we tell our stories is often as important as *what* we tell. Peter, like several of the men I spoke to in the course of this study, could relate certain events in his life with a clarity and intensity of detail that is characteristic of trauma.⁴⁴ When we experience acute trauma our bodies produce

chemicals, such as adrenalin, to get us into 'fight or flight' mode and enable us to respond rapidly to perceived or actual danger. When the danger has passed our bodies will either calm down or, if the threat of danger remains, the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis (the central stress response system) will release cortisol to give us the energy we need to remain in 'fight or flight' mode.⁴⁵ These chemicals affect the way in which we retain a traumatic memory and, more importantly, affect the ability of the mind to integrate the memory into the sum of our other memories. It is as though the memory is chemically bound and held distinctly in our mind – so that triggering it is a recurrence of the trauma. This means that the memory can be recalled with tremendous accuracy and in profound detail.⁴⁶

Much of the literature about trauma, in South Africa and globally, has focused on the experiences of soldiers in combat⁴⁷ and on victims of rape and child abuse.⁴⁸ Seldom are perpetrators of violence, such as Peter, considered victims. And yet, as you will see throughout the stories in this monograph, constant and repeated trauma, as a result of being victims of violence, witnessing traumatic events and indeed perpetrating violence, has serious, long-term consequences for these men, their families and society. For people affected by trauma the effects may include insomnia, fatigue and anxiety, but it may also exacerbate substance abuse and lead to aggression and violence.

Family life and the progression into crime

Peter began life in Bonteheuwel on the Cape Flats in 1963. He was the youngest of five children and had two older sisters and two older brothers. His eldest brother was mentally handicapped and needed a lot of care. Peter was the 'baby' in the family, being much younger than his older siblings.

His parents were business people and he remembers them as having been well regarded. His mother was, he said, the head social worker for 'Coloured Affairs' in Bonteheuwel, and his father was a trader who bought and sold fruit and vegetables. Peter's memories of this time were good. He and his sister spoke about how their father would take the family on outings to the beach, and when the circus came to town their family would be the first in line.

This changed dramatically when Peter was about six years old and his father died. His death brought an end to the warm memories that Peter and his sister held of their early childhood. To Peter it felt as though it was very soon after their father died that their mother met another man, Fred, whom she first dated and then married.

The adult Peter, when reflecting back on this time in his childhood, realised that his mother must have been going through a hard time. After the death of their father she was left alone with five children, one of whom needed special care and attention because of his handicap. Fred offered her support, comfort, and practical and financial help with the children. As Peter said, it is not any man who will take on a woman with five children. But this apparent generosity was something Peter only thought about much later, when he was already in prison. He experienced it quite differently at the time. Fred was an unwanted intrusion into his life. He felt the loss not only of his father but also of his mother's love and attention.

When Fred came into their lives it was the end of family outings. Now, their mother and Fred would go out, leaving the children at home. Peter's sister, Emma, painfully remembered a Christmas when their mother had cooked lunch and then gone out with Fred, leaving their aunt to dish up for them. 'But,' Emma said, 'food is nothing without a mother to serve it for you and to share it with you.'

Soon after his mother became involved with Fred the family left Bonteheuwel to live in Mitchells Plain. This compounded the disruption to their lives brought on by their father's death. Peter's mother also stopped working, to look after his mentally handicapped brother on a full-time basis. This meant that money was tight: the family depended on the small disability grant his brother was entitled to and Fred's inconsistent income from the construction industry.

Peter could not recover from the loss of his father and the perceived loss of his mother's love. He felt as though he had been replaced by Fred. He experienced this both as a personal betrayal – she seemed to need the man in her life more than her 'baby' – and as a betrayal of their father and his memory.

Emma said that Fred had waited until he was married to their mother before he 'showed his real colours'. He started drinking regularly and heavily. She remembered that Fred was nasty to all the children. He would drink and then wake them up in the middle of the night to take them to task about something that had happened during the day, and for which he felt they should be disciplined.

Peter was bitter and angry at his mother's rejection and at having been displaced by a man he regarded as 'useless'. He described how his mother would do everything for Fred, even taking him his meals on a tray so that he could eat in front of the TV. He was deeply jealous of his mother's attentiveness to Fred.

When he was about 10 years old and in standard 2 (grade 4) Peter responded to what was happening at home by rejecting all adult authority. He left school and started being, in his words, 'naughty' – hanging out with other boys who were not at school, smoking cigarettes, dagga and mandrax, and drinking alcohol. Not long after leaving school Peter started running away from home.

Betrayal and rejection are powerful emotional forces, and they elicit strong emotional reactions – anger, hurt and returned rejection.⁴⁹ Soon, Peter started living on the streets, pushed by what was happening at home and pulled by the excitement of independence and autonomy. This was a turning point in Peter's life that determined his life path (trajectory).⁵⁰ The changes in his life came at a developmental stage when children learn the first morals and rules, and begin to internalise them.⁵¹

Peter was very enterprising. He found odd jobs selling fruit and vegetables in the street near shopping centres. During the day he would help the traders load their vehicles and in return they would give him a place to sleep, money and food. With the money he made he would buy himself clothes, shoes or toiletries. In rejecting his mother's authority Peter also found a freedom from the strictures of parental rules and supervision. He was free to come and go as he pleased, and smoke dagga and mandrax with his friends, as he liked to do, unhindered.

Soon Peter progressed from doing odd jobs to robbing, from which he could earn more money.

So from about age 10, Peter assumed the role of adult and, by his account, at least part-time provider. He told me how he would visit his mother's house from time to time, but never to stay for the night. When he came to visit he would bring his mother some of the money he had earned or stolen.

He and his friends would sometimes hang around outside nightclubs in Salt River, Woodstock, Observatory and Wynberg. He described how Japanese sailors came to the nightclubs to be

entertained by sex workers, and were easy targets for the boys. Working alone or in collaboration with the sex workers, they would follow the couples into the alleys and rob the sailors of the money they usually kept in their underpants. Sometimes they were able to steal as much as R1 000. The boys would give some of this money to the sex workers and use the rest to buy themselves food and drugs, and sit around sharing the spoils.

Peter and his friends also began to rob the 'collectors' who worked for clothing shops in Mitchells Plain. Since many people would buy clothes or furniture on lay-by, at the end of each week the clothing shops would send out their collectors to gather the instalments owed. Peter and his friends would wait for them to come around on the Friday, and rob them.

Peter's mother was distraught. Emma said their mother repeatedly tried to get Peter to come back home, looking for him on the streets to bring him back. Sometimes he would come back home for a short while, only to run away again. As a social worker, she knew other social workers and she would take him to see them, hoping they could help to change his behaviour. But by this time, Peter said, when his mother spoke to him 'it was in one ear and out the other', and he didn't believe what social workers had to say. In the end, Peter's sister said, their mother had a 'nervous breakdown'.

By the time he was 12 or 13 his mother had all but given up on him. She no longer knew what to do and so, when he stole a handful of lollipops from a mobile store down the road from her house, she insisted that the owner report the crime to the police. Despite the relatively minor nature of the crime, Peter's mother felt that it meant that she had finally lost 'control'. But for Peter it was a further betrayal. He tried to rationalise his mother's actions, saying, 'I don't know why she did that, she did it maybe with the intention of scaring me, or maybe she wanted me to stop with the wrong things that I was doing, and that she heard about, but I didn't see it or know it.'

At first he gave a confused account of what had happened. His sentences were incoherent and the order of the story confused as he tried to convey his mother's betrayal of him to the authorities, his justification of her betrayal, and the simultaneous acknowledgement of his wrongdoing. We came back to these events several times during our conversations. The second time Peter said that perhaps the owner and his mother wanted to 'break him', like one would break in a horse, to tame him.

The shop owner did as his mother had suggested and reported the theft to the police. Peter was arrested and charged with shoplifting. In court his mother testified against him, saying again that she didn't have any control over him, and asked for him to be sent to a reformatory. The court agreed.

The case was heard near the end of the year and the reformatory, the Porter Reformatory School, was full, so Peter was sent to the Bonnytown Place of Safety⁵² until a space became available at the Porter Reformatory. But he did not stay at Bonnytown for long before he managed to escape and return to Mitchells Plain, and to robbing people in the street.

When the police started looking for him he turned to his sister Nazeema, and asked her to take him back to the place of safety, to avoid being arrested again. He turned himself in at Bonnytown and soon after a place was found for him at the Porter Reformatory in Tokai.

Established as the first reformatory in South Africa in 1882, the school was by several accounts a cruel, brutal place.⁵³ Yet during the first interview Peter said almost nothing about his time there, as though it was unremarkable to him. This absence, or omission, suggests either a reluctance to

discuss it (which did not appear to be the case) or rather that in the context of his life experience so far, the reformatory, however brutal, was unremarkable. Our discussion circled around his experiences at the Porter Reformatory several times. Each time Peter would offer a little more detail, but the unravelling came slowly and with a great deal of prompting.

Linda Chisholm offers a detailed history of the Porter Reformatory, arguing that it was established at the end of the 19th century to serve the needs of commercial agriculture – to turn wayward children into productive farm workers. The school was named after William Porter, Attorney General of the Cape Colony and member of the Legislative Council, who believed in the rehabilitation of young property offenders. The reformatory was seen as ‘a substitute for what was considered to be poor parental control, it could help in the construction of new moral authorities’.⁵⁴ In short, the purpose of the reformatory ‘was to break down “wild and reckless” habits and to build up values considered appropriate for an emergent working class: obedience, willingness to work, honesty and cleanliness’.⁵⁵

Surveillance of the boys was part of the very structure of the building, with ‘Judas’ windows built into the doors of the dormitories and workshops so the warder could see through the length of the building (the photograph on the cover of this monograph shows one of the

... hierarchies of power at the reformatory were already entrenched and enforced through violence and rape

dormitory doors of the now dilapidated Porter Reformatory). The men appointed as warders at the school were chosen because they were ‘accustomed to discipline’ and, according to Chisholm, ‘wages and conditions of employment reinforced the warder’s positions as the lowest agent in the hierarchy of punishment’.⁵⁶ By the end of the 19th century hierarchies of power at the reformatory were already entrenched and enforced through violence and rape (by both warders and peers). Many boys attempted escape, and cases of self-harm and suicide were also recorded. Not much seems to have changed by the time Peter found himself there.

Peter spent two years at the Porter Reformatory. He explained that any transgressions – cheekiness to a teacher or something similar – would be met with strict corporal punishment. The reformatory was like a small prison, he said, where you would learn a trade, but where gangsterism was the order of the day. The kind of authority exercised by the warders and stronger boys differed very little from the kind of authority exercised by the gangs in the streets where Peter grew up.

To survive at the Porter reformatory, and to avoid being raped or beaten, you had to show that you were tougher than the other boys. Peter said that, ‘in Tokai when you get there the *menere* [warders] would provoke you to see how well you fight and so on, but if they see you’re a man, you can fight well, then you get respect in that youth jail’.

Peter had already learned to survive on the streets and so was well adapted to life in the reformatory. He soon started to prove himself to his peers through incidents such as this one:

Every now and then there would be a fight, maybe in the hall, while you are at the table eating. If I fight with someone, it means I want to show everybody who I am. I stand up. We had those metal plates. I walk towards him [the other boy]. He sits with his back to me. I throw that *pap* [porridge] over his head. It’s hot *pap*. Then I slam his head with the dish ... I hit his head maybe two or three times. The others jump up because it’s a shock for them so early in the

morning, [they call out] 'No, look what P's doing.' Then the *menere* [warders] come and get me and they send me out. I get *strafkamp* [punishment] maybe for seven days. You stay there, you are locked up, you don't have privileges, you don't get TV, stuff like that, but when you get out, then there is a lot of respect among all those youngsters.

Peter said incidents such as this happened many times. The single cells where Peter would have been held in solitary confinement were cold, dark, confined spaces and proving oneself able to deal with the fear and loneliness was a clear marker of strength, worthy of respect. After proving himself in this way Peter could assert his dominance over the other, weaker boys, because 'when you get out of there, then you can say to them, look here clean my shoes, then they will do it because they know what to expect, you've proved it [yourself]'.

Peter had a sophisticated understanding of what was required to reach the top of the hierarchy, what brings 'respect' and what kind of violence and sacrifice is necessary to obtain it. In the Porter Reformatory, as in street gangs or prison, proving oneself capable of violence was the path to respect.

While at the reformatory Peter joined the Mongrels gang. This was both the biggest gang at the reformatory and the most powerful and biggest gang operating in the neighbourhood where his mother lived. 'The speciality of the Mongrels,' Peter said, 'was the way that they work, they are cruel people and they don't let anyone mess with them and they have businesses, drugs and other stuff.' At the reformatory Peter 'became wise' to the ways of the gangsters.

When I asked Peter about the first time he had sex, Peter inadvertently described how this cruelty would sometimes manifest. He had his first sexual experience when he was 14 or 15, soon after leaving the reformatory, with a girl who lived in Mitchells Plain. At the time she was using and selling sex and drugs. Peter's words describe it best:

It was that time when I was involved with drugs, her name was Charlene, she stayed there in Mitchells Plain and one day she came to me ... then she said, 'Make a pipe man', because she also smoked drugs. She ... wasn't just a prostitute, she also had a boyfriend who sold drugs, then she stole drugs, or something like that.

Then they raped her. Something, her nerves, happened when they raped her. Why? Because her boyfriend was also a gang leader and he let his whole gang rape her and she couldn't take it and had a nervous breakdown.

What did her people [family] do? They got money for her. She stayed for a long time in the hospital, but it's stuff I didn't know. And then the government gave her support – disability money. She got something out, pills that calmed her or something like that. But she carried on using drugs.

Then she came to me, I think it was a Wednesday, it's about midday, then she says again, 'Make a pipe man' ... [Peter diverts for a long, rambling and confused explanation of the deal to buy a mandrax pill for R8.50] ... now we go and sit in a van, a van that didn't have any wheels that stood in the people's backyard, there were no seats in the back, it was just a mattress, someone stayed in that van. So we get in, I tell her to crush the pill and she does and then we start to smoke.

When they were done smoking she wanted a second pill, and in what appears to have been an exchange, she said that she wanted to give him something, and they had sex. Peter went on to have many more sexual encounters. He described himself as quite a ladies' man, having had many girlfriends and several children by the time I met him.

By his mid-teens this harsh world, and the violence associated with it, had become a way of life for Peter. Although he was not living at home he would often stop by to visit his mother. By now Peter's stepfather was drinking most of the time. When Peter would drop in to see his mother he would find his stepfather drunk. Then Fred would complain bitterly to Peter's mother about his being at the house, something that infuriated Peter. Once he lashed out at Fred with one of the beer mugs that stood on top of the fridge, slamming it into his head. When this happened his mother 'would scream and plead with me to leave him', but Peter was still bitter and angry. He could not understand why the little bit of building work Fred did earned him his mother's attention and care.

She did everything for him. If she dished up for him in the evenings, our food is dished up, his would be put on a tray with a glass of milk – now these are all things that ate away at me – and every now and then when he was drunk, if he is still drunk, then he doesn't worry. He was like a mouse in that house. But, if he was drunk and he saw me, then all the old stuff comes out about what I might have done, that in his eyes was wrong ... Then he moans to my mother. I hear it. Maybe I am sitting in the front room, and I stay right there, I hear what he says. 'Don't come talk shit here' ... I say to him. He mustn't come and talk shit here – 'You are talking shit to my mother. You pig.' We had those beer jugs that stood on top of the fridge, then I had hit him over the head with that. And then put it down. My mother had screamed about what I am doing, then I leave again.

These memories are so vivid for Peter, tied up in the chemical bonds of the adrenalin his body would have been producing, that in retelling them he slipped into the present tense, as though it was happening right now.

After an incident like this he would 'cool off' at his sister Nazeema's house. She would protect him, even though 'she knew what I was doing was wrong'.

On the streets where he lived, adults who could take the place of parents while having a mutually beneficial criminal relationship with Peter were plentiful. But these relationships were complex and fraught with mistrust. They were relationships of convenience, based on mutual advantage. Peter described how he would hook up with a specific clique of women who would pick up youngsters like himself, who were *skelm*, and take them shopping.

By his mid-teens this harsh world, and the violence associated with it, had become a way of life

One day three of these women picked Peter up and said 'right, you are going to Wynberg'. Peter jumped in the car. They smoked dagga as they drove.

When we got to Wynberg we went into Ackermans or Woolworths, one of those two shops, then I'm like this, I tell the women working in the shops, I'm looking for *takkies* and so on. Then they go and fetch the *takkies* and have to bring it to me to try on ... While I'm busy with the woman, I say, 'The *takkie* is a bit tight here, I'm looking for another size, they must bring a better *takkie*.' So I give the other women the chance to steal. Then when they are finished

they walk out of the front of the shop and I act like their son, like one of their children. One of them shouts at me 'Come you' – then I run out of the shop, without having stolen, the stuff is already stolen.

He was never caught or charged for shoplifting, but he told me with some amusement that there was one time when he was nearly caught but managed to run away. I asked him if he was ever alone when he committed these crimes, and he said no, always with others, never alone, and the people he was with were always older, either older men or older women.

On the one hand, the women and men he worked for offered him adult approval, sharing an alternative morality to that which he encountered at home, perhaps one that was less hypocritical in his child's mind – one where you knew where you stood and where your needs would be met, and where you could do what you wanted without sanction. The price one could expect may have been intimacy, security and love, but this he seems to have lost already when his mother, in his view, swapped his love for that of his stepfather.

The women he formed relationships with had troubled lives themselves, which helped them form a common sense of purpose and identity, while each acted strictly in their own interests when it came to sharing the spoils of their shoplifting. 'Many of them,' said Peter, 'were really crooked.' Whoever had the money or the goods would have the advantage of being able to portion it out, often not sharing equally. Peter learned quickly,

there were times when I was in charge of the money, I had the money, then, I would do the same thing. When I came to the scene and they ask where's the money then I say, no it was only this, and they open it up and they see it's only R300. I had taken R500, but of course I don't tell them. As the time goes by the money is finished but I know we will be together for a long time, the whole day. Now [later] I would take the other money out, but also not all of it, maybe another R50 and I say, 'Here you are.'

He understood how to use money to gain status and power, and to manipulate others when he was in control of the spoils. He had learned and internalised the moral code of the street as quickly as he learned the rules of hierarchy in the reformatory.⁵⁷

Peter never had to sleep on the streets. He was taken in and given a place to stay by the traders he helped. Although, he said, the people who took him in were like parents to him and he would 'eat at their table', he was also like a servant. 'I would go to the shop for them, and clean the *bakkie*, now and then clean the yard and all that stuff that a housewife would expect of me after all.'

He stayed with one family for two or three years, then moved on to another family with the same kind of arrangement, and then to a third.

Peter's sister Emma blamed Nazeema for having encouraged their brother's criminal behaviour. Nazeema, she said, would plead poverty, telling Peter she had no money, and Peter would arrive with shopping bags full of groceries and bikes for the children, the proceeds of robbery.

Emma had a very different relationship with Peter and was nothing like her sister. She said that Peter would never dare to bring his friends to her house and when he came he would be very polite to her. She works at a clothing factory, has put her children through university, and describes her family as bookworms. She said, 'You can be told a lot of nonsense in the world but a book won't lie to you.' Peter referred to her as 'executive'.

The struggle for intimacy, status and power

When he was in his early 20s, and by now helping his sister Nazeema run her drug business, Peter's eye was caught by a 15-year-old girl who lived next door. Chantal came from a respectable family in whose eyes Peter was just a 'gangster', certainly not suitable for their daughter.

'Everyone respected them,' Peter said, 'they were people that went to church every Sunday.' Chantal's father was strict; he would call all his daughters in at five o'clock in the evening when he came home from work. But, not having a car, the family would send one of the daughters to the shop to buy odds and ends. When Chantal went to the shop Peter took the opportunity to speak to her. He started to buy her things, chips, cooldrinks, chocolates, 'stuff like that'.

But this relationship, like those he was used to having on the streets, was bound by the same rules of status, power and honour, with warmth and intimacy being fleeting, turning quickly into violence. Although Peter told me that he respected Chantal so much that they did not have sex until they had been seeing each other for six months, the events that led to their first sexual experience were anything but 'respectful'.

One day, about six months after they had started seeing each other regularly, Peter stopped at Chantal's house after school. He parked in the alley next to her house, waiting for her to come downstairs after having changed out of her school clothes. As he waited he drank a beer. He waited and waited but she didn't come down. Eventually he sent a little boy to find out where she was. Peter described what happened next in great detail, again as though he were re-living the experience.

Now the boy comes back and he says no Chantal is out, she has gone to a friend of hers. Now I know the friend, she just stays a few streets away at another house, with her mother and so on.

Right, I start the *bakkie*, and go around to the friend's house and I knock on the door. She comes, not my girlfriend, the other friend comes to the door, and I say *Salaam* (they are Muslim people). She says *Salaam*. I say where's whatsit, Chantal, 'No Chantal is here, come in' ... What I see in the front room are two big ladies sitting, the one is ... the friend's mother and then there are two small children, girls and two school boys ... I stand there, and I wait ... Now the woman says, she says to me, I must leave. I must go out, Chantal's coming now.

I say, 'I'm going nowhere, you [calling to Chantal] must come now, what are you doing up there in the people's bedroom?' My thoughts now tell me she's busy with wrong stuff in there ... The friend's mother ... stands up, she says, 'Young man, you can't come bothering people in my house.' I say, 'I'm sorry ma'am, I didn't mean it like that, to come and swear in your house and so on, because that's my girlfriend, I'm looking for Chantal.'

They ask Chantal, is this your boyfriend? Then she says, 'Yes, but I don't know why he's swearing like that.' Now I say, 'I am going to fuck you up, seems to me that you are involved with wrong stuff.'

[They leave the house]

This was on a Friday, all the people are now outside in their yards and so, then she comes, and I stand a little way away from the door, now she comes. I say, 'Come on man!' She says,

'No man you are going to hit me.' And I have never hit her. I say, 'I am not going to hit you, man, come on now man.' Then she comes, but as she comes she catches me around my waist. I say to her, 'What are you looking for up there with them, it looks like you are doing stuff there with those boys ...'

Now I don't know what went against me that day, but as I said I had had a few beers. I hit her, she fell on the ground, then I kicked her in front of her chest and then the people in the road started getting busy, watering their gardens, some are also standing drinking here over the walls, and so. Ma'am knows what brown people are like, gossiping and all that stuff. Some scream, 'Hey look what Nazeema's brother is doing there' – then they start coming for me, then you say, come closer and I will shoot you dead.

At this point in telling his story Peter became extremely concerned with detail, confused about who was doing what and how events unfolded. He was back in the moment, intoxicated by alcohol, power and anger at having been humiliated by his girlfriend. He just had to point with his finger, as if it were a gun, and the onlookers would leave him alone. They knew that at the time the gangs were at war and he had many guns stashed away at his sister's house.

He took Chantal, put her in the car and drove off with her, resolving to tell her parents about their relationship, because their not knowing was yet another humiliation – he was not good enough for them. He was infuriated by what he believed were lies about what she was doing at her friend's house. There was a build-up of humiliation and shame. He took her to a young gangster's home, where he knew there were no adults present. He made her clean the gravel from her face. He smoked a mandrax pill and when Chantal came out of the bathroom he kissed her and they had sex.

CG: That is the first time for her?

Peter: That she's having sex?

CG: Yes.

Peter: That's correct, yes. So now we've finished having sex. But there was no force. Does Ma'am hear me? Don't look at me with the thought that I raped her or something, I have never raped a woman, and we had sex, then I spoke with her again.

By the time Peter was ready to take her home the police were waiting for him. He was arrested and spent the weekend in jail. In court he pleaded guilty to assault and was given the option of a 12-month sentence or a R2 000 fine. Although Peter said he was willing to spend the time in jail, his sister paid the fine and he returned home.

For Peter there was no contradiction between saying that he had never raped and having sex with his girlfriend, a virgin, after having beaten her publicly in the street outside her friend's house. The humiliation he suffered from her apparent rejection or ignoring of him was of a great deal more significance to him than her feelings, although he was conscious of her fear. Her fear, however, allowed him to, for a short while, play the role of 'protector' and 'provider' in the scene that unfolded.

His interpretation of what could only be described as a rape is devoid of any empathy for her. She needed to clean herself up, wipe the gravel from her face – ready herself for him – while he had his friend crush and roll the mandrax he would smoke after he had sex with her. He needed me to

believe that this was not rape – that he had never raped – because they spoke after sex, there was intimacy in their encounter, and after all he bought her a cooldrink.

He simultaneously maintained apparently contradictory narratives about his relationship – a romantic idea that he and his girlfriend were sharing a forbidden love affair, while her emotional presence was absent from the dialogue and the events tell of a violent, abusive relationship in which his needs and desires overwhelmed hers.

His relationships with women were defined by the same code of honour present in the gangs. An insult, a humiliation, was to be met with force and violence to protect the honour and status of the person who had been humiliated.

His relationship with Chantal continued, and five months later they found out that she was pregnant.

When her parents discovered that their daughter was pregnant ‘all hell broke loose’. Her father forbade Peter from visiting her, or from coming to the house. Yet Peter returned repeatedly, challenging her father’s right to decline his overtures – ‘that is my child’s mother in there’. Her pregnancy shifted male authority and ownership from her father to Peter. He described going to the house drunk and high, knocking on the door and calling out for her, and her father chasing him away in a public and visible display of manhood, power and violence.

Now and then we are drunk from the drugs and so, and I come to the house, and knock. I know he said I may not come there. I knock.

‘What do you want?’

I say, ‘I’m looking for the thing man, call for that thing there.’

‘Hey, you can’t come to my house. You’re drunk.’

I say, ‘Ja, it’s alright, call her.’

Then she comes, puts the light on, but I don’t go in, not in the house, then I say, ‘Come let’s drive around here, your father is going on and so on, now I’m going to do my stuff that I must do, then we are coming back.’

This reference to his demands for sex with Chantal, despite her father’s objections, is evidence of how he had become more powerful and held more authority than her father. He implies that through her acquiescence, she demonstrated her acceptance of their relationship and his ‘ownership’ of her.

Gangs

There is some confusion in Peter’s story about when he joined a gang. In our first discussion he said that although he could have joined a gang at a young age he did not, only joining the Mongrels in his late teens or early 20s. In this account he seemed to have forgotten that he had joined the Mongrels while at the Porter Reformatory. He seemed to have drifted in and out of gang involvement, until he needed the gang to protect his sister’s business interests.

Working for his sister meant going to buy dagga in Gugulethu, bringing it back to sell in Mitchells Plain, making it up into smaller parcels and re-selling it, going to the shop and generally running errands for her. This business supported many people: the gang that took protection money; a man who sat on the corner to watch out for the police; Peter, his sister and her family.

After speaking about gangsterism for a while Peter became distracted and spoke at length about his sister's boyfriend, Arnold, with whom he shared a mutual animosity. Peter enjoyed speaking about the preferential treatment his sister would give him and how she showed Peter that he was more important to her than her boyfriend. She would dish up food for him if he came in with the 'munchies', hungry from taking drugs. But she would not do the same for her boyfriend. If members of Arnold's family came to see him they had to wait outside, they weren't invited into the house. A strong hierarchy of status was present.

Throughout Peter's story the status of families in the community was a pre-occupation: his own family's fall from a place of status before his father's death to a lower status when they moved to Mitchells Plain; and, later, his own 'lower' status in relation to his girlfriend's family. Being allowed into someone's house was the clearest sign of status, or lack thereof. He could not enter Chantal's family's house, and Arnold's family could not enter his sister's house. There are people who are 'right' and people who are 'wrong'; those who are respectable and those who are not. He moved between these statuses throughout his life. His power, violence and access to guns and women were strong symbols of status that he used to overcome, for example, the authority of Chantal's father.

After speaking about Arnold, his weakness and how much he disrespected the man, he became distracted again, turning to how he would bring girls to his sister's house to have sex with them. After this exchange his mood lightened. He was amused by his own power to have sex whenever he wanted, and he explained that it was his involvement with the drug business and his sexual prowess that brought him respect from the gangsters. In this extract he explains clearly the markers of status:

CG: Was it because of the women or because of the business [that they respected you]?

Peter: The business, with everything.

CG: With everything?

Peter: With everything. How can I explain. I was almost like one who shone out among them, because why, I knew how to speak to people, I knew how to do business, and I could drive, does Ma'am understand? And I had a bunch of girls ... so I was almost, I was a jack of all trades according to them.

He had it all.

The gang was a powerful resource for Peter to draw upon, to show his status and value.

The events that led to his final incarceration took place in 1992 when a rival gang, the Schoolboys, targeted his sister's business, robbing her clients as they left with their goods.

One Sunday the Schoolboys started shooting at Nazeema's house, ran towards the house, grabbed Arnold and 'bashed his head in'. They were sending her a message: they would not tolerate her drug dealing unless they benefitted from the proceeds. His sister was furious and said she would pay R20 000 for the Schoolboys to be killed. This was an opportunity for Peter to impress his sister, to protect her honour and act as both protector and enforcer.

Peter called the head of the Mongrels, who arrived at the house with a 'bunch of vans'. He told this story in exquisite detail, again as if re-living the experience.

When the gangsters arrived he arranged a place for them to sit, talk, drink and smoke mandrax and cigarettes, while planning their counter-attack. His sister provided, paying for enough wine, mandrax and dagga for the 30 or 40 gangsters. Peter acted as host, ensuring that everyone had what they needed to keep them happy. He described the events best:

Back at the house. Those that drink, drink. Those that smoke, smoke. We sit planning. We want the time to pass, that it can be night-time. It's the same Sunday, I think it was in May, so a few days we sit drinking there – then we have our plan of attack.

Now if you sit in that house and you look out you look straight out onto Schoolboys territory. You can see where they are trying to hang out. Now we stand on the balcony and we look out. Everyone moving around are Schoolboys. Now the thing is we can't all go, those people will disappear, we have to take out the hit squad.

The leader of the gang agreed to leave 14 men, seven to stay and protect Peter's sister and seven who would be the 'hit squad'.

Right. We take one of the cars, a Cressida, I am the driver of the Cressida. Guns are issued there on the ground, lying there on a towel, and signed out – which gun are you taking, right you take this one, you take that one, everyone now has a gun. Some men have two guns ... So just after seven it starts getting dark, the men have finished drinking, there are some that are still drinking and then we are in their territory ...

Then we are creeping down the alley, we get to the house that ... they are holding out in, why – you can't see that house from the road – you have to come through the alleys and go on foot to get to that house.

Now here there is Vibracrete around the yard, here's a gate, but if you go in it looks like the ground sinks in. It's sloped. We are two or three men there – we creep up to the house ... then we hear lots of voices in the yard. We see there are women too, Schoolgirls. The children like the gangsters. They are their boyfriends.

I stop the van behind me, I get a shotgun through the window from the driver's side and shoot him

The same people that were at my sister's are here in the yard. Now the brother just says, 'That's them.'

When we had opened the gate they saw, here are the gangsters, there is a big thing coming.

Some of those girls run out of the door. Three pushing past each other at one time to get out, some fall here on the Vibracrete to get out of the yard. Two of them get shot right there – we thought they were dead but they weren't dead – just one guy was shot dead and we take two of them with us. The main guys were there. We take the two and shove them in the boot of the Cressida before they could call out. As we drive off we see one come running out of the alley – he runs across the road to the other alley but what makes us stop and shoot him is that that he could have testified in court that he saw me there. I was the driver ... I stop the van behind me, I get a shotgun through the window from the driver's side and shoot him ... But then we heard the sirens of the flying squad ... So we left him and drove on with our lights off. Then we drove over the field to get away because the police had to come down the road, to get to the people who had been shot. And as I understand it a woman was also shot.

Peter and the hit squad take the two Schoolboys they have captured into the bushes on the way to Khayelitsha. Peter explains:

But now here in the van was a can of petrol, I don't know where that petrol came from.

Then we went into the bushes with those people. But not too deep in. Say from here to there [pointing a few metres].

As we get into the bushes they are pleading with us, some say sir, some say uncle, some say please sir, we are not Schoolboys, we didn't do that thing. But we were drunk, intoxicated, we wanted to kill them.

Then they dropped to their knees, made as if they were going to drop to their knees. One of them said he was a Muslim, he wanted to say Tu'ah. 'If you are going to kill me let me just say a Tu'ah.' Then he prays, but he prayed too long so they shot him, they shot him 14, 15 times. Then the one jumped up and ran. He just ran one, two, three steps and fell, then jumped up again and ran again, one, two – because why – you know how a drunk person runs. Someone who is drunk falls, struggles up again, because why, he sees.

That night in the time that we were busy with the one that was running away my other brothers threw petrol over him and set him alight. Then we left.

The day was far from over for Peter. As he arrived back at his sister's house he saw that an ambulance was waiting outside. Chantal had gone into labour with their child.

Immediately he and his sister identified an opportunity for Peter to establish an alibi. He took his sister's Mercedes-Benz and a change of clothing in Chantal's little backpack. He went from one hospital to another, looking for Chantal, until eventually after midnight he found her at the Mowbray Maternity Hospital. He was relieved to find that she had not yet given birth, as it meant that he could spend some time with her to establish his alibi. After a while the nurse said he had to leave, but the next morning he returned. By that time the news of the murder had spread.

That night their son was born, but Peter would not get to spend much time with him, because the police were already on his trail.

However, there were a few days after the birth of his child that Peter's life assumed a semblance of peacefulness. And in this time we get a glimpse of his deep desire for acceptance and respect, which he feels for a brief while when he visits Chantal in hospital after their child is born. He described this experience again with all the detail that a good storyteller requires:

While she was in hospital I supported her. Every day clean clothes, or clean panties. I went to her mother at her house. I said, 'If you have things for her give them to me now.' I go to the shop, to the bakeries, I buy fresh *vetkoek* or stuff like that, cooldrinks. And when I get there it's visiting hours. When I pull into the parking lot she can see me out of the window. The other women's boyfriends just left them there. They don't even support their girlfriends in there. They don't bring them anything. I get there with three or four bags. Some of them say, 'Here comes your husband.' Because why – they thought I was her husband. Then I go up with all the stuff, then I had a fresh cake. I asked for some saucers from the hospital. I cut the cake and cut each one of them a nice piece of cake, chips, roasted peanuts – the stuff that I bought – and cooldrinks too. I put it on a tray and take it there. Greet them, and then I am involved with her.

Clean her cupboard, the fruit bowls and stuff like that. Make her a nice fruit bowl, fruit basket, pack out the sweets, pack her cupboard full and then sit with her.

In these moments Peter had the respect, the status and the sense of intimacy that he craved.

But it was not long before he was arrested. Someone had informed on him and the other gangsters involved in the murders. His treatment at the hands of the police showed clearly how the state's exercise of power resembled that of the gangs.

At the Nick Acker building in Bellville South the murder and robbery squad members stripped Peter naked, his hands handcuffed behind his back. He and his accomplices were thrown on the grass.

'There's big tortoises there,' Peter said. 'They throw the cabbage leaves on top of them [the men who have been arrested]. Now a tortoise doesn't actually bite, but we think they bite. But their nails, if they are big, and they are big tortoises.' The tortoises climbed over the men's bodies, their claws cutting into their skin.

And not just that. They hit us with wet sacks. When you get to the office the office is empty, there are no benches, chairs, there is maybe just a table. Then I come in. I'm just going to explain it carefully to you. I was handcuffed, here's the door [pointing to one side] here stands an official behind the door with a wet sack. It's the tube from a car tire, a sack made of that, but it's full, sprayed wet. Now he's standing here behind, now I come into the room, when I hear again I just hear someone stomp on me so that I sink down, then that man comes with the sack. Pulls it tight behind my head. You can't hear anything that is going on. Everything goes dark. Then he pulls it off. When I speak, I say, 'Sir, I don't know anything about what you are saying.' I argue. I want to get out of this thing. I say, 'I was never on the scene, sir.' Right, then they pull it, you can fall over now. He pulls that bag sack tighter around your neck, we were hit like that. And one guy, he's outside now, they broke his hand in the grill. They broke his hand. The grill wasn't on the outside door, the grill, then they broke his hand, my face too.

I had another Peter next to my head. My eyes were swollen shut. Because why, when they drove with me in the car, I sat in the middle and my hands were handcuffed, I couldn't, it was now punches from this side, the one in the front slaps me, my nose, my mouth, everything's bleeding. They said, 'You must just talk now. Which of you shot those people?' I say, 'Sir, I was just the driver.' But before that, but before I admitted that, I fought for a long time, there came a time when I just couldn't take it any more. Do you understand?

After confessing the men were put on trial. They told their lawyers that they had been tortured, but by the time the court came to inspect the Nick Acker building where the men said they had been tortured, the rooms had all changed and Peter felt as though he was in some Kafkaesque nightmare:

If we came to point out an office, then there are nice tables and chairs, flowerpots, then the judge comes and the assessors and our advocate, and he asks, 'Where were you assaulted?' Now I say, 'No, here, sir.' But now in all the statements we said there was nothing in the room. But now, here, the photos are taken of us and the room, the room looks like a sitting room. You understand? Right. We were taken back to court. To the district surgeon that came to testify in court. He came to testify we were, physically, we were healthy, but now what they don't know in court is that he saw us before the assaults and torture ...

Only at this point did Peter's mother come to his aid. But it was too late. Although she testified that when she went to the police station she could not recognise her son because his eyes were swollen shut and blood was running from his ears, the court did not believe her. In the end Peter was sentenced to 57 years in prison. Hearing this his mother fainted.

This was not the end of the tragedies his mother would endure. In 2000, when Peter had already been in prison for six years, his handicapped brother snapped and stabbed their stepfather to death. A year later, the same brother became involved in a street fight and was himself stabbed to death. This proved too much for their mother. 'When she arrived on the scene and saw that her son was full of blood and so on, then she collapsed, or fainted and fell into a coma, she never got up again.'

The making of a gangster

There are many things about Peter's life that we can know through his stories, and a few, important things that Peter cannot tell us about. It is rare for anyone to remember anything before the age of three, and similarly rare to have anything other than memories of singular events, often informed by what others (such as your parents) might have told you, of these early years.⁵⁸ Since Peter's mother died in 2001, it was not possible to speak to her about Peter as an infant, or her own state of mind when Peter was born. What we do see is that Peter reacts very strongly to emotional stimuli – he shows little ability to regulate his emotions. He is impulsive, takes risks, is mistrustful, and is unafraid in the face of danger. While this suggests at best weak emotional bonding with his mother, and perhaps also exposure to toxic stress during pregnancy, it was also the perfect preparation for the life that Peter would lead.

When he reacted to his mother's rejection and the presence of Fred in his life by leaving school and leaving home, he rejected the authority, rules and values the institutions of home and school represented. It is unsurprising then that the social workers brought in by his mother had little impact – they represented his mother and her authority, and this he already mistrusted and had rejected.

Peter was well adapted to life on the streets. He liked the thrill of risk-taking, he was drawn to drugs, he was highly enterprising and the alternative community represented by sex workers, gangsters and thieves was ready to welcome him in and offer him a set of rules and values that he could relate to. In this community, risk-taking, strength, violence and mistrust were both valued and necessary.

His mother's last attempt to intervene in his life during childhood, by calling in the police and asking the court to send him to the reformatory, did little more than confirm to Peter that her authority, and her love and compassion for him were weak. The reformatory mirrored the very values that Peter had started to learn on the streets. Moreover, it provided him with a model for masculinity that he readily accepted. To be someone, to be respected, have status and have your physical needs met you had to be able to demonstrate your toughness. You had to be able to withstand the torture of solitary confinement, fight your way out of being raped and beaten, and show that you could be more violent than the other boys. The brutalisation of the reformatory just confirmed and reinforced the values that would enable him to survive so well on the streets.

Peter's sister, Nazeema, had accepted the same values and way of life. She was close to Peter and, like the women with whom he stole, she supported and confirmed his choices and offered him approval and belonging. His sister Emma and his one elder brother, who never became involved in gangster lifestyles, were not risk-takers, they were not impulsive, and they did not share the same attraction to drugs, alcohol and violence. In the community in which they lived, both sets of values

and types of lifestyles were 'normal' – so one's temperament and early life experiences, perhaps even epigenetic⁵⁹ adaptations to the environment, which will differ from person to person, will inform the path you take. The question that will continue to bother us is the extent to which Peter had a choice about the path his life would take.

By the time Peter left the reformatory it seemed as though any choices that he might have had, were now extremely limited. He was powerfully conditioned, with his experience of reformatory having come at a critical developmental stage in his life when he was internalising a set of values, and when his peers became increasingly important in his life.⁶⁰

There are several criminological theories that may be drawn upon to explain Peter's trajectory, including the developmental theories of antisocial behaviour proposed by Gottfredson and Hirschi;⁶¹ Moffitt's⁶² associated theory; and even Agnew's general strain theory.⁶³

Gottfredson and Hirschi hold that there are several underlying factors that predict criminal behaviour (and they are so strong as to predict criminal behaviour at any age), namely impulsivity, low self-control and poor verbal ability.⁶⁴ They argue that weak social control and personal propensity to criminality together predict criminal behaviour.

Moffitt and others take a slightly different approach in trying to offer an explanation for the difference between offenders whose offending is confined to their teens (adolescent limited) and others who continue offending throughout their lives (life course persistent). Moffitt argues that adolescent limited offenders (by far the majority) are motivated by a desire for autonomy, adult status and privilege; they are thus more likely to commit property crimes and crimes that can fulfil their needs. Life course persistent criminals are defined by 'inadequate socialisation, a history of poor personal relationships and thus weak attachment', and are more likely to be convicted of violent offences.⁶⁵

By the time Peter left the reformatory it seemed as though any choices that he might have had, were now extremely limited

Developmental psychology and neuroscience offer complementary interpretations of the factors that inform and influence the trajectory of Peter's life. With the benefit of new advances in both neuroscience and the psychology of trauma, we are now better able to understand how trauma in early childhood not only affects our feelings and how we interact with our world but also shapes and influences the development of our brains. Trauma psychologists Debra Kaminer and Gilian Eagle explain that 'repeated traumatic experiences in childhood "train" the brain to focus on responding to danger and threat rather than to focus on learning and exploration. Those neural pathways that govern defensive responses to danger or threat therefore become overdeveloped, while those that are responsible for other tasks (including the capacity for trust, the expression of emotions through language, and flexible adaptation to change or stress in the environment) remain underdeveloped.'⁶⁶ What this means is that children who are exposed to trauma, and especially repeated trauma, often aren't able to rationalise experiences, are more likely to act immediately on their feelings, and are unable, or less able, to form warm, trusting relationships. The trauma that precipitated Peter's criminal trajectory was the death of his father and the subsequent rejection by his mother, which was likely exacerbated by the abuse from his stepfather.

For Peter, survival on the streets depended on his not trusting anyone or forming warm, loving bonds. We see this most clearly in his relationships with girls and women. He is almost entirely

incapable of forming and sustaining warm, loving, intimate relations with women, and knows only how to assert his dominance, and to defend his self-esteem through violence. When his girlfriend shames him by not joining him in his car and rather going to hang out with her friends, and this humiliation is compounded by his being sent out of the house by the owners, he reacts violently: grabbing his girlfriend, dragging her across the gravel and kicking her. He completes the violence by raping her, but the minute demonstrations of intimacy, the kisses before they have sex and conversation afterwards is enough for him to be able to deny (to himself and others) that he has raped her. He shows some capacity for warmth when he visits his girlfriend in hospital after the birth of their child, but he speaks of no other similarly warm, intimate exchanges during the course of their relationship.

Another approach to understanding violence is offered by James Gilligan. He argues that it is necessary to understand the use of violence as being psychologically meaningful.⁶⁷ Gilligan argues against a theory of violence that gives morality a central place. In South Africa we often hear political leaders, church leaders and others arguing that the reason for the high levels of violence is a collapse of morality, a loss of morality. They argue that children are not taught the difference between right and wrong and that weak social controls are to blame for criminality. Yet, as we see in Peter's story, the very structures of authority and of state, reformatory, prison and police reinforce the 'morality' and values held by gangsters. The police and the reformatory display, reward and value the same kind of masculinity,⁶⁸ use of violence and values that Peter is accustomed to on the streets. Thus to argue that 'weak social controls' are at play, as Gottfredson and Hirschi might, is mistaken. Indeed, the social norms and controls as represented by the state and gang culture are incredibly strong; far stronger in Peter's life than the alternative – compassionate, loving and pro-social values.

Whichever theory one applies to this situation, it is clear that Peter's early childhood experiences, in particular the death of his father, rejection by his mother and abuse by his stepfather, pushed him from the family home to live on the streets. At this point the state (in the form of the criminal justice system) is called in, by his mother. But sending Peter to the reformatory only reinforces his choice to resort to aggression and violence. The reformatory induces repeated trauma and establishes a code of behaviour and values that will equip Peter for gangster life, and life on the streets. More importantly, there is a ready community of adults who have rejected the norms of dominant society and who benefit from Peter's participation in crime.

After this there was little, aside from removing Peter from his situation and providing him with intensive, prolonged therapy, that could have changed the trajectory of his life. Had the first intervention been of an entirely different nature, focussed on building and strengthening his relationship with his mother, offering him an entirely different type of support and exposing him to a set of values and experiences that reinforced positive, prosocial coping skills, it is possible that the outcome may have been different. But these kinds of services were not and still are not available to the majority of South Africans.

Chapter 2

Ryan: ‘He wouldn’t hurt a fly’

There may be only one thing that you need to know about Ryan’s life to understand how a ‘placid’, quiet boy who goes out of his way to avoid violence, ends up spending his life incarcerated for the brutal and bloody murder of his brother. Ryan’s mother explained that it started like this:

I became a mother with him at age 17 years. I did not want him but my mother forced me to keep him. I was very hard on him; I slapped him around a lot. I never took to him. I did not like him.

As I take you through Ryan’s story it will become clear how this start shaped what was to come, and how the interventions by the criminal justice system and the child welfare system, despite perhaps their best intentions, only made things worse.

Ryan was the only white offender to have been selected and interviewed for this study. He was interviewed by Lukas Muntingh and Tizina Ramagaga in three sessions lasting over four hours at Kutama Sinthumule Correctional Centre in October and November 2010. By the time he came to be interviewed he had spent most of his life in and out of institutions, starting with homes for abused and neglected children, moving on to a reformatory and then to repeated spells in prison until he was sentenced for the murder of his brother. He had multiple convictions for property crimes ranging from burglary to vehicle theft, had been an international drug courier (for which he was never convicted) and a sex worker. But until the murder of his brother he had not used violence in the commission of his crimes.

Ryan was extremely articulate and had no trouble expressing himself in the interviews. He was self-reflective and self-conscious. As with Peter, the chronology of events in Ryan’s life is sometimes difficult to decipher from his story. He found it difficult to keep the events that took place in his early childhood in any kind of order. This was also the case when he described events later in his life and when he spoke about different periods of incarceration.

He remained calm and personable throughout the interviews, engaging the interviewers in discussions about the parole system and the purpose of punishment and incarceration. The only time he became agitated was when he described how he had murdered his brother. This he did in a great deal of detail – the minutiae of what happened in the hours leading up to the incident being shared as though he had an unconscious expectation that one of these details held the truth he sought to help him understand how he came to beat his brother to death with a hammer. However, it is not in those hours that the answers lie, but rather in the early years of Ryan’s hard life.

Beginnings

Ryan was born in Durban in 1966. He has no memory of his biological father, never having met him. All he ever knew about him was that he was a criminal who had been imprisoned so many times that his nickname was Tjookie.⁶⁹ Later in his life Ryan's mother would tell him that he had inherited his father's criminal genes, and it was that which made him the criminal he had become.

Ryan's mother went on to have another child with Tjookie, Ryan's younger brother Garth, the brother he would later murder.

Ryan did not grow up without a father altogether. While he was still a small child his mother married an apprentice artisan who worked for Eskom. Ryan loved his stepfather, and said, 'As far as I was concerned he was my real father.'

He remembered starting school in Durban when he was five or six, but his first year at school was disrupted when in the second term the family moved to Grootvlei in Mpumalanga, where his stepfather took up an apprenticeship at the coal-fired power station.

At Grootvlei the family lived in the Eskom staff compound close to the small town of Balfour. Ryan described the compound as 'a community more than anything else. It's really one of those *dorps*. There wasn't even a shop there, there was just a canteen, and there was a hall so we can watch movies on a Friday. People at that stage helped each other out. You could go to your neighbours or whatever and people were friendly because everybody needs – it was a pretty closed community.' This was the most stable time in Ryan's life and would be the longest he ever lived in one place.

While living in Balfour Ryan's mother and his stepfather had another four children together, a boy and three girls. Ryan was never close to his younger siblings.

The family struggled financially – as an artisan's apprentice his stepfather earned very little and his mother seldom worked, only having had one job for a short while at the telephone exchange. Most of the time Ryan's mother stayed at home to care for the six children. To Ryan she seemed overwhelmed by the task.

I used to get blamed for a lot of the *kak* that used to happen at home because I was the eldest, especially when my mom was working and my dad was also working as well – it was a very different time ... my mom used to *moer* [hit] me with anything she could lay her hands on but, no, it didn't help. No, it didn't help. And eventually I just used to stand there looking at her – she'd just vent all her frustration on me; it didn't affect me anymore. It didn't affect me anymore.

Ryan's stepfather, on the other hand, never hit him, 'never once'. When called upon by his mother to hit him, his stepfather would take Ryan into the room and make him jump on the bed while he hit the bed to create the impression, for his mother, that the boy was receiving a hiding.

As Ryan said, the hidings didn't have the effect his mother had hoped for, and it was not long before he got into trouble for stealing other children's toys.

It was difficult for me to understand how come everybody had everything and I didn't – you know, the only way I could get it was to take somebody else's. And, you know, when you're that age [nine or ten] you don't understand about economics, money not being there and

whatever – all you understand is everybody's got what you want and you don't have it. Anyway, that's childish I suppose.

One day, having reached the end of her tether, his mother called the police to discipline him. The police ...

... just threw me down on the bed and gave me a couple of cuts with a cane ... but that was about it ... she [his mother] used to get frustrated because I just didn't feel it anymore. It got to that stage where I could just put my hand out and hold her away from me like this and then there'd be nothing she could do. I used to just stand there. She used to end up crying and sobbing out of frustration.

School was not much of a respite from the harshness Ryan experienced at home. He said that he used to 'have problems with other kids at school ... I never used to be accepted very easily because I used to find people boring, people my own age, I couldn't relate to what they were doing. I was always involved with older people.'

Callie Hattingh, a clinical psychologist who specialises in trauma therapy, explains that when children do not have a nurturing, warm caregiver to help them contain their hurt and fear and help them to name and manage their feelings, one of the possible effects is that they may have an underdeveloped ventrovagal system⁷⁰ – part of the autonomic system responsible for managing social engagement. In addition, the continuous beatings break down children's ability to regulate, manage and control their feelings.⁷¹ (This is discussed in greater detail in the chapter about Zibonele's life.)

School was not much of a respite from the harshness Ryan experienced at home

For Ryan the abuse and beatings continued to come, not only from his mother but also from boys at school. His mother remembered that because Ryan was the only English-speaking child at the school he was bullied by the Afrikaans-speaking boys. This frustrated her. Ryan was a 'big strong boy' and she believed that he should have been able to defend himself.

Ryan also remembered the bullying well:

They used to *bliksem* [hit] me every day at the bus stop when we got off the bus. I used to come home with a bloody nose, my clothes torn, bugged up. And my mom got *gatvol* [had enough]. The one day she gave me a fricking hiding. She told me, 'Now the next time somebody hits you, you *moer* him back' – so I did.

The day after his mother had beaten him for coming home with his nose bloody and his clothes torn, he followed her instructions – he hit the first boy who tried to hit him, and gave him a bloody nose. But seeing the blood he got a fright and ran away. That night the boy's father brought him to their house to confront Ryan and his parents. In this one instance, the only instance he could remember, his mother stood up for him:

So my mom brought out the photo album and said, 'Well, look at this [showing him the pictures of Ryan beaten and dishevelled after school], this is what your kid has been doing to my son every day for the past five or six years,' or whenever. So that poor kid got a hiding on top of ... And that was the last; after that he never troubled me again.

While from this point Ryan might have become aggressive and used violence to get what he wanted, the violence his mother had meted out to him from a young age had the opposite effect. It caused him to draw away from violence, to try to avoid it. From his account of his life, the incident described above in which he retaliated was exceptional rather than regular. As Ryan said, 'I guess that's why I've never been that way [violent], because if I see a confrontation or something coming, I duck in the next direction. I don't want to. Look, if I have to I'll do what I have to do, but I by no means enjoy it, I detest violence. To me it's not a solution or anything, it just causes a lot worse.' His mother agreed, telling Lukas many years later that 'he was a very placid boy and would not hurt a fly'. He had learned well by now to file away his feelings so that they remained unconscious. It's probable that having one supportive, loving parent in his life – his stepfather – acted as a protective factor, preventing Ryan from retaliating with violence as a matter of course.

But, in 1979, when Ryan was 12, his life took a turn for the worse. His stepfather, the only person in his life who showed him any warmth and affection, who had consoled him when he was hurt, died of cancer. The family left the Eskom compound and moved to the nearby town of Balfour. Ryan was badly affected by his death. His mother remembered that the school psychologist had come to see her to speak about her son. He 'was like zombie for three days. People asked what was the matter with him at the funeral.' But his mother was unable to answer. She did not understand that Ryan's withdrawal or, in psychological terms, his dissociation, was a sign of the depth of the trauma he suffered at the loss of his stepfather.⁷²

Progressing into crime

After this Ryan's behaviour deteriorated. He began stealing from his mother and from his peers at school. Money was even tighter than before. There was no money for school lunch or for the tuck shop, so he stole what he could from his mother's purse to buy food at school.

To compound the loss of his father and the associated unresolved trauma, when the family moved to Balfour Ryan was sent away to boarding school in Nigel. There he started high school, in a new town, feeling very alone. The school psychologist recognised that something was wrong and he was 'put through a battery of tests' and then sent to another boarding school that same year. But neither Ryan nor his mother had any insight into the psychologist's findings or concerns.

He described 1981, the year he turned 15, as 'very much a balls-up'. His mother remarried (a friend of his stepfather) and the family moved several times, every few months, from Balfour to Empangeni and back again. Ryan did not get on with his new stepfather, whom he described as 'not overly mad about children'. He said, 'For some reason this guy was very scared of me. I don't know why. I was only a child, I really don't understand. Okay, I was big for my age, but I wasn't sort of violent. And I didn't know him from a bar of soap.'

Ryan's anger at his mother came through clearly when he spoke about this:

I mean, I didn't even know she was going to get married. She buggered off to Empangeni and came back married to this guy. I'd never seen him – and anyway we didn't get on at all, not at all. And the situation really deteriorated to such an extent that he used to take his things and hide them away; his own personal things he used to hide them away in the garage and he'd go tell my mom that I stole his stuff and sold it, or whatever the case was. And my mom believed him – so eventually the upshot of it was that I left home. She, they, posted me to go and stay with my grandmother in Johannesburg.

Ryan said that at this time he felt alone and isolated in his family unit. 'It was like I was an entity on my own.'

It was not long before Ryan stopped going to school and ran away from home. When he was found (he did not say by whom or how he was found) he was sent to the Norman House Place of Safety in Edenvale, Johannesburg. There is little information available about Norman House except that it is a small, state-run home for children who have been abused or neglected, or who have come into conflict with the law.⁷³ But it could not have been a positive experience, because Ryan did not stay there for long. One winter's night he and another boy ran away from Norman House. It was freezing and the boys were unprepared for the cold. When they passed a school they decided to break into the sick bay to find some blankets. They opened a window and climbed into the school 'and the next thing there were just cops everywhere'.

Ryan and the other boy were arrested for breaking and entering. This arrest was the first in what would become an almost farcical pattern of arrests and institutionalisation that would continue for the remainder of his life.

After running away from Norman House, Ryan was sent to live with his grandmother in Mayfair, Johannesburg. But he was not happy there and it was only a few weeks before he ran away again. This time he made his way to Durban, some 600 km away. There he found himself cold and alone again. During the day he found refuge in a department store and pulled on a warm jacket. He insisted repeatedly throughout the interviews, whenever he came back to describe what happened that day, that he never intended to steal the jacket:

I put it on because I was cold. I was walking around in the shop with it and they arrested me for it ... I actually had a watch, one of those calculator watches, they'd just come out and were pretty expensive. And I offered the guy, I said to him, 'Well, just take the bloody watch, it's going to more than pay for the fricking jacket', I said I didn't want to steal the thing, it's cold, and it was raining outside. And he didn't want to accept it – so there was nothing I could do about it except carry on and do what he wanted to do.

Ryan was arrested for shoplifting and sent to Excelsior Place of Safety in Pinetown (run by the Catholic church). When his case came before the court he met the social worker who had been assigned to his case. This was the first time Ryan could remember ever having met a social worker. He remembered her as having been very sympathetic. 'It's strange,' he says of the social worker,

It's actually the first time I came across somebody that actually cried [because] of something that happened to me. She was not impressed when the judge sentenced me to go to Tokai. He [the judge] just didn't want to know anything, he refused point blank ...

After the guy had sentenced me, she came downstairs to come and speak to me and she actually started crying. She brought me something to eat and some cold drink and whatever – apologised, she said she was really sorry, she did the best that she could she says but she doesn't understand why the judge was so anti doing anything for me. She said maybe it was just a bad day for her.

It wasn't only a bad day for the social worker. The decision to send him to a reformatory would have a lasting impact on Ryan's life. Although the social worker was kind and seemed to care about what happened to him, Ryan never knew her name, he didn't believe he was ever told, and he also did

not know what her 'function' was. In much the same way he and his mother were never told by the school psychologist what the outcome of the battery of tests was, or why he was concerned about Ryan's behaviour. So although both a social worker and a psychologist came into contact with Ryan, neither seemed to spend any time trying to understand or discuss with Ryan, or his mother, what it was that had led Ryan to come into conflict with the law, or to behave in a way that drew their attention.

We can't know whether this was a symptom of their having had too many cases to deal with, or because the case seemed hopeless, or because they did not consider the possibility that Ryan was a victim of abuse, or because they were focused very narrowly on a particular behaviour. Whatever the reason, they seemed to feel little inclination, or ability, to intervene to change the situation. Ryan and his mother didn't know how to ask for help and might not even have recognised they needed help. And so the opportunity for psychological support or intervention was lost.

From here Ryan was handed over to the criminal justice system.

Ryan, like Peter, circled around his experience at the reformatory in Tokai (the Constantia School for Boys). At first he was dismissive of his time there. When he finally came around to speaking about the reformatory it was clear that

Ryan reacted to the reformatory by rejecting the harsh authority it enforced

his experience was as brutalising as Peter's had been. Peter is three years older than Ryan and was sent to the reformatory in Tokai when he was a little younger than Ryan was. So, while their time at the reformatories did not intersect, their experiences of the brutal environment and their responses are familiar and predictable. Peter responded by becoming a better fighter, showing his strength and adopting the strict hierarchical code of the gangs, defined by the ability to withstand torture and the use of violence. He had already rejected the authority of his mother and the school. Ryan also reacted to the reformatory by rejecting the harsh authority it enforced. The way in which authority was enforced at the boarding school closely mirrored his mother's efforts to discipline and 'control' him.⁷⁴

He was able to use his talent on the sports fields to avoid doing hard labour – working in the vineyards and digging ditches – that the other children who weren't good at sport had to. 'If you weren't selected to play any sport, that's what you ended up doing. So it was either sport and exempt yourself from work or otherwise work – and I was totally anti-work.' Ryan described Tokai as 'being like a boarding school, just stricter', suggesting that the limited time he had spend at boarding school was no less harsh than at the reformatory. Both the reformatory and the boarding schools merely continued the abuse he had experienced at home since he was small.

When Ryan was in Tokai the white reformatory was segregated from the Porter school, where predominantly coloured children were held. As he described, 'there was no love lost between the whites and the coloureds at the time, because everybody hated everybody else'. Ryan said the best way to escape from the white reform school was to run across the Porter school's fields:

... if you decided you're going to run the quickest way was to run through their fields and the Porter fields were right on ours bordering against Tokai itself, Constantia School, as they call it. So you had to run across there and heaven help you if they caught you; they'd beat the living crap out of you. And you must know they've got picks and shovels – because that's all they

did the whole time, they just dug out that soil from one end to the other. So running across there was a like a helluva thing. But it was nice because on the other side was a very wooded area and then a residential area behind that. And of course your first thing was to get clothing once you got out of there because everybody recognises the clothing.

Ryan should know; he ran away from the reformatory about 23 times. Between 1983 and 1984 he never remained at the school for longer than four consecutive days. When he was caught, like Peter, he would be locked in the isolation cells.

I'd just come out of isolation and I'd be gone again. I even took off in isolation. Because they had to open the doors to feed you sometime. I think I still have the record for running away there. They used to tease me because my aunt lived in Vredehoek and I used to run away from there and go and stay with my aunt, and I'd be back the next day because my aunt would then phone ... they'd just wait until I'd been fed and then come and fetch me back again.

After each escape Ryan would be caned before being placed in isolation. Each escape was worth nine cuts. He described this punishment as having been long and drawn out, intended to instil fear and put the boys in their place:

You just come in, bend over the chair and he whacks you one – and he had a cane, it was long, it was probably a metre, a metre and a half and about as thick as my thumb. And he'd take like two steps then come down and *wha!* – Out you go and stand there for two or three minutes. Oh, somebody else is busy coming in, he's meeting and having his coffee – oh, he'll come back here, another one or two – go and stand outside again. And I think it pissed him off because I never said boo or bah. I used to bleed. Probably by the fifth or sixth one you used to start bleeding, it used to break the skin.

He described his attempts at escape as a challenge to the authority of the principal – who had said to him when he arrived: 'We take square people like you and we push them through round holes.' Rather than its having the intended effect of intimidating Ryan into conforming, it just made him more determined to prove the principal wrong. The torture and abuse at the hands of this state institution compounded Ryan's trauma and the feelings of rage and hurt that he kept suppressing.

Reflecting back on this time, Ryan said these experiences set a pattern of running away from all stressful situations in his life. He started avoiding any situation that became uncomfortable or that was a reminder of the stress and trauma he had experienced.

This is entirely consistent with the experiences of people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Trauma psychologist Bessel van der Kolk explains that some people who are exposed to extreme stress may suffer from hyperarousal and avoid situations and emotions that trigger their memory, whether conscious or unconscious, of the trauma. Hyperarousal is a psychological term used to describe a cluster of symptoms typical of PTSD – it happens when our bodies go into high gear in response to psychological trauma and our bodies and psyches are then unable to 'reset'.⁷⁵ It is characterised by, among other things, sleeping difficulties, irritability and outbursts of anger and anxiety.

It would seem that what Ryan did is what Van der Kolk describes as moving between hyperarousal and dissociation, where the traumatised person responds to their chronic hyperarousal by avoiding situations that remind them of the trauma and becoming numb to almost any feeling.⁷⁶ In the

end the sufferer cannot listen to their emotions, or adapt or change their response to situations. They respond with 'fight or flight' reactions, without being able to take the time to rationalise their response to whatever is triggering their trauma. Finally, as Van der Kolk explains, any emotion is experienced as dangerous:

Emotions become reminders of their inability to affect the outcome of their life ... extreme feelings of anger and helplessness can be understood as the reliving of memories of the trauma; like other memories of the trauma, they become reminders that are to be avoided.⁷⁷

Ryan seemed to confirm this when he said,

Actually all that running away has led me to have difficulty in handling situations ... when I sit down and look back at them, I think to myself, hell, why didn't I just handle the thing, it wasn't so bad. But later in life it became a thing for me, it was like if a situation became difficult or I could even sense there's going to be a bit of trouble here, I just used to run away from everything. I wasn't prepared to accept responsibility. I don't think I knew how, but I think it was more the idea of accepting the responsibility that made me afraid. So let me just run away – it's the simpler solution.

He was particularly afraid of emotional conflict, which meant that he kept others at a distance:

I had been in too many situations and places where I had seen conflict at work and I didn't want conflict in my life because everywhere I saw it, it was causing pain, not necessarily physical pain but at that stage I started realising the emotional difficulties a person can get into ... So when I used to see a situation start developing – phew, I'm gone. I am gone – the moment somebody even confronts me about something I say, 'Ja, no, absolutely fine.' When they turn around, I'm gone, I'm out the door. That's it, you won't see me again. I couldn't get myself involved in anything or with anybody. I couldn't. Everybody I kept at a distance.

It is unsurprising then that Ryan's relationships with women were in the end as cold and harsh as his own relationship with his mother had been. Denied the chance to develop empathy as a young child, he was unable to have warm, loving relationships at all. Not only did he not know what such relationships looked and felt like, the failure to form good bonds with caregivers early and the inability to regulate emotions make it impossible to have the kind of relationships that might help protect against the harshness of the outside world.⁷⁸

Eventually Ryan escaped from the reformatory in Tokai for good. He took his chance when travelling with the reformatory's rugby team to a game in Gauteng and made his way to his mother's house for a few months. She was not pleased to see him but tolerated his presence, since he had nowhere else to go.

Ryan speaks little about his family after the reformatory. His mother appears in cameo roles from time to time, when he returns to stay with her for short spells between bouts in prison. But from here his life moved from one bad experience to another. Wherever he went and whatever he did, disaster seemed to follow, largely as a result of his risky behaviour, which included taking many drugs.

Like Peter, Ryan relied on drugs to help numb the powerful emotions that he was unable to regulate or express. Unlike Peter, who stuck to mandrax, dagga and alcohol, Ryan tried any and every drug available. He started sniffing solvents in prison, and then moved on to a range of drugs, from

hallucinogens to cocaine. All of which helped to distance him from his feelings, and offer some relief from them.⁷⁹

From bad to worse

Ryan related one experience that shows clearly how he was unable to feel empathy. This incident took place after he had escaped from the reformatory, and had been arrested and incarcerated for impulsively stealing a motorbike. Soon after he was released from prison his uncle reached out to him and got him a job at a hotel in Bergville (in rural KwaZulu-Natal) – ‘as a training assistant manager’. His uncle was a catering manager who had worked at many hotels in KwaZulu-Natal.

One night Ryan was asked to guard the bottle store because it was under construction and did not yet have ceilings. The owner of the hotel gave him a revolver ‘in case of trouble’. Nothing happened during the night and the next morning a driver was sent to fetch him. While Ryan sat in the car the driver stood next to the car having a conversation with someone. Ryan must have been fiddling with the gun because the revolver went off in his hand, hitting the driver under his arm and killing him instantly. Ryan was tried for culpable homicide and received a four-year sentence that was suspended on condition that he was not found guilty of another violent crime.

He identified this as a critical turning point in his life. He had enjoyed the job he was doing, and felt that ‘if that crap hadn’t happened, I think my life could have taken a turn for the positive then, in that I would have stayed in that job’. He also remembered having been considered to be very good at his job, mastering all of the tasks required of him. ‘Even the bar lady was there ... I overheard her discussing me with [the manager] one day – she said, “This guy’s incredible, I don’t know how he remembers everything.”’

At no point did he display any distress at having killed a man or any empathy with his victim, referring to the incident only in terms of how it affected his life: ‘And then this crap happened when I shot this dude. That screwed everything up.’ He also didn’t seem to know the name of the man he had shot, or at least it was not significant enough to recall. Perhaps his lack of empathy was exacerbated because of racism – the man he shot was black – but in the end, as we will see, Ryan was unable to feel anything for anyone, irrespective of their race or gender. He was conscious of this emotional numbness in relation to the incident, saying:

Strangely enough I didn’t feel a damn thing. I think at that stage, that’s when I started to realise either there is something wrong with me or otherwise I’m extremely different to other people – because it did not affect me at all. Not a thing. I was more worried about my own safety afterwards because I had to leave, I had to leave Bergville because it turns out that the guy that I shot, he was one of the chief *Induna*’s sons. Now I wasn’t aware of this. Anyway, so they were hunting me and I had to leave, I actually had to go stay with friends ... in Colenso ... And it was like, ah man, it was unreal. It was a whole balls-up. And from then I was just like directionless because I didn’t know what to do with myself.

He was left ‘rudderless’, saying he had just thought he had ‘all the pieces of this puzzle [of life] *lekker* figured out and then suddenly it all just collapsed – *boef*’.

He was unable to cope with the disappointment, and felt as though nothing he did could ever work. This sense of hopelessness and helplessness drove him into a transient life drifting from one place to another, one temporary job to another. It also prepared him well for a life on the margins of society

where criminality is interspersed with short periods of employment. He stole cars and motorbikes, broke into houses, escaped from prison, and for a while couriered drugs between South Africa, Brazil and Switzerland.

While Ryan's criminal behaviour started around the same time as that of the other serial offenders in this study, it continued until he was much older than they were. This is mainly, it seems, because he was incarcerated so often. By the time he was 26 years old this had become a way of life, a repetitive cycle, such that by the time he was interviewed he said that he had been convicted between 20 and 25 times. The threat of prison did not deter Ryan from criminal behaviour. Indeed, given the abuse and apparent injustice to which he had been exposed from an early age, the very idea of something being criminal – against the law that seemed to work only in the favour of others – seemed nonsensical to him.

He described the period between 1992 and 1994 as being *deurmekaar* (confused) as he was 'whacked on drugs', which he would take

The threat of prison did not deter Ryan from criminal behaviour

in binges. He would take on short-term jobs wherever he could get them, working only for a short while because 'I know that's the period of grace you've got before they're going to find out you've got a record and all that kind of stuff'. He would work for a month, draw his first salary and then leave, having secured the job with a false matric certificate and using his girlfriend, who had a job, as his reference.

But after a while he became tired of this life and started stripping and working as a male escort, which he 'took to like a duck to water'. For four years he worked as sex worker and stripper – all while continuing to take drugs.

It was between drug-running trips to Switzerland and Brazil that Ryan committed his ultimate crime. He beat his brother Garth to death with a hammer and viciously assaulted his sister-in-law. He described in apparently unnecessary detail the events of the whole day that led up to the moment it happened. In this scene Ryan had gone to fetch a hammer he had lent his brother. When Ryan described the final scene he spoke very fast, almost breathlessly, from time to time becoming close to incoherent:

After a few games of pool it must have been here about half 10, 11, around about. I think I had maybe two or three beers. I went up, knocked on the door – *ja*, he's on his way, he's coming back. I hear the speech: 'Why does that fucking brother of yours want everything?' What the hell is this bitch carrying on about now? 'I want to go to fucking bed' – and this thing is carrying on – I thought to myself, geez, don't let me walk in through this door, I'm going to put you in your place, I'm going to tell you *kak* from here till you're never going to hear the end of it. So he comes out. He opens the security gate. I say, 'Fuck, let me take my hammer', and off we go.

And here he starts again about all the *kak*, about how since he got home ... she's been carrying on about this that and the next thing. I said, 'Geez, *boet*, do something about it', I said, 'Get rid of the woman', I said, 'You're not happy, get rid of her.' 'No, but I can't live without her, I need her in my life.' I said to him, 'When did you become such a weakling? I mean, what the hell is your problem?'

'No, this fucking lock –.' And now he started swearing because he couldn't get the security gate open and I just lost my temper, so I wacked him with the hammer, I thought bugger this.

And I hit him the first time, I couldn't stop, I snapped. I just carried on beating him until the hammer broke. And then I looked at this lot and I thought, shit, what have I done? Why? Why have I done this? And the thing that came into my head was that bloody bitch upstairs. So I went upstairs and I beat the crap out of her too. She's lucky she didn't die. She was saved by the grace of God. She really was.

And what pisses me off most of all about everything, and they told me it's premeditated murder – I said, how the hell do you figure that out? How do you? I can understand the premeditated, attempted murder because I had a chance to think before I went upstairs and beat the crap out of his wife. I said what happened there, I lost my fricking temper, which I've never ever done in my life – and that's why I've never done it – because I was afraid of something like that, I will lose control.

After the incident Ryan walked back to his home, splattered with blood. He sat on his bed, 'I just sat there and I didn't move, I just stayed there. I knew they would come for me. I couldn't believe what I had done and I was shocked. I was trying to mentally get over this and I couldn't, I couldn't, I couldn't accept it, it was – I don't know, it was ...'

He reserved his anger and frustration – still – for his brother's wife, for the court that found him guilty of premeditated murder, and for his attorney who failed to beat the charge of premeditated murder or robbery of which he was convicted. It is as though he was angry that the system had misunderstood or misrepresented him, again. He was also externalising the blame, pushing the blame onto anyone but himself.

Ryan told Lukas that he had tried to analyse what had happened over and over again in the seven years that he had been in prison, but he still found it incomprehensible. Yet he also said he always knew he had the capacity for extreme violence – he had 'felt it within' himself – and this was why he had avoided confrontation, because he didn't want the confrontation to escalate. During the beating he realised that he was killing his brother, but he was unable to stop himself. All the rage he had built up over the years of abuse was channelled into this attack, and he felt unable to control himself.

Beaten bad?

I began this account of Ryan's life with a quote from his mother explaining that she never wanted to have him, was forced by her mother to keep him and never actually liked him. We are able to get some sense of the impact of this rejection from the findings of a longitudinal study conducted in Prague. This study involved 220 mothers who had sought and been denied abortions. The researchers matched the children from these pregnancies with children of the same age, gender, socioeconomic status and family structure but whose mothers had wanted them. These matched pairs of children were followed from age nine to 35. The study found that at age nine the children of unwanted pregnancies fared worse at school and had more difficulty making friends than their wanted counterparts. At age 21 the children from unwanted pregnancies had less job satisfaction, more conflict with their colleagues and friends, and less success in love than their 'wanted' counterparts. They were also more dissatisfied with their mental wellbeing. At this age twice as many of the adults from unwanted pregnancies had been sentenced to prison terms. At age 30, more of the adults from unwanted pregnancies were unemployed, needed psychiatric help and had difficulties in parenting than their wanted counterparts – laying the basis for an intergenerational cycle of maladaptation.⁸⁰

It is tempting, on the basis of this and because of the abuse Ryan had experienced, to blame his mother both for his criminal career and ultimately for the violent murder of his brother. Certainly her failure to establish a warm bond with him in the first place laid the basis for his inability to regulate his emotions, or to have the emotional vocabulary to express and understand how he was feeling. She was also responsible for his physical abuse, and for his introduction to the criminal justice system by calling in the police to discipline him when her beatings were no longer effective. All of this served only to drive him to reject authority, undermine his ability to have empathy, and compound his trauma. However, the way we parent is to a large degree determined by how we were parented ourselves.⁸¹ Ryan's mother's relationship with her own mother was at best fraught – we know this from the opening statement to this chapter. We also know that Ryan found no more comfort staying with his grandmother than he did at home. This means that it is likely that this narrative demonstrates how trauma, neglect and abuse are transferred from one generation to another.

The opportunities to intervene positively that presented themselves when Ryan came into contact with the social worker and school psychologist reveal the limitations of these institutionally defined and constrained interactions, and force us not to present simplistic recommendations and solutions to such complex problems. Since the school psychologist and social workers, or probation officers, might be the first service providers to come into contact with children like Ryan, it is tempting to identify them as the point of intervention and expect them to develop an appropriate response and course of intervention for such a child. But there are several factors that militate against the potential for psychologists and social workers in these settings to intervene optimally. Firstly, there are too few social workers and psychologists to meet the need,⁸² which means that their ability to spend time with and invest in single cases is extremely constrained. Further, they have a limited menu of remedial options to choose from, and long, complex therapeutic interventions for individual cases are unlikely to be feasible (at least for people who cannot afford to pay for therapy).

In addition, youth secure care facilities have remained harsh environments, despite the progressive changes in child justice since the passing of the Children's Act and the Child Justice Act.⁸³

Peter and Ryan's experiences in the reformatories differed significantly in one respect. The warders at the Porter Reformatory appeared to have actively encouraged and even participated in the initiation rituals of the boys, establishing the need for the boys to demonstrate their physical strength and their ability to endure torture and violence. In that way the values and attributes of successful masculinity promoted by both the staff and inmates mirrored that of the gang culture. Ryan, on the other hand, was subjected to authoritarian discipline. Children were forced to obey and conform, or face serious consequences. The two boys responded quite differently. Ryan rebelled, rejecting authoritarian control. Peter accepted and responded to the need to demonstrate his conformity to the unwritten rules of the reformatory by using violence and enduring torture to gain the respect of his peers. Both, however, sought relief from the effects of abuse and trauma through the use of drugs.

Ultimately the failure to invest in the intensive therapeutic treatment that children such as Ryan and Peter and their families need, resulted in that cost being borne by the people who fell victim to their crimes, the police who arrested them, the courts that repeatedly tried them, and the prisons that became their home.

Chapter 3

Velabahleke: ‘Who would be left behind?’

In the previous chapter it was possible to see how Ryan’s whiteness informed the kind of social capital (people he could call on to connect him to jobs or opportunities) that enabled him to take up ‘normal’ jobs from time to time. Peter’s social capital, on the other hand, drove him towards increasing criminality. While we might describe the context for Peter’s offending – his community – as disorganised,⁸⁴ influenced as it is by the in- and out-migration of men to and from prison; there was a strong system of social control, a set of rules and values, exercised and enforced not only by the gangs but also by others in the community who promoted criminality. Ryan did not operate within a context of community – his ‘community’ was his family and others he came into contact with but whose presence in his life was mostly transitory. These factors influence the nature of the crimes they commit, and where the crimes are committed.

Velabahleke’s⁸⁴ experiences and circumstances, growing up in Thokoza, were in some respects quite different from those of Ryan and Peter, and in other respects fairly similar. Unlike Peter and Ryan, Velabahleke did not come into contact with the criminal justice system at an early age. However, the kind of abuse Peter and Ryan experienced in the reformatories was meted out to Velabahleke at school and at home. Also, while neither Ryan nor Peter was actively or consciously affected by broader political events, Velabahleke was 10 years old in 1983, when resistance to the apartheid state was strong and growing on the East Rand and around the country.⁸⁶ He was a young man at the height of the political violence between 1991 and 1994, in which at least 3 000 people living on the East Rand were killed.⁸⁷ He lived in a war zone, and the effect this had on his pattern of offending, and his coping mechanisms, will become clear.

When I interviewed Velabahleke in May 2013 he was 40 years old, but he looked much older. His hard life was etched on his skin. He spoke isiZulu and was extremely expansive. He liked to talk and tell stories. He had an easy way and was often humorous.

Velabahleke was serving a sentence of 51 years for aggravated robbery, murder, possession of ammunition and intimidation. He had already been incarcerated for 13 years. His prison record noted that he had no prior convictions, yet as you will see he committed many crimes, ranging from petty theft to robbery, during the course of his life. He will be eligible for parole in 2040, when he is 67. While in prison Velabahleke had lost touch with members of his family, the telephone numbers he had for family members no longer seemed to work, and he had not had a visit from a family member

for years. It was not possible for us to speak to anyone who could offer us a different perspective on his life or verify his account.

Beginnings

Velabahleke was born in 1973 in Thokoza, a large urban township on the East Rand. The family home was full, with five children born to his mother and father, and his three cousins. They would have been 11 in the home, but by the time Velabahleke was born his eldest sister had died (he did not say why or how).

In his early childhood both his parents worked, his father for Barloworld and then for Kelvinator, and his mother for another company. Since his mother and father were at work every day, there was little supervision or monitoring of the children's activities.

From when he started school at six years of age, Velabahleke would often play truant, for days and even weeks. He liked to say that it was because of 'peer pressure', but it would seem that it didn't take much or even any pressure for him to skip school – it was just more entertaining to hang out at the mall and push trollies for customers to earn pocket money. Velabahleke said that it was not that he needed money, it was just more fun than being at school. He and his friends would use the money to buy chocolates. From early in his life he was confident enough to move around the township on his own or with his friends, and was quite entrepreneurial.

He skipped school and hung out at the mall for three years before his parents became aware that he was not going to school every day. We can reasonably assume that his parents were not checking his homework or listening to his reading, otherwise they would have realised that he was missing out on most of his schooling. But caring for eight children while working full-time leaves little opportunity for this kind of middle-class parenting, affordable aftercare facilities didn't exist, and the school didn't tell his parents that he was not attending class.

When the school eventually called his parents to report his absence, they realised that something had to be done. Velabahleke, his brother and one of his cousins were sent to stay with his mother's younger sister in Estcourt, KwaZulu-Natal where it was hoped the children would be more diligent. They were right. Velabahleke said that it was much harder to skip school in Estcourt, because there was nowhere to go and nothing to do. Life in a small town in KwaZulu-Natal, he said, was very different to life in the township, where there was no shortage of things to keep you busy.

The three boys only stayed in Estcourt for about a year before his mother and her sister had an argument about money. 'My aunt would claim that mum does not send money whereas my mum did send the money every month. My aunt's children would be given our money but we did not receive the money. When mum came down in December to find that money was not being given to us as she had expected, she had a quarrel with my aunt, then she took us back to Thokoza.'

When he returned to Thokoza, Velabahleke went back to school and this time, he said, he attended all his classes, until he was in standard 3 (grade 5). That was when things started going wrong at home and he started to get into trouble at school, again for skipping classes.

The whole family were entrepreneurial and supplemented the incomes of Velabahleke's mother and father by trading – all the children were involved in selling things. The boys sold pictures at the stadium while Velabahleke's sister sold fruit, peanuts, eggs and ice cream. They also sold fried fish, which his mother made, at taverns in the evenings. The trouble at home started, Velabahleke said,

because his father 'liked women a lot' and while they thought their father was saving the money they all made, they found out that he had been spending it entertaining women. This made Velabahleke bitter and angry, and led to his leaving school, as he explains:

We would see that our friends were being taken care of by their parents and their parents also did good things for their children and seeing that made us lose hope. That made us to go out there and do things we were not supposed to do, when we should have focused on doing business, because our dad was not supportive and that's is how I quit school. I quit school in standard 3.

Anger at his father's betrayal of the family was no doubt one of the reasons for Velabahleke's losing interest in school. But it emerged during our discussions that a vicious beating by the entire school staff contributed significantly to his decision not to return to school.

On the day in question Velabahleke was called into the principal's office because he had started skipping classes again. All the teachers had gathered in the office and all carried a pipe, except the headmaster, who had a cane. (Velabahleke didn't specify what the pipes looked like, but based on other accounts it is likely that the teachers were using a length of hose.) Each teacher was given a chance to hit Velabahleke five times with his/her pipe. By the time they were done, Velabahleke said, he was numb; he couldn't feel a thing anymore. When I asked him how his mother had reacted to this beating, he explained that at the time she was working as a cleaner at the school, but 'there was not much she could do, she allowed the teachers to discipline me because she was there [at school] to do her job and not to interfere in the affairs between the teacher and pupils'. It was not her place to intervene. Her low status and position in the school hierarchy meant she would not have felt that she had the power to intervene, even if she had wanted to.

It's likely that the teachers had approached this beating with the intention of breaking Velabahleke's apparent defiance of their own and the school's authority. They seem to have believed that beating him would have led to his returning to school on a regular basis. It is hardly surprising that it had the opposite effect.

He was a violent disciplinarian and would exercise his power over the family ... whenever they stepped out of line

Velabahleke's father had tried the same thing. He was a violent disciplinarian and would exercise his power over the family, including his wife, whenever they stepped out of line. Velabahleke and his siblings were afraid of their father, who would beat them with a sjambok:

If, for example, we did not go to school, we knew that we would not be able to sleep at home that night. My mum would not intervene when my dad disciplines us because she knew why my dad would discipline us and she would be afraid of being hit as well. If we knew that we did something wrong, we knew that we would need to sleep in the toilet in the yard or somewhere in the other toilets in the township in the neighbourhood. Because he knew that if we did not sleep in the house, we slept in the toilet, and he would go look for us in the toilet in the yard. That is why we would opt to sleep in the toilets in the neighbourhood or in the broken-down cars that are in the township, because there he would not find us.

Neither of his parents, he said, was happy about his and his siblings' leaving school, but his father was unable to provide the financial support they needed, and his mother 'did not have the financial

muscle to put us through school'. His father tried to keep the boys in school, even taking them to a school that was closer to their home, but by this time it would seem that the boys had lost respect for him, did not accept his authority, and did not feel they could rely on him to provide for them.

By the time Velabahleke left school his older brother and sister had already quit when they were in standard 5 (grade 7), and his younger brother left school shortly after Velabahleke did. Leaving school as early as they did at least limited if not put a direct stop to any chance Velabahleke and his siblings might have had of following the kind of trajectory we like to consider as 'normal', that is, education followed by formal employment. Instead they would have had to use their business acumen to earn their living through trading, or would have to take menial, low-status jobs.⁶⁸ But given the political context in which Velabahleke was living, it was far more likely that he would be drawn into the political conflict.

Velabahleke said his father and mother would often fight at home, but he only found out when he was a bit older that his father's infidelity was the subject of these arguments. Often these arguments would become physical, and his father would beat their mother. Velabahleke said, 'We were very young at the time and we did not have the strength to stop them.'

By the time he returned from Estcourt, his mother had left their father and was living with their grandmother in a different part of the township. The children stayed with their mother and would only see their father on Friday afternoons when he bought them chips. His father did not buy the children clothes, and in speaking about this Velabahleke's sense of betrayal by his father came through clearly – he felt that his father's neglect and betrayal was visible to everyone. Not having the right clothes, said Velabahleke, made it 'visible that even in school we were not like other children'.

After leaving her husband, Velabahleke's mother also left, or lost, her job with the company. She did, however, have the work as a cleaner at the school. More importantly, she remained a good trader and was fond of gambling. She was lucky with her gambling and would often win. With her winnings she would buy stock for the children to sell. They continued to sell ice cream at the stadiums (Ellis Park and Orlando) and Russian sausages and fried fish at taverns. This income kept the family going. Velabahleke said that his father also liked gambling and when he wasn't spending his money on women, he was spending it on gambling. But he did not have his wife's good luck and lost more than he won.

Steeped in violence

Velabahleke's experience of violence was not limited to that which he witnessed at home and at school. In 1983, when he was 10 years old, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was established and organised resistance to apartheid increased significantly. The apartheid government reacted by implementing a state of emergency in some districts of the country. Activists and political leaders were arrested on a massive scale and a blackout placed on any information about 'unrest' or resistance. Townships such as Thokoza were overrun by police and soldiers.

Two years later a national state of emergency was declared and within a year over 30 000 activists had been detained.⁶⁹ The increase in anti-apartheid resistance and state repression had a significant impact on policing. Writing about this period, the Catholic Institute for International Relations described the shift in policing that came about at the time, saying,

[N]ow the hidden face of policing in the townships has also changed. New black police forces have replaced the security forces in many areas. Special constables (*kitskonstabels*) and

municipal police patrol on foot and are in the townships at all times. In some regions homeland police or vigilantes have taken over the role of controlling black communities. The wall of silence that surrounds police action means few outsiders know what is going on. Activists, fieldworkers and human rights lawyers claim that a brutal new reign of terror has been unleashed.⁹⁰

The *kitskonstabels* were young men recruited by the police, given rudimentary training over six weeks, and paid R400 a week to crush the resistance. Their introduction into communities was incendiary: they had no experience of policing, poor training, carried shotguns and had the same powers as the police. They quickly gained a reputation for extreme brutality.⁹¹ In addition, the detention of political leaders also fueled violence in many areas because the young activists who remained behind lacked direction and discipline, and reacted to repression with violence (see Chapter 4: Mosiuoa).

It was in this context that Velabahleke left school and became active as a trader, a gambler and later a gangster in Thokoza.

A criminal career

By the time he was 10 Velabahleke had his first gun. He stole it from a house down the road from where his grandmother lived. He found his second gun about two years later, when shops were being looted:

I stole my first gun from this other house, which was the third house from my grandmother's house. At that house they used to sell cold drinks, on the day that I went there after a soccer match, I saw a gun, but this gun was different from the guns we used because it was heavy, so I realized it was a real gun. I did not use it because I was still quite young then; I was between nine and 10 years old. My second gun I obtained when I was about 11 years old, still living at my grandmother's house. There was a time that furniture shops were burnt and there was toyi-toying; that is when I found a palm gun. I found this palm gun through the furniture shop vehicles being attacked because those vehicles were protected by security officers, so it was during those attacks that I found that gun.

Over time Velabahleke owned so many guns that he could not remember them all. He did remember having at various stages an AK-47, an R4 and R5 (all automatic firearms), a Luger and several other handguns. In the 1980s and 1990s, Velabahleke said, it was very easy to get a gun, 'if someone knew that you carried a gun and he was not going to use it because his relative who used to carry a gun is dead, or simply doesn't want it any more, he would easily give you that gun'.

Up to his point in our discussion Velabahleke had not expressed a single emotion about the experiences he had recounted.⁹² But when we started talking about when he got his first gun, I asked him if he had not been afraid at this time. In the beginning, he said, he was a little scared, but his life 'changed drastically' when he started carrying a gun. He was shot at a few times, and that (carrying a gun) stopped him being afraid. A gun might have made him feel safer, but it also increased the danger he faced. He had lots of enemies, he said – 'the first enemy would be the person who wants this very gun that you are carrying, but on the other hand I was carrying a gun because I needed to get money by using the gun. When you carry a gun your life is at risk.' Carrying a gun also meant that Velabahleke no longer had to rely only on his entrepreneurial skills to earn a living, but could do much better financially from robbery.

After leaving school when he was about 14 years old, Velabahleke's life became fast paced. Initially he started his own business. Now he no longer bought and sold things for the family kitty, he took care of himself. He showed great ingenuity: he stole a bicycle, turned it into a three-wheeler and attached a cool box to it. He used this to sell ice cream in the township and at stadiums. He also took to gambling, playing dice like his father. Velabahleke was a good businessman and said earning money for himself made life feel good:

I started seeing that life was getting better because I could buy clothes for myself and whatever else I desired I could buy for myself without asking. I knew that I would have money weekly and I would set aside money from the profit I made for food in the house and I would be left with some money for stock and whatever money would be left I would lay-by certain things. I would be able to go out and that is when I started seeing that life was becoming much better.

But around this time Velabahleke also started drinking and hanging out with groups of armed men. These were not formal alliances, with rules and a group identity like the gangs Peter was involved with, but rather a loose alignment of young men who would band together opportunistically – membership being determined only by owning a gun. As Velabahleke explains,

I would walk around with a lot of people, it was not official with what kind of people did I hang out with, because I was seen to be hanging out with different people all the times, with no names, but they carried guns. Whenever there was an opportunity to go make money I joined whichever gang.

The gangs he hung out with would mostly hijack vehicles doing deliveries in Thokoza, because they carried money. He said he would also rob shops 'far away from the township ... because we were certain that no one knew us there'. He also robbed shops and people in the street, but was 'afraid of breaking into houses'.

The political protests offered Velabahleke an opportunity to increase his takings,

because I was guaranteed to come back with something in hand for the family. When vehicles from furniture shops were being burnt, we would take some furniture, or if bakeries were being burnt, that is where we would get food. That is how I got into the toyi-toyi and also ended up getting the gun. During those days the policemen would raid each and every house and whenever we heard that the police would come looking for a gun, I would then take any gun I have and throw it in the dam that was near my township in order to hide it there.

Materialism and the need to look the part, particularly by dressing in expensive clothes, was part of being a 'gangster' in Thokoza. After hijacking vehicles making deliveries in Thokoza, Velabahleke and his accomplices would share the spoils and buy themselves expensive clothes. They could earn a few thousand rand in a couple of hours, and would spend it just as quickly. They were living a high-adrenalin, high-stakes lifestyle:

Gangsterism contributed a lot to a materialism way of life because we would perform the crime for two to three hours, and then get the money and divide it among ourselves and perhaps buy a pair of pants for around R800 and maybe a pair of shoes for around that amount too. It was easy to spend such amounts because it was money one did not work for. It was very important to look good, and have money so that if one had a girlfriend, one would

be able to give the girlfriend money. It was also important to look good so that it was visible that you were a gangster. So basically the only things the money we got was spent on were clothes and alcohol.

It was not long before Velabahleke was arrested for the first time. He was about 16 years old, but because life was so fast paced, so filled with adrenalin, Velabahleke could not remember exactly how old he had been at the time. He was in a tavern when some guys knocked over his and his friends' drinks. When one of his friends went outside to use the bathroom, a fight started and knives were pulled. Velabahleke grabbed a broken bottle and stabbed one of the men. Later, one of his friends told him that the man had died, and that he was wanted by the police. He went to the police station with a friend and the friend's father (his own father was not around to help) and told the police what had happened. He was incarcerated for some time, awaiting trial, but when the case got to court it was dismissed.

He was arrested again in 1993. It is clear how conditioned Velabahleke was to violence by then. This time he and a friend had bought brandy and Appetizer and gone to 'another township where Sotho people stay'. As they were walking along he heard someone calling his name. The person was dusty and covered in blood. At first he ignored him, irritated that someone so dirty would call out his name. But as the man got closer he saw it was his brother. He had just come from the hospital after having been badly beaten up. Velabahleke was enraged. He tracked down the man who had beaten his brother, stabbed him with a knife and beat him with bricks until he died. Velabahleke was arrested and the case went to court, where he claimed he had acted in self-defence and received a suspended sentence.

It was also important to look good so it was visible that you were a gangster

When Velabahleke came out of jail in the early 1990s he started trading again, but now there was 'a lot of fighting between the ANC [African National Congress] and the IFP [Inkatha Freedom Party]'. It was hard, he said, to stay on the East Rand and a lot of people were running away to return to the homelands. His father asked Velabahleke and his brother if they wanted to leave, but, he said,

Who would be left behind? The fighting was so bad that other people's houses were being taken over. Zulus were attacking and taking over other people's houses and were wanting to take over the township. The township had to be protected that the Zulus do not go in. That is how we ended up in the midst of the violence and also taking part.

This is what Velabahleke's day would be like during the war:

During the violence, it would happen that every morning when we wake up at around 3am or 2am, we had to take big guns in order to go and attack because the people we were fighting with would fight around those times.

Early in the morning when we started operating is when most taxis would also be starting their business of picking up commuters, so we would start attacking people that went to work. We would leave the area that we were at and go to the other area where we would be met half way [by] the other group who was fighting us along the way.

Seeing that most houses had no owners, those areas ... were called no-go areas. When commuters made their way to work, we would watch and see in which direction the people

involved in the fighting came from and which direction they were going. If they came from the left they were assumed to be making their way towards the right. The direction in which they came from was how you could determine whether they were an ANC or an IFP and that is how the shootings were targeted.

The Stability Unit joined in the violence and they fought alongside the IFP and that is why the Thokoza violence took time. The [32] Battalion Unit ended up helping us [the ANC] because they saw that we were being defeated because the IFP had the help of the Stability Unit. The 32/31 Battalion Unit were soldiers who wore brown uniforms from South Africa. The violence went on for a long time even though I cannot remember the year in which it ended, whether it was 1994 or 1995 or whether it was in another year. The violence ended towards the time when Bill Clinton was coming to Thokoza to the primary school [Maphanzela Primary] I was studying at.

It was days like these that photographers Greg Marinovich and João Silva describe so vividly in their book *The Bang Bang Club*.⁹³ During the war, there was no time for normal activities such as trading, but when people left their homes or their shops in fear they left behind their belongings, including valuable items such as fridges and stock. Velabahleke and his comrades would sell these items in the area he lived: 'That was the means of survival, both factions of the ANC and the IFP would do that.'

I asked Velabahleke why he had aligned himself with the ANC and not the IFP. He was Zulu speaking and his family came from KwaZulu-Natal, so the choice was not self-evident. Velabahleke's response shows that, like Kotsi and Hlupha, whose stories I will touch on in Chapter 6, his involvement in the violence in the early 1990s was opportunistic, and he was cynical about political affiliation:

I grew up in the township; I was not in a position to be a comrade or to be an IFP. I grew up during the apartheid era, where we knew that we were oppressed because of the white government. I did not at any point tell myself that I wanted to be an ANC member or that I wanted to have a membership card. I grew up knowing that one should fight for their rights so that we could eat, not that I wanted to be affiliated to a certain party and be ruled/dictated to by them [any party]. I was not focused on the struggle. I would only get involved if there was something for me to gain, if there was a toyi-toyi I would join it, or if we burned some things I did it knowing that there would be some form of benefit for me. I was able to move freely about territories due to not affiliating myself. People would often ask how is it that I don't get shot.

I asked Velabahleke about his reputation in Thokoza, about how people saw him. He said that initially some people were afraid of him while others were not. But as he became increasingly involved in the war the community's fear increased, because young men like himself would often be drunk or high, to keep their own stress at bay:

People started being afraid of me because I was ... a gangster and because I used to carry a gun around even though I had not done anything to them. The murders of people in the community added to the fear people had of me. The violence added to the community's fear, because the violence was often beyond control, and those involved in the violence were smoking drugs and others consuming alcohol due to stress. Us carrying big guns during the day also contributed to the fear of the community. I was aware that a lot of people were afraid of me.

Velabahleke's reference to stress here was only the second time during our interviews that he gave any indication of how he felt. By now his exposure to violence and war would have conditioned his responses. It is likely that he was living in an almost permanent state of fight or flight, with little time to consider his responses, plan his actions or think beyond the immediate. There is little doubt that he would have been suffering from the effects of continuous trauma.⁹⁴

The fear he generated among others would have given Velabahleke a sense of power, but also of alienation from his community. By this time Velabahleke said his gun had become part of the fabric of his very being, and so it remained, even when the political violence abated.

Although the war between the ANC and IFP was over by the late 1990s (1998/99), Velabahleke's life had changed very little. The post-war period was only different from wartime in that there was a decrease in the intensity of fighting. For men such as Velabahleke, one kind of battle gave way to another. This became clear through his detailed description of the day that he committed the crime that resulted in the sentence he was serving when I met him.

A few days before, he had been at home with some friends. It was dark when someone entered the yard. The man was carrying a gun and said that soldiers were after him. Velabahleke showed him a short cut, a way to avoid the soldiers, and then buried the man's .22 rifle in the yard. When the man came back to get his gun the next day Velabahleke was not at home, and he ended up taking the gun for himself.

A few days later Velabahleke and his brother were at home drinking beer when a group of friends came past and called to them to join them. It was August, towards the end of winter, when it is very dry in Gauteng. There was a lot

For men such as Velabahleke, one kind of battle gave way to another

of dust in the air. Velabahleke stopped to talk to a group of guys and girls he knew – members of a choir. He chatted and flirted with one of the girls, and then ran to catch up with his friends. The dust was thick in the air. He passed someone but couldn't see who it was. His group turned around and told him to make the man he had passed turn back. The only way he could think to attract the man's attention was to fire a shot. He fired at the man's feet, missed, and then fired a shot into the air. Velabahleke realised he knew the man because they had fought together in the past.

Behind the guy was gravel and the part we stood on was tarred so I could see him clearly.

I then saw an explosion of blood from the guy's body and I was frightened, the guy was still standing repeatedly saying, 'You are shooting at me.' We left the guy standing there, when we were about to turn at the corner, I saw the guy falling. Then in my mind, I kept asking myself what ended up happening because when I targeted the gun at the guy's feet it did not fire, but when I directed it towards the sky, it fired, I was just trying to make a sense of it all in my mind.

Velabahleke was unnerved; not by the death but because he did not understand how his former comrade could have been killed by his shot. But neither he nor any of his group went to the injured man's aid. They turned around and walked away. By this time Velabahleke was so conditioned by violence, so numbed to it, that he felt nothing for the man he had shot.

After this Velabahleke heard rumours that he was wanted by the police for the murder, and he was afraid. He considered consulting a *sangoma* to find out what would happen next – he wanted

someone to help him look into the future. For a few months he lived like a fugitive, never sleeping at home, fearful that the police would come to arrest him while he was sleeping. His account of this time was confused, his thoughts drifted into incoherence. Just before Christmas, between 21 and 23 December 1997, his luck ran out and he was arrested.

In describing the court case that followed, Velabahleke revealed both his confusion about the trial process and a curious interpretation of justice. The statements made in court did not match his recollection of events, and so he decided to plead not guilty. While he did not deny to me that he had shot at the man, or that his shot may have killed him, he believed that the evidence that was given was inaccurate and the statements made by the three state witnesses contradicted each other. In Velabahleke's account of the trial, his guilt or innocence came to be determined on the basis of two questions put to him by the judge. When Velabahleke answered the first question, he gave the court details that had not been given before (he does not tell me what those are). However, there seems to have been a breakdown in communication between him and his lawyer, as none of what Velabahleke said in answer to the questions was raised by his lawyer during the trial. Velabahleke felt victimised by the court, he did not believe his lawyer had represented him properly, and as he played through the events he became increasingly embittered and felt betrayed by his friends who had asked him to stop the man who had then died. In Velabahleke's interpretation of justice, the inaccuracies in the statements made by the witnesses meant that he should have been found not guilty – even though he knew he had committed the crime.

... he was using the language of the programmes to externalise the blame for his actions ...

As we came towards the end of our interviews, Velabahleke said he did believe that he 'deserved' to be incarcerated, and that 'while being in jail I have learned a lot of things which being outside in the community would not have taught me'. Like several of the men I spoke to, he started using language and a way of speaking that seemed to mirror the conversations that happen during the rehabilitation programmes he had participated in:

Even though in the beginning I felt that my sentence was heavy and long [51 years], the sentence is actually not long and heavy in comparison to the crime I committed and the life I took, because there is no measure for a person's life and no amount too high to bring that life lost back.

By being in jail I have undergone a lot of programmes which have taught me a lot, I have learned the value of life and how to make means other than just grabbing a gun and going to rob in order to make a living. Living in the township makes you vulnerable to a lot of things that one would not ordinarily do, such as peer pressure. As guys there is pressure to do things to make your friends happy, whereas one should be looking to do things that are appropriate for you or things that you need that make you happy.

It was difficult to know whether Velabahleke really meant this or whether he was merely repeating the language and concepts he had learned in the programmes in order to convince me that he was a good man, a changed person. What is clear is that he was using the language of the programmes to externalise the blame for his actions, at least to some extent. He liked to say it was 'peer pressure' that had led him astray.

Cycles of violence

In all aspects of Velabahleke's life, authority was exerted through the threat and use of violence – whether by teachers, his parents or the state. Thus, the normative barriers that Velabahleke might have had to using violence would have been eroded: the adults in his life resorted to violence to solve their conflicts; the state used violence to repress political opposition; and young men used violence to resist the state, and in this there were no rules, no structure and no accountability.

Reviewing Hannah Arendt's book *On violence*, Hugh Curtler writes 'once authority has deteriorated to the level of mere power (the threat of violence) the next move to actual violence is no longer a moral problem: it is a matter of survival'.⁹⁵ And so it was in Velabahleke's life.

Velabahleke also grew up with little adult supervision – he was largely left to fend for himself, and the adults in his life showed him from early on that they could not be relied upon for emotional, physical or financial support and protection.

Clinical psychologist Christopher Roach, who has worked extensively with both the victims and perpetrators of violence, including in prison, writes about how differently society responds to men such as Velabahleke when compared with how we might respond to war heroes. He offers two examples; the first one of a soldier coming back from war and committing a murder. In such a situation our response may be one of understanding – here is a good man clearly scarred by his exposure to war and violence. The other person in his example is a young man who comes out of prison and commits a murder. Our response is quite different. And yet, as Roach shows, this young man's exposure to violence in his community, and perhaps even in the prison he has come from, is not that different. More importantly, while soldiers leave the war zone, the victims of inner city violence do not, 'they remain at the scene of the crime, in the centre of their own "war zone"'. And chances of their receiving specialised trauma for treatment are slim.⁹⁶

Judith Herman's concept of complex PTSD was developed to explain the effect of continuous traumatic stress, of the kind described by the CSVr through its treatment of migrants and other inner city dwellers in Johannesburg.⁹⁷ The work done by the CSVr highlighted the difficulty of treating trauma when there are no safe spaces and when institutionalised racism has affected the victims' lives.

As a result of the kind of communities that people such as Velabahleke live in, characterised by high levels of violence and social disorganisation, they find it difficult if not impossible to solve the problems they experience. Structural conditions – political, economic and social forces – 'result in sustained disorder and the isolation of these communities from the economic mainstream. In some of these communities there are now multiple generations who have grown up in an environment that has many of the characteristics of what might be considered CTS [continuous traumatic stress]'.⁹⁸

The experience of this kind of trauma has an effect both on the body and on the mind, with symptoms ranging from insomnia to anxiety disorders, anger, irritability, loss of intimacy, distrust, an increase in risk-taking behaviours, and substance abuse.⁹⁹

Roach argues that for trauma survivors in 'crime hotspots' or where exposure to violence is an ongoing occurrence, trauma is more likely to present as anger and hostility (externalising) than anxiety (internalising). This is explained as an adaptive response; in a situation fraught with constant

danger your chances of survival are much higher if you respond with anger and hostility, rather than by withdrawing or freezing.

In an ideal world, understanding this should inform both the treatment of men such as Velabahleke and our response to them.

Chapter 4

Mosiuoa: ‘Cheese boy’

When I interviewed Mosiuoa^{100, 101} he was 46 years old and had been in prison for 13 years, serving a 36-year sentence for his involvement in the robbery of a cash-in-transit vehicle. He was six years older than Velabahleke, but looked much younger. He carried himself well and sported a striking gold tooth, a remnant of the fast life he led for a short while as a robber in the early 2000s.

Mosiuoa was soft spoken, and took his time to remember when he didn’t immediately recall a time or date. His manner was subdued during the first part of the first interview, and his answers clipped. This changed as he warmed to the conversation.

Family life

Mosiuoa was born in 1967 in Dobsonville, Soweto. He was the middle child of three children, all boys. When he was nine, in 1976, school students in Soweto took to the streets to demand an end to the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools. His older brother, who was 18 at the time, was actively involved in the uprisings, and that same year he and thousands of other young men left the country to join the ANC’s armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe.¹⁰² He would only return 15 years later, in 1991, when the ANC and other political organisations were unbanned.

Mosiuoa’s family was active in the resistance against apartheid. His family home was always full of people: activists, people from other provinces who had come to look for work in Johannesburg, even neighbours who had fallen on hard times. Mosiuoa said his father was generous and his parents opened their home to anyone in need. This also meant that stories about what was happening in exile, or updates on the political situation in South Africa for people coming from exile, were part of the daily conversations in the household. Mosiuoa grew up politically aware but, a young boy at the time, his grasp of political issues was rudimentary. News about his brother’s movements from Botswana to Tanzania filtered back to the family, and to Mosiuoa his life in exile sounded adventurous, exciting and noble – ‘they are fighting for a good cause’.

Because the house was always so full and his parents both worked full-time, there was not much opportunity for Mosiuoa to get individual attention from his parents. It is something he desperately sought. Once, when he was seven years old, the little boy watched his mother getting onto the bus. He followed her, making sure she didn’t see him. But it was busy and there were crowds of people. At the station he lost sight of her and took the wrong train. When he got off the train at one of the stations he managed to find a policeman and was taken back to the police station, where he must have spent the whole day. Naturally, his parents were frantic. Because he was so young at the

time he couldn't remember the incident in great detail, or how his parents found him, but eventually they did and Mosiuoa was returned home. Worried as they were and intent on preventing this from happening again, Mosiuoa was soundly beaten by his father. But neither the threat of a beating nor the fear of getting lost deterred him. He returned to the station again and again, sometimes after school to meet his mother, but she never seemed pleased to see him.

He was desperate to attract his mother's attention, to find some elusive intimacy with her. But this was almost impossible: his mother worked full-time and at any one moment there would be about 12 people in the house, including cousins who lived with the family and the others who passed through. While this meant that he didn't get much of a chance to spend individual time with his mother, it also meant that he had a lot of freedom: there was no one watching what he was doing; no one would even notice if he stayed out of school.

There were, however, times of family togetherness. At first when Mosiuoa spoke about his father he described him as generous – a good man and a caring father who would 'sometimes take us to movies or give us

money'. He took the family on outings to resorts in the Magaliesberg. But his father was also very strict and would often beat Mosiuoa with a cane, either because he had done something wrong, such as coming home late, or just because his father was angry. This continued, Mosiuoa said, until he was 21. After a beating he would leave home for a few days and stay with friends. He thought, 'Maybe it was this thing of giving me the hiding too much. Maybe it made me strong or stubborn.'

Maybe it was this thing of giving me the hiding too much. Maybe it made me strong or stubborn

As described in the previous chapter, the post-1976 period saw a massive increase in organised resistance to apartheid, and a strong and violent pushback by the state.¹⁰³ In 1979 Soweto was a dangerous place for a 12-year-old boy. While his mother did not have much time to spare for Mosiuoa, she was protective of him and didn't want him to follow his brother into exile. So he was sent to stay with his grandparents in Kagiso to avoid the political violence in Soweto, while his younger brother remained at home.

Kagiso is only 20 km away from Soweto, and during the late 1970s and early 1980s political resistance there was highly organised. The Kagiso Residents Organisation, led by trade unionist Joe Makgethlo, negotiated with the authorities to overcome community grievances, such as an increase in rents.¹⁰⁴ There were fewer protests than in Soweto, so it probably seemed like a safer place for the young boy.

Mosiuoa also said there was a second reason for his having been sent to Kagiso: there was no boy in that household, only girls – his grandfather's wife's granddaughters – and the home needed a boy. He would spend the week in Kagiso and on some weekends return home to Dobsonville. This second reason for his relocation to Kagiso was difficult for me to understand, although he often mentioned it in the course of the interviews. I asked him about it several times, and each time his answers were unclear. Perhaps having a boy in the household was important to his grandfather, but his inclusion in the household was not welcomed by all.

Mosiuoa's grandfather's wife, his second wife, resented the boy because he was the grandchild of her husband's first wife. This meant that in the household, despite being the only boy, Mosiuoa said, 'there was favouritism, you understand, there were those special grandchildren of her own. You see

I was her step-grandson. So usually it was difficult.’ The Sesotho words Mosiuoa uses to describe this time reflect deep emotions.

Speaking about living with his grandparents, Mosiuoa described how he had felt marginalised in the family. Every day the children would come home from school at lunchtime, and then go back to school afterwards. Often he would get home later than his cousins and there would be no food left for him – no one would have thought to keep any for him. In these cases he might have been given money to buy bread, but the shop was some distance away and he would be late getting back to school. For which he would be caned. He was learning that the only attention he seemed to draw from adults, at school or at home, was when he did something wrong.

Much of the time the only adult in the household was his step-grandmother. His grandfather worked as an ‘escort policeman’. It was his job to accompany people who were being ‘deported’ back to the homelands, and these trips took many days. When his grandfather was away, things were particularly bad for Mosiuoa. And when his grandfather was at home he was very strict. In the afternoons Mosiuoa would often play in the park with other children (he does not seem to use the word ‘friends’), but if he returned home late, after the gate had been locked at five or six o’clock, he would receive a beating. This happened frequently.

He could not remember whether he had started school before leaving for Kagiso or after, but said that he had started school when he was six. Whichever it was, when he moved to Kagiso to attend school there he had to start all over again because the school ‘did not know his background’, and the children were taught in isiXhosa rather than Sesotho. He was only in standard five (grade seven) when he left Kagiso nine years later, at the age of 21, having failed several grades. When I asked him about this he said it was not that he had found school difficult, but rather because of the ‘treatment’ he had received in Kagiso.

Mosiuoa was not the only boy in his class who was much older than he would have been had his schooling been uninterrupted. The problem, he said, was that they were taught in so many languages:

But you must remember, hey, I do not know what was going on. First time going to school you find that we were old in class, not only me, we were many. Because, we were repeating classes. So this thing of Afrikaans, we must do maths ... in our languages, e.g. isbalo. And the following grade it would be changed in Afrikaans or English. The school was a Xhosa school and that emphasis was put on that language. And you find that when maybe maths, you were going to use English, we had to start again. *Eish*, you see the other thing that made one to bunk school was this issue of being beaten when we did not understand.

The teachers seem to have interpreted the children’s inability to understand their lessons as insolence. They would often beat the students with a fan belt. This, he said, was when he started becoming ‘stubborn’.

Mosiuoa used the word ‘stubborn’ several times to describe his response to physical punishment, trying to explain his own behaviour – which he knew was unacceptable to his parents and the other adults who exerted authority over his life – and which he felt guilty about. Stubbornness is about being difficult, about resisting what others want you to do. Resisting authority meant embracing the behaviour that was forbidden, and rejecting the values and rules of dominance. Mosiuoa started stealing. At first he would steal from his grandparents – small amounts of money (like R1) to ‘satisfy’

his friends. But he would be caught out and forced to stay at home and clean the yard rather than going to school.

I asked Mosiuoa whether he had told his parents how unhappy he was in Kagiso, trying to understand why he had remained there for so many years. He said he had told his parents but they did not believe his stories, 'when my mother would be visiting here, they would wash us and give us clean clothes and maybe give us warm food. It would be like they are taking care of us. Only to find there was nothing like that.'

Since Mosiuoa's father was a teacher I was surprised that he was not more concerned about his son's failure at school. I asked Mosiuoa about this and he said that sometimes his parents would ask him to bring his books home and they would look at them over the weekend, but when I asked him whether there was any discussion about his schooling he said there was not, his parents were 'ignoring me too much'. It was as though he were invisible.

In his own eyes and in the eyes of his parents, Mosiuoa was troublesome and a failure, and there was not much he could do to change that. He did not and could not achieve at school, he was not a 'hero' like his brother who had gone into exile, and he could not live up to the expectations of being the 'man' in the household when his grandfather was away. He was reminded constantly of these shortcomings with beatings at school and at home. He was also left to his own devices for much of the time, unmonitored and unsupervised.

In his teens Mosiuoa started spending time with a friend who was a little older than he and who also lived in Kagiso. His friend came from a much more relaxed household, where 'they welcome each and every boy'. His friend's mother was a domestic worker for Indian families in Azaadville. On a Friday, when the families she worked for were attending mosque, Mosiuoa would go with his friend to their homes. His friend knew where the families hid their keys and they would go into the houses and take food, money and other things. Mosiuoa said he didn't realise at the time that they were breaking into houses and stealing; it didn't feel that way to him.

There was also a group of about four or five boys that he would hang around with who smoked and sniffed glue. Mosiuoa didn't get into taking drugs because, he said, 'I was not a person who was having something going into my mouth.' Together the group broke into shops and broke the foosball tables to get at the money inside. Mosiuoa said it was only when he was hungry that he would initiate the break-ins, but I suspect he was trying to present himself in a way that would be acceptable to me when he said this. He was also insistent that 'I was a little boy, I didn't have any idea', even though he was already in his late teens by the time he engaged in this behaviour. He maintained this claim to innocence and presented himself as being much younger than he was when he spoke about this time in his life. In his own eyes he was just a young boy who didn't know better.

There were some adults who played a positive role in Mosiuoa's life. He spoke of having been treated kindly by his aunt and uncle who lived in Laudium, and whom he would visit occasionally. He said sometimes he would skip school for up to a month and go and stay with them, making his own way there and not telling his grandparents. He said,

I remember one day they [his grandparents, I presume] thought I was lost. They went to a radio station to say they were looking for me, but no, I was just staying there in Laudium. You must remember Laudium is in Pretoria. I did not ask money to go there. I made plans.

His aunt, he said, knew that he was having a hard time in Kagiso and would call his mother to tell her, but his mother would tell her that Mosiuoa was lying.

There was another adult with whom he had been very close and whom he felt he could trust: a neighbour, who was his 'favourite person'. This man spoke to Mosiuoa, told him interesting stories, helped him solve his problems, and sometimes even intervened and spoke to his parents on his behalf when he had received a beating. But this man was in and out of prison, because he was a car thief. Sometimes he let Mosiuoa and his friends drive around in his cars, and he would buy Mosiuoa things like All Star *takkies*. So one of the few adults who boosted Mosiuoa's self-esteem – made him feel good about himself – was a criminal.

Mosiuoa's 'invisibility' and the rejection he experienced from both his parents and his grandparents; the harsh physical punishment he endured at home and at school; and the political context at the time, which was of resistance to authoritarianism, all contributed to his rejection of dominant values. Feeling marginalised and rejected would have driven him towards peer groups that had also cast aside these values, and he would have found in those peer groups a way of feeling better – of improving his self-esteem.¹⁰⁵

Throughout his childhood Mosiuoa had looked for warmth and intimacy, first by following his mother to work. But his attempts to be seen, to be rendered visible to his mother, were met with rejection and punishment. His antisocial behaviour can be seen both as a defiance of the beatings and as a means to attract attention, but this was met with further rejection and punishment. When he made friends and found camaraderie with a group of boys who were as marginalised as he, he was easily drawn into their criminality. Although his aunt and uncle in Laudium were supportive of him, it seems as though this came too late to prevent his antisocial behaviour. In addition, the one adult who offered him positive adult attention was a man who himself was a thief. The conditions could not have been more perfect for the start of a criminal career.¹⁰⁶

Politics and the making of a 'cheese boy'

By the time Mosiuoa left Kagiso he was about 19 or 20.¹⁰⁷ He had only grade seven, so obtaining formal employment was likely to be impossible for him. But it was also not necessary because he was quickly drawn into political activity, taking political instruction from some of his friends. In this he again found the camaraderie and the positive affirmation he was seeking. He was given tasks that required him to take a great deal of responsibility, including delivering guns to the activists they had been assigned to.

Now Mosiuoa's life was in constant danger. Not only was he at risk of being arrested and detained, he also lived only a few streets away from Joe Mamasela, an *askari* (someone who had been an ANC member but who had been 'turned' and worked for the security police). Mamasela worked for the C10 unit of the security police – a hit squad based at a farm named Vlakplaas that gained notoriety during the early 1990s. At the time Mosiuoa was active the hit squad was under the leadership of Eugene de Kock.¹⁰⁸ Mosiuoa said he often encountered Mamasela, who at the time was posing as an ANC member. A close friend of his fell victim to one of Mamasela's plots when he was given a hand grenade to throw at the mayor's house, but the hand grenade had been altered, he said, so that it exploded as soon as the pin was removed and killed Mosiuoa's friend.¹⁰⁹

He didn't stay in Soweto for long before he was pulled into fomenting political violence in Sebokeng, because, he said, 'in Sebokeng it was quiet. So we were there to instigate people that we must do violence. They must participate in this thing of political whatever ...'

While by this time there was a great deal of political violence in Kagiso and Soweto, it was quieter in Sebokeng. Mosiuoa had a political mission. 'We were doing this because of [what] we wanted. They had to release the comrades, Nelson Mandela and whatever, the other comrades, and the others must come back to the country, you see.' And with his mission came status.

This is how Mosiuoa recruited people in Sebokeng to burn councillors' houses:

We used to meet at the hall called Kopanong. And then they would choose roles. There will be those who will talk. And you will do this or that. It was easy. We will be then given tasks. I would go there and talk to the guys. 'Gents, I am so and so.' They knew what was going on. 'I am coming from a certain place. This is the situation and these and that need to happen.' And I will show them a gun that, 'I am well protected and connected. If you want guns, they will be organised there is this person who do this.' You tell them a story, when that happens they become interested, now they know that it is true, it is like this.

Initially the conflict in Sebokeng, at least from Mosiuoa's perspective, was between the ANC and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and between the ANC and people who were seen to be collaborators with the state, especially local government officials. But in 1990 'things were going out of hand'.¹¹⁰ The IFP had joined the fray and there was conflict between the ANC, the PAC, the IFP and the police. It was a full-scale war.

Mosiuoa was on the front line in these battles, throwing petrol bombs and attacking the buses that transported policemen. He now had a legitimate means to prove his worth and gain status despite not having much formal education

– by showing his capacity for violence. It is clear how his lack of education had undermined his sense of self-esteem when Mosiuoa says:

There were those who had finished matric and whatever. And they know to do things and you follow after them, and maybe also to show them that you have a say or have something to do, you have to use violence.

Some of the older ANC members had guns and taught Mosiuoa how to use them. He would be given a gun to practise shooting, and shoot at targets. The youngsters were organised into groups of six, and Mosiuoa was given the gun allocated to his group – because, he said, he had 'pluck'¹¹¹ and was a good fighter, and would usually be on the front line when there was conflict. At the time it was as easy for Mosiuoa to get a gun as it had been for Velabahleke. At the hostels, he said, you could buy any gun you wanted, from AK-47s to pistols.

In 1991 Mosiuoa's brother returned from exile, but he came back traumatised:

You see, *ai man*, people from exile are, *eish*, they're a problem, in fact, they are not sleeping well, you can see man, this person is not ok, even by looking at him. He is still in the bush ... they did not trust anything at all. They had not changed. Until around 1995, 1996, after voting and integrating with SANDF [the South African National Defence Force], you see

At the hostels ... you could buy any gun you wanted, from AK-47s to pistols

someone who liked the army. He is a soldier. When he was fresh coming from exile he came speaking Swahili or sometimes speaking German language, not knowing what's going on? You understand.

He was also not at all impressed by Mosiuoa and his comrades and at one point he confronted his brother, warning him to stop what he was doing. Mosiuoa couldn't understand why his brother said this, or why his brother was so disdainful of his political involvement.

That same year Mosiuoa returned from Sebokeng and then remained in Soweto. He was still fired up by his rudimentary political education and decided to look for a job on the mines in Roodepoort. He said he and his friends wanted to understand and experience for themselves what life as a miner was like, he wanted to 'experience what's going on there in [the] mines'. He was hired as a miner and managed to stick it out for a year. It seems his decision to get work at the mine was motivated by a combination of curiosity and political consciousness. On the one hand, he said that his friends had said, 'How can we be living near the mine and not know what exploitation goes on there?' On the other hand, 'we used to think that there was gold down there, we wanted to see gold, but only to find there were stones there'.

Mosiuoa found the work much harder than he had expected.

It was not okay for a person like me coming from the location and then ... I've seen that the way they designed it, they designed it for foreigners and then that time, remember it was Bantu provinces ... Bantustans and that thing. So we wanted to work there to take an experience what's going in the mine. The exploitation of the blacks there and then the underground, what's going on. And then we found out this is not the type of situation that a person can work there. You understand, because they're exploiting there.

He said that the miners behaved exactly like prisoners, only instead of gangs being formed around common interests they were formed around common identities: Zulus, Sothos, Xhosas, each forming their own interest group, and often there would be conflict between them. Mosiuoa stuck at this for a few months before he left the mines.

His mother had taught him and his younger brother to drive in 1985 when he was 17, and he got his licence in 1988. At this time his mother was a heavy-duty truck driver, one of the only female heavy-duty truck drivers who drove delivery trucks for a large supermarket chain. Being able to drive and having his licence meant that Mosiuoa could get a job driving taxis in Soweto. But it was not long before he was recruited by housebreakers, who would use him to transport the goods they stole back to Soweto in return for a television or some other appliance.

For more than eight years Mosiuoa drove taxis and earned an additional income through his association with the men who were breaking into houses; before armed conflict between rival taxi associations drove him out of the industry. The violence, he said, was caused by competition over routes. Mosiuoa carried a gun in his taxi and would defend his route just as the other drivers would defend theirs. The police became involved, he said, because policemen were also taxi drivers and wanted to protect their own interests. But after one of his close friends was killed, Mosiuoa felt that the violence had come too close to home. Taxi drivers were being shot in their own yards or abducted and killed by opponents pretending to be commuters:

Now the violence was worse, they were attacking people in their houses. They would make traps. They would take dustbins – you must remember that on Wednesday the Pickit people would come to take the rubbish, *neh*. Sometimes they would take the dustbin and put it on the gate. They knew that you would be coming with your car. You would be wondering why the dustbin is at the gate. You would come out to fetch it. It would be then that they start shooting at you. It was so easy ... You must remember that the toilets were in the back yard, when you would go out to pee at night, they are there in the yard to kill you.

Other times, they would make as though they were waiting for a taxi, but no. They killed my friend that way. He was from Roodepoort, with people going to Westgate. On the way there were three people who made as though they were waiting for a taxi. After I just overtook him he stopped to take them in, only to find that they were going to shoot him.

By this time Mosiuoa's mother had a licence to run a tavern, so he started to work as a barman in his mother's business. Both when he was driving taxis and when he was working in the shebeen his lifestyle 'was liquor and lots of girls'.

He said his life was about competing with other men, showing how well you could dress, driving a fancy car. Most of his comrades had by now moved up in the world – many of those people, he said, were either working for the government or were in parliament. Explaining how this led him into increasing criminality, Mosiuoa said it was because he could see how well they were doing financially and the status they had. 'It's the pressure of wanting nice things.' Mosiuoa had neither the education nor the struggle credentials to get him into a similar position.

In 2000 Mosiuoa's mother died. By this time his lifestyle had become a source of conflict between him and his elder brother. Mosiuoa still did not understand his brother's disdain for his involvement in the political violence in the early 1990s. His brother also seemed to resent the 'soft' life Mosiuoa had led compared to what he had gone through in exile. And while his brother was a hero, his mother exceptional and his father a respected activist and teacher, Mosiuoa was little more than a *tsotsi*. He was, however, brave. He had shown already that he had 'pluck', was not afraid and was willing to be in the front line of violence.

While working at the tavern he made friends who invited him to join them in hijacking cars. In about 2000 he started hijacking vehicles and then robbing foreigners – Senegalese and Nigerians in Hillbrow – anyone who was not South African. He said that the first time he robbed someone in the street he wanted to 'show people that it is easy man, I can take this person's money'. He said that he and his friends would target foreigners in Hillbrow who were laundering counterfeit money, using the same justifications that have become so familiar in the more recent attacks on foreigners – that the foreigners were criminals, were taking South African women and jobs, and were thus justifiable targets for attack:

Usually there was this thing that these people were coming here and were taking our sisters, and our jobs; and that they were having money, foreign currencies ... and it is true, they were having what they called 'black dollar'. They called it 'washer washer', others called it borsch. They would say if you come with 5 000 they could make it 10 000 for you or 20 000. When we asked them how, they would say they wash it with the other money. We then knew that they were having money. If we saw a white man coming to that room or a hotel with a suitcase then

we knew that he was having false money ... We were going to wait for them to come out of that hotel, when they [left] the hotel we were going to rob them.

Now his lifestyle became even more exaggerated. 'We were having money that time, and you must remember that I didn't work for this money, it's robbery money. If the police caught me with this money they'll take it, so I have to use it.' He would spend some of the money on things that would benefit the family – furniture for the house or other things the family needed. The rest he would spend on designer clothes and on cars. He was living fast and hard.

But Mosiuoa was conflicted about the use of violence. On the one hand he spoke of having only used his gun in robberies to threaten his victims, not to shoot. He also said that he never raped his female victims because 'that one was totally discredited'. The pleasure of 60 seconds or five minutes was 'useless – why you don't talk with the woman, the lady, then we have an agreement'. Yet he also needed to show the group how brave he was. 'I was that kind of person ... you underestimate me and I will show you.' This meant, 'If I say I'll shoot you, we'll shoot you.'

Going down

In early 2000 Mosiuoa was involved for a short but intense period in high-risk, high-return robberies, including the robbery of a jewellery store. He had not yet been arrested for any of his crimes. But his luck was soon to run out.

Mosiuoa began his description of the last robbery he was involved in, the hijacking of a cash-in-transit vehicle, by saying, 'Normally, we blacks, we normally believe in this thing of *sangomas* and whatever, and that he will give you *muti* and you will become stronger. But I didn't believe in that.' This was the second time in our conversations that Mosiuoa had given me a glimpse of how he had internalised racism, how he believed that black people were inferior to whites. The first was at the end of one of our discussions when he asked me what was wrong with black people and black families that so many young black men ended up in prison. Internalised racism was just another contributing factor to his low self-esteem, but also a way of externalising blame, a justification for his behaviour that meant he did not have to take personal responsibility, so it is not surprising that it would be raised as he explained the details of this, his final and most high-risk crime.

He described in great detail how the cash-in-transit heist was planned and executed – from the recruitment of one of the men who worked for the security company to the reconnaissance of the route the vehicle took; how he and his accomplices planned the attack and the theft of the vehicles they would need to execute the plan: three strong vehicles, like a Mercedes-Benz, a BMW and an Isuzu van, he said. They needed one vehicle to crash into the vehicle transporting the money, two getaway cars and another 'street car'.

Having done their reconnaissance they visited the *sangoma*. The *sangoma* would be able to tell them whether there was money to be had in this case. But, in this instance, the *sangoma* also said that he saw the police shooting at the hijackers. They asked the *sangoma* to make them invisible, or invincible. He agreed, but said that even if he did this, three people would 'go down'. Mosiuoa said they did not believe him, 'we know ourselves, we will fight them'.

The heist would take place in the North West near Vryburg. Mosiuoa would drive the van that would ram the cash-in-transit vehicle and push it off the road. They planned to then pour petrol over the

vehicle, as though they were going to set it alight. This would cause the guards to panic and open the van so they could take the money. They were expecting to take R6 million that day. Once they had access to the van some members of the group would take the money, while others would take the guns and put them in a second vehicle. The third vehicle would hold only unarmed members of the group, and two cars would be left on the scene to distract the police investigators. Speaking about his role, Mosiuoa seemed proud to have been brave enough to be the one to drive the vehicle that would crash into the armoured car while travelling at a speed of around 120 km/hour.

On the morning of the heist the group left Soweto and drove for many hours to reach the spot where they planned to intercept the cash-in-transit vehicle. What they did not know was that one of the members of the group had already informed the police about their plans. The police waited until Mosiuoa drove his van into the armoured vehicle. Then, before the robbery could be completed, police and army helicopters swooped overhead, firing at the team. There was not even time to start shooting back before four of the robbers had been shot and killed, and another six wounded. Only Mosiuoa and one other member of the team were unscathed.

Mosiuoa was bitter about his arrest, because, he said, he had intended this to be his last robbery. He had decided to turn his hand to business afterwards, leaving his criminal life behind him.

Criminal justice

Mosiuoa was arrested and held at the Marokweng police station for a few hours before being taken to Vryburg, where he was held for another three days. The group was then split, with some going to Kuruman prison and the others to Klerksdorp, because the police believed that together they would be able to escape. While in Vryburg Mosiuoa went on a hunger strike, demanding to be moved to a prison closer to his family. He was moved to Klerksdorp and stayed there for two months. He was transferred again to Kimberley for the trial, which lasted six months. In June 2001 he was sentenced to 71 years. He appealed and his sentence was revised to 51 years in July 2001. He appealed again, and his sentence was reduced again, this time to 36 years.

I asked him how he had managed to get his sentence reduced and he told me that the judge, in his first judgement, had said he ...

... had made a mistake to give us so much sentence. He wanted to prove to the community that the community mustn't do crime. He talk a lot of things there. So I say, ok, if he is talking like this let me try again ... they were sitting as a full bench and then they took over this thing, then ok, we'll give you 36, but in that 36 you'll bring 20 years straight.

Mosiuoa was not happy with this decision, but he was warned that he should not appeal again, or he would be given a life sentence. He reckoned that a life sentence would have been preferable, because a life sentence of 25 years means an effective 15 or even 13 years in prison. But ...

... I didn't want to try because I hear this, they say, no, if you are doing a life sentence you must not appeal, because no matter you maybe can take a thing in a store, a chocolate or whatever, you'll come back and then do life again. So I say, ok, now I will never appeal again. I'll stay with this 36 years.

Mosiuoa served his sentence at Mangaung Correctional Facility. He said that he had not asked to be at this facility, but was glad to be there because, he said, he had been rehabilitated: 'I have seen my rights and my wrongs. I can distinguish between the two.' He said this as though while committing

the robberies he had not known that what he was doing was wrong. Like Velabahleke, Mosiuoa easily slipped into the language of the rehabilitation programmes when he spoke about them. While in prison he completed his matric and enrolled to do a degree in business management with the University of South Africa (UNISA).

By the time I spoke to Mosiuoa, most of the friends he had before he went to prison were dead, having succumbed in one way or another to their hard and fast lifestyles. Mosiuoa was concerned that one of his children, for whom he had never been a present father, was following in his footsteps. His son was skipping school and had started taking drugs, but there was nothing he could do to intervene.

Making sense

Having followed this brief account of Mosiuoa's life, it is possible to see the combination of factors that influenced and informed his trajectory into crime.

Developmental criminologists would consider Mosiuoa a late-onset offender, his offending behaviour having only starting in his mid- to late teens. The two risk factors identified as informing the behaviour of these kinds of offenders, as shown through longitudinal research with offenders and non-offenders, are harsh punishment and a lack of popularity.¹¹³ An absence of parental monitoring and supervision while Mosiuoa was growing up increased the chance that he would become involved in anti-social behaviour,¹¹⁴ because it meant that there was no one to intervene, to discuss with him his behaviour or the effects of hanging out with an anti-social peer group. In addition, harsh punishment was a prevailing experience throughout Mosiuoa's life, and it led him to reject those who held a position of authority and used violence to assert their dominance and humiliate.

We cannot underestimate the role of harsh punishment in fostering defiance. Beatings such as those endured by Mosiuoa are experienced both as physical pain and on an emotional level. They result not only in anger and resistance to or rejection of the values promoted by the abuser (and representative of dominant values) but also in humiliation. It is humiliating to be hit, especially as a teenager. Mosiuoa said his father continued to cane him for transgressions until he was 21.

Psychiatrist James Gilligan proposes a theory of violence in which self-esteem and threats to self-esteem are central. His theory is based on many years of clinical experience working in prisons with violent offenders. He argues that the loss of self-esteem is experienced subjectively as the death of the self. People will sacrifice anything to prevent the death and disintegration of their individual or group identity. Gilligan argues that there are three preconditions for violence, of which the first is shame. If the cause of that shame is something small and apparently insignificant, the shame is doubled. He says often men who feel this sense of shame hide it behind machismo, bravado. Behind this bravado, he says, "is a person who feels vulnerable not just to "loss of face" but to the total loss of honor, prestige, respect, and status – the disintegration of identity, especially their adult, masculine, heterosexual identity, their selfhood, personhood, rationality and sanity".¹¹⁵

Applying this to Mosiuoa's life, one can see how the political context in the early 1990s provided him with the opportunity, albeit briefly, to demonstrate his bravery and strength, to find a sense of worth, and to realise his masculinity. But his brother's disapproval would have been acutely painful, and shameful, to Mosiuoa. Not having an education or any special standing in the liberation movement meant that he stood by while he watched other men who had fought alongside him in Sebokeng moving into jobs that carried tremendous social acceptability and status. He could find relief from

this further humiliation among groups of men who found themselves in a similar situation, who sought to realise their need for status through materialism – and constructed elaborate justifications for taking what they needed from a society that had rejected them.

Criminologists and psychologists have been theorising about the links between self-esteem and delinquency for many years, and there is a vast literature on the subject.¹¹⁶ Among psychologists there is controversy and much debate about the nature of this relationship. On the one hand there are those who have sought to prove that people with low self-esteem are more likely than others to behave aggressively or anti-socially.¹¹⁷ Others have challenged these findings, showing through their own research that no such link exists, or arguing that the opposite is true – unreasonably high self-esteem contributes to crime and aggression.¹¹⁸ Responding to this controversy, Donnellan et al. undertook three studies to investigate whether and how self-esteem relates to aggressive or anti-social behaviour.¹¹⁹ In all three studies they found a strong correlation between low self-esteem and delinquency at different ages and among different nationalities. They also found that children who had low self-esteem at age 11 were more likely than others to be aggressive two years later; in other words, low self-esteem may predict future aggression.

There are several ways in which self-esteem is thought to be related to delinquency. One hypothesis holds that delinquent behaviour leads to low self-esteem because the individuals see themselves through the eyes of those who view their behaviour negatively; and they themselves understand that their behaviour violates social norms. Another hypothesis holds that when teenagers' self-esteem comes under pressure because of unmet expectations of their behaviour and performance at home and at school, peer groups that promote anti-social behaviour offer them a way to improve their self-esteem (by being accepted by these peer groups):

[A] build up of negative feelings in teenagers brought about by continued failure to meet the standards expected of them in their dominant membership groups impels them to seek the company of teenage groups where these standards are rejected and delinquent behaviour is admired. By endorsing delinquent values and living up to them through the commission of delinquent acts, the teenager gains the status that is denied in other settings, and consequently self-esteem is restored.¹²⁰

So teenagers such as Mosiuoa, who find themselves disdained and rejected, may find a way to feel better about themselves not only by kicking against the society that has shunned them but also by finding acceptance and status among their peer group. While Bynner et al. could not prove a causal relationship between low self-esteem and delinquency, they were able to show a positive correlation between delinquency and an improvement in self-esteem – in other words, the affirmation these teenagers were able to gain from delinquent peers improved their self-esteem.

Turning to South Africa, David Bruce, in offering a critique of the national crime prevention strategy, argued that low self-esteem fuelled by internalised racism was likely to be one of the factors driving high levels of inter-personal violence.¹²¹

Low self-esteem would have been one of the factors that drove Mosiuoa towards peer groups within which he would have had the means to improve his self-esteem. In these groups bravery, risk-taking and violence were a sign of masculinity. Mosiuoa's involvement in political violence would have lowered the barriers to violence and violent crime, and introduced him to a peer group whose members were also unable to realise their status needs through non-criminal means.

Afterword

Each day that we went to the correctional facility to interview men for this study my research assistants and I followed a routine. Part of the routine was taking lunch with the prison psychologist in the staff cafeteria. The day after completing the interviews with Mosiuoa, the psychologist told us that the previous day, as he was walking through the grounds of the facility, he heard someone calling his name. He turned around and saw it was Mosiuoa, whom he knew well. Mosiuoa seemed excited and happy, and told the psychologist that he felt like a weight had lifted from his shoulders after he had shared his story with us. Although I was not able to see Mosiuoa again, it seemed to me that his insight came when he told me that his parents had not believed him when he told them how badly he was treated in Kagiso. This made him feel less guilty, less of a failure.

Chapter 5

Zibonele: 27 mielies

Of the men interviewed for this study, seven grew up or lived in rural areas. The factors influencing their criminal trajectories and the nature of their crimes differed from those affecting the men who spent most of their lives in urban areas (this is discussed in more detail in the following chapter). Zibonele was one of the men who grew up on a farm in the Free State, where he spent his childhood and much of his adult life before his incarceration.

He was 55 when I interviewed him at Mangaung Correctional Facility in April 2013. He could speak and understand Afrikaans, but said he would prefer to speak his home language, Sesotho, during the interview. However, when I asked questions in Afrikaans or English, he responded in Afrikaans. Although he could speak Afrikaans well enough to understand my questions, it seemed the language prevented him from expressing himself as clearly and as fully as he might in his home language.

It was as important for me to establish a mutually respectful relationship with Zibonele as it was in all the interviews. But this seemed much more difficult with older men who had lived their lives in rural areas or grown up as the children of farm labourers than it was with men who had lived their lives in urban townships and who were younger or around the same age as I was. The racism that men such as Zibonele had been subjected to their whole lives, the dominance of whiteness and their internalisation of blackness as inferior,¹²² meant that as a white woman I was treated with deference – like a madam (or employer). Initially the power relationship in the interview room was deeply skewed and I had to work consciously and carefully to make Zibonele feel comfortable. This prevented me from interrupting him to ask him to speak Sesotho, because whichever way I phrased the offer for him to speak in his home language it felt as though I would be telling him that he didn't speak Afrikaans well enough, and I didn't want to do that. We struggled through the first interview in this way, while I tried to establish trust between us and overcome our mutual racist conditioning so that we could speak to each other more easily.

For the second interview, Pule Pitilele¹²³ and I agreed in advance that he would lead the discussion, translating for me as we went along, so Zibonele could feel more comfortable and speak Sesotho without having to be asked. But this only helped a little, because, as we came to appreciate, Zibonele was not comfortable with any language and struggled to express himself even in Sesotho.

The result is that this narrative is less textured, less detailed, than those shared by men who were not constrained by language in the same way. Despite this, I have chosen to include Zibonele's story because of the nature of the crimes he committed and for which he was incarcerated when

I met him. He was serving an 80-year sentence for having abducted, raped and strangled three girls aged eight, 12 and 19 over a period of a few months. These are the almost archetypal crimes that attract headlines, the crimes that make us ask ourselves, ‘What kind of person does this?’ They are also the type of crimes that have led South Africa to focus policy on the victims, and on protecting women and children from violence. So narrating a life that leads to this kind of crime, and showing how institutionalised and pervasive abuse and racism lead to this outcome, seemed to be an important contribution this study could make. I have also included Zibonele’s story because, although we saw a glimpse of the effect of racism on Mosiuoa’s sense of self – his belief that black is bad or inferior, that there is ‘something wrong with blacks’ because black men are incarcerated at such a high rate – Mosiuoa never speaks about having interacted with ‘white’ society, and thus we cannot see the effects of direct racism on the developing self, as we do here.

Rude beginnings

Zibonele was his parents’ first son, born on a farm outside Kroonstad in the Free State in 1958, only eight years after the then-thriving town of Kroonstad had established what would become the largest maize mill in the world, producing much of the *mealie meal* that is the staple diet of the majority of South Africans.¹²⁴

Kroonstad is a medium-sized town in the north-west Free State that lies at the centre of the vast maize, wheat and cattle farms surrounding it. For many years these farms drove the town’s successful economy. Stretching from Kroonstad, north-east to the border of Gauteng, is the area where most of the country’s wheat is produced,¹²⁵ and the town lies in the province that has contributed over 1 million tonnes of maize a year to the national harvest since the mid-1980s, some 34% of the country’s maize yield.¹²⁶ The farms here are vast expanses of flat land. Waving maize extends for miles to the horizon. The significance of this to Zibonele’s story will become clear.

We do not know much about the farm where Zibonele was born, and where his parents lived and worked, because he was only two when his father left his mother for another woman. Not long after this his mother became involved with another man and sent Zibonele and his older sister to live with their uncle and grandmother. It is likely that Zibonele’s infancy was a difficult time for his mother, especially since she seemed to have had a fraught relationship with his father. This would have had an effect on the growing baby and may account for his poor command of language and his lack of an emotional vocabulary. Without a warm, interactive and communicative relationship with his mother in his infancy he would not have learnt to control his emotions.

Zibonele didn’t see his mother much after he was two. She lived on a different farm, and would come and visit the family from time to time. Farms in the Free State are separated by great distances, and there is little or no public transport, so it would have been difficult for his mother to make the trip to see the children. In his new home, Zibonele had to compete for attention with his sister and their seven cousins.

Zibonele only started school when he was about 11 years old, and stayed in school for three years before he left when he was 14 to work on the farm. This was not unusual for the children of farm workers – Zibonele’s mother had not had any schooling and he did not know whether his father had been educated. Starting work young was the experience of other men I interviewed who had grown up on farms, and several who had not.

Zibonele's day started very early. He had to milk the cows in the morning before going to school; again in the afternoon after school; and at the weekend. He does not have good memories of school. What he does remember is being bullied frequently by a boy who was about his age. Every afternoon the boy would confront Zibonele and demand food from him. If he did not have anything to give him, the boy would fight him. Zibonele himself quickly learned that to survive this he would have to bully others:

I would for instance choose the one I think that I can beat and request them to bring me something, you understand. If they don't, that person would be beaten. It was the same with this guy. He wanted to do the same thing to me, even though we were the same age. Our fight with this chap would not end at school. But whenever we would meet outside of school premises we would fight.

Bullying and fighting among the boys were rife at the school. When he was 12 years old Zibonele remembers being confronted by an older boy who wanted to beat him. The two children engaged in a vicious fight, in which Zibonele hurt the boy, badly. The teachers responded in kind, lashing Zibonele seven times for having injured his peer.

His uncle tried to intervene, telling Zibonele he should not fight, and he spoke to the family of the boy Zibonele clashed with, but it did not change anything. Although Zibonele did not have the emotional language to explain how the bullying affected him, its significance is clear in that these are his overriding memories of school.

After three years of bullying and being bullied, by teachers and pupils alike, Zibonele left school, not because of the bullying but because of money. Despite being surrounded by tremendous wealth, the family was extremely poor. Twelve people could not live off his uncle's meagre wages and his grandmother's pension. By the time he was 14 Zibonele needed to contribute to the family income.

He told me that after a year of having worked on the farm he committed his first crime.

It was 1973, he was 15, and he was clearing ground on the farm, weeding and working the land. On this particular day he and the other men and boys made a fire to cook some mielies for their lunch. They arranged the 27 mielies on the fire and waited for them to cook. Zibonele remembers the number of mielies as though it were burned into his brain. While they were roasting the maize the farmer and his wife found them at the fire and were outraged that they had taken so many mielies – they had taken the food from his belly, the farmer said. He was so angered by their excess that he took Zibonele (and probably his co-workers too) to the police station and charged them with theft. Zibonele's punishment was four lashes.

The lash, or corporal punishment, was a common form of punishment in South Africa from the earliest colonial times, when it was reserved for petty crimes. It was also a form of punishment embraced by the apartheid government, and frequently the choice of punishment for young petty offenders.¹²⁷ Several of the men interviewed for this study received a caning as punishment for their first crimes.

Zibonele would have been one of the around 34 000 young offenders who were to receive this form of corporal punishment in the early 1970s.¹²⁸ By 1982 over 40 000 young men and boys were caned each year both in prison and at police stations, and this number remained relatively constant until the early 1990s.¹²⁹ While none of the men I interviewed spoke in any detail about the canings

they had received, and in fact spoke of them rather dismissively, the pain and humiliation of the experience should not be underestimated.

In his book about his experiences in prison in the 1950s, Albie Sachs writes vividly about hearing the screams of young boys as they were being caned. He also recalled how these beatings were often so severe that the cane would be left in pieces. Sachs gives a particularly emotive account, in which the humiliation – the laughter of the prison officials who administered the lashes – was as disturbing to him as the screams of the young men being punished.¹³⁰ Of course, not all canings would have been administered as cruelly as this, and in some cases the police officers who were required to cane young offenders would have felt deep discomfort with the process.

My colleague, Johan Burger, recalls having witnessed at least two canings at a police station as a young police officer. Here he describes how the punishment would have been administered, as required by the detailed standing orders issued to police officers:

Johan: A *flennielap* [flannel cloth] had to be placed on the person's back, and below the buttocks so that only the buttocks were exposed. The person who administered the 'cuts' (as they were called in English) then had to be careful to only hit the exposed part of the buttocks. Two police members had to be present, one who administered the lashes and a witness. The second person was also there to help if the person receiving the lashes had to be held down. That person had to remain still. They would lie on a narrow bench while the cuts were being administered, so they didn't really pose much of a threat, because it was a narrow bench and it would be difficult to move or manoeuvre ...

I seem to remember, though I may be wrong, that if there was excessive bleeding as a result of the lashes the person had to be taken to see the district surgeon.

CG: I imagine that this must have been very humiliating for the person receiving the lashes.

Johan: Yes, I imagine it was. It was also sometimes very difficult for the policeman. Remember that they did not know the convicted person, and had no interest in the case, they just received a warrant from the court and had to carry out the sentence, which said that so many lashes had to be administered on such and such a date. I remember one case very vividly. It was a young man, and I remember thinking that it looked very painful.

CG: Was he naked?

Johan: His buttocks would be naked, he would have to pull down his pants before the lashes were administered. Sometimes there would be blood. I remember in this instance that there was some blood. It was difficult for me to see it, because I remember getting cuts at school and it was painful, but not this painful ... [after a few strokes] the buttocks would become swollen and if after two or three lashes the cane fell on the same place it had fallen before, it would break the skin. Of course it's hugely humiliating, and the person is helpless.¹³¹

Camaraderie between Zibonele and his co-workers who likely also received this punishment may have minimised the humiliation of the experience. However, their treatment – as though they were naughty children – also has to be understood as a racial attack. The farmer's reaction to the 'theft' of the mielies was grossly disproportionate to the act of having cooked more mielies than he felt was reasonable. Underlying his reaction was his, possibly even subconscious, need to assert dominance over the men and boys who worked for him, to put them in their place and protect his property.

The effect of racist conditioning on Zibonele's sense of self, which manifested as an assumption of his own 'badness' and inferiority, became evident when I asked him how he would describe the farmer: 'He was a good man, but here and there, you know if you steal another man's stuff ...' – implying that the farmer's reaction was not only understandable but justifiable. He said the farmer had said, 'It would have been ok if you had taken six or seven mielies, but 27 is too many.' Zibonele told us this as though he agreed with the farmer.

The bullying that Zibonele had experienced at school was mirrored on the farm. After describing the incident above, I asked him how the farmer had treated him when he was younger and was working on the farm – before he left school. He said that if he or the other youngsters on the farm did something wrong the farmer would get very angry, and sometimes hit them with a whip or sjambok. But, said Zibonele, he would have 'asked for it' and the farmer needed 'to teach them'. He also said that sometimes the farmer was good to them.

During the second interview, we came back to this again. This time Zibonele laughed when we asked him how he could say the farmer was a good man, while at the same time saying he would walk around with a whip. He said that although the farmer was good, he would beat you, 'to show you that you were now working, not like when you were at school ... we would be playful and forget that we had taken a working contract, and we had to be serious. He would then beat us ... It was not a whipping per se, it was disciplining. That was good. He would beat just twice or so and when we would cry he would stop.' We asked Zibonele if he felt angry when he was beaten, and he said, 'No, I don't recall being angry with him.'

But these beatings didn't deter Zibonele from stealing again from the farmer. In 1977 he broke into the farmer's house and stole some clothes. This time the farmer did not react as he had done previously. Instead he let Zibonele keep the clothes – reinforcing perhaps even more powerfully his dominance and Zibonele's 'inferiority'.

At about this time, when Zibonele was 19, he met his wife, and they married two years later. Together Zibonele and his wife had four children, but only two lived beyond six months. Their first child was born in 1981, and died in the same year. The second, a daughter, was born two years later and is now an adult. The third was born in 1988 and died six months later, and their last child, a little boy, was born in 1994. Zibonele didn't know why his children had died, just that they had been sick. However, their deaths give us some insight into the harshness of the circumstances in which the family was living. In the 1970s and 1980s most infant deaths, at least among coloureds (for whom data were available), were caused by gastro-enteritis, pneumonia, malnutrition and measles.¹³² From the limited data available, we know that in this period black babies were dying at over nine times the rate of white babies, because of poor health care and poor living conditions.

Infant mortality in apartheid South Africa

In 1980 the white infant mortality rate in South Africa was 13.5 per 1 000 live births (comparable to the rate in the United Kingdom at the time, which was 12 per 1 000)¹³³ and the coloured infant mortality rate 55 per 1 000.¹³⁴ There were no data for the black infant mortality rate nationally for this period, as data from the homelands were either not kept or

not made available for analysis. What we do know from census data in 1980 is that the black infant mortality rate in certain urban areas varied between 85.9 per 1 000 and 124.4 per 1 000, while data for rural Transkei, collected through an epidemiological study, found the rate there to be 130 per 1 000. The authors of a 1985 article on the infant mortality rate in South Africa noted that in the 13 years from 1970 to 1983, the drop in the coloured infant mortality from 134.8 per 1 000 to 50.7 per 1 000 was ascribed to an improvement in health care, particularly in urban areas.¹³⁵

Despite being married, Zibonele found it hard to get along with anyone as an adult, just as he had found it difficult to make friends as a child. When he wasn't working he liked to play dice with other men, and place bets on horse races. But often the games of dice would end in a fight, mostly about respect. Zibonele would respond with violence whenever he felt that he had been belittled. When that happened, he said, he 'would be taken by emotions, I don't know where it comes from ... I became angry. Even just a small thing would make me angry. I am that kind of person. I like things to go my way. If things do not go my way I feel like someone's despising me. That someone is undermining me.' These fights would often happen when he lost at a game of dice, and then 'it will be knife upon knife'.

Zibonele also lost his temper and became violent with his wife and his girlfriend (of which he had several while he was married). His wife never liked his infidelity but he believed it was his right to have other sexual partners, and once in a relationship he saw his girlfriends as his possessions. A girlfriend's infidelity was enough to drive Zibonele into a rage. On one occasion he beat her so badly that he was convicted of assault. This is how he described what happened:

Zibonele: She was a bit naughty. She was one of these ladies who you have to stop from making mistakes. At the time I was still married, and I wanted to show her that the things she was doing were not right – even if I was married to another woman she still needed to respect me. She needed to know that I would beat her even though I am still married to my wife.

PP: How did you beat her?

Zibonele: I kicked her. *Ei!* ... You see she had other men on the side, and here I was spending money on her, so that meant I was losing ... If you are a married man you check these things, and I saw her having other men and I asked her to stop.

PP: When you say you were losing, do you mean you were giving her money?

Zibonele: Yes, even when I was coming from playing dice I would give her something, and sometimes at the end of the month I would steal a bit from my family's income and give her something. But, on the other hand I was losing [because she was seeing other men].

Zibonele believed that by giving her money he was entitled to her exclusive sexual attention; he had bought her fidelity. When she had sex with other men, he believed she was not only disrespecting him but also wasted his investment. Speaking of how he would be overcome by his emotions in situations such as this, Zibonele said, 'At times like this my emotions are sometimes in control. When they are up [his emotions] I find that I have done bad things ... my emotions control me badly.'

We get a glimpse into how Zibonele felt about women when, right at the end of our interviews, he spoke about what he had learned in prison, saying, 'You need to, when you see a female person you need not to see a chicken, or a cow, but you must see another person ... you must see a human being.' He said this as though it was a new insight, as though women's humanity was not something he had thought of before. Perhaps this way of seeing women, as no better than animals, can be understood as a projection of his own loss of humanity, which was stripped from him when he was bullied, and when he bullied other boys at school, a process that was repeated and reinforced by the farmer. He transferred this feeling of the loss of his humanity onto women, who had even lower social status than he did.

One way to understand Zibonele's loss of control over his emotions is through the lens of psychoanalytic theory. Debra Kaminer, a clinical psychologist who treats patients suffering from trauma and studies trauma and its effects, explains that when a child is beaten or hurt repeatedly, as Zibonele was, they learn not to show their feelings of anger and hurt and to hide their vulnerability. They cannot show their vulnerability to the adult who is abusing them because of the fear that it will lead to even greater abuse. And because they are physically smaller and the adult is much more powerful they also cannot show their anger. In Zibonele's case this was exaggerated because often the beating came not only from an adult but from a white adult, with whom the power differential would have been even greater. In order to deal with their emotions the hurt children compartmentalise their feelings. The feelings don't go away altogether – they are put away and remain unconscious. In this way the children protect themselves. But when the feelings of rage and vulnerability that are held compartmentalised and hidden from the conscious mind are triggered, they can take over the consciousness entirely. At this point the person won't be able to control their emotions or their actions, and may not even remember exactly what happened.¹³⁶

End game

In 1997 Zibonele and his family left the farm they had been living on. They were among the thousands of farm workers in the Free State, and elsewhere, who were forced to move into townships after the passing of the Extension of Security of Tenure Act.¹³⁷ Because farmers feared the consequences of having to provide land and houses for their workers and their families, they sent them to live in nearby towns, from where they would fetch the workers they needed every day. But since the distances are so great between farms and towns this move also meant that farmers increased mechanisation and could make do with far fewer workers.¹³⁸ There was also another reason for the farmer to evict Zibonele: he had been accused, wrongfully, he insists, of raping a woman on a nearby farm. He claims the false accusation was made by people with whom he had played dice, and who bore a grudge against him. The accusation led to Zibonele's arrest, and he spent five months in prison awaiting trial, but he was not convicted. When he returned to the farm after the trial the farmer told him he was no longer allowed to live there and he and his family had to move to the town.

Zibonele was lucky, unlike many other farm workers who moved to the towns and then struggled to make a living. He was able to get a job driving taxis because he had a licence and had learned to drive on the farm. He and his family moved to an informal settlement, now called Snake Park, outside Kroonstad, where many others who had worked on the farms were living.

It was while living there, in 1997, that Zibonele committed the crimes for which he was incarcerated. As we approached this point in the story he became increasingly uncomfortable. Like several of the men I interviewed, he danced around trying to avoid having to speak about the crimes he had committed. Although he reiterated his guilt, over and over, saying that he did abduct, rape and strangle the girls, he seemed baffled by his actions. He did not know why he had done this, and did not want to talk about the details of his crimes. When I asked him what happened on the day that he committed the offence, he said, 'Ai, I don't know any more. For what, I don't know.'

It was harder to see the breakdown of his sentences, the loss of coherence in his account, than it was in some of the other interviews with offenders, because often his sentences were difficult to follow anyway. But when he came to the rapes he stopped making sense at all, turning in circles, variously admitting guilt and lamenting his lack of understanding of what had happened and why. Eventually he offered the ages of the two children and the teenager: 12, eight and 19. He said the crimes happened on different days and that the children were not related – all in response to particular questions. He was driving his taxi when he saw one child and gave her a lift. Then he took her out of town and raped her before strangling her with a rope and leaving her body there.

He said that after the first rape and murder he had an overwhelming compulsion to do it again. And again. He was afraid that someone would find out what he had done. He told us that what he did was 'ugly', and it was not right. He expressed self-hatred, as he reiterated that he had no excuse.

That was just a child. It was just a child. The thing that made me to take her to where I arrived and rape her and killed her ... I do not know what was the thing that made me end up raping that child of eight years. I committed it, that I would not hide. I do not know what happened, it is just a matter that it appears that I committed it and I do not understand what came over me.

According to Kaminer, however, 'this story is a perfect illustration of dissociation. Clearly his actions cause him a sense of dissonance and unease, they do not feel like part of him, unlike more psychopathic characters who feel no remorse or negative emotions about their actions.'¹³⁹

After he was arrested in 1999, the details of which Zibonele did not share, he was held at the Kroonstad correctional facility before being transferred to Grootvlei. After being sentenced he was sent to Mangaung Correctional Facility, which is where I met him.

The making of a serial rapist

In the last two decades, theories of violence have become increasingly concerned with the relationship between early childhood experiences, particularly the nature of the bond between a mother and her infant, and aggression and violence.¹⁴⁰ There was some discussion of this in Peter and Ryan's stories, but in Zibonele's story we see the effects of what Mark Tomlinson refers to as 'toxic poverty' particularly clearly.¹⁴¹ It is theorised that this primary relationship between a caregiver (usually a mother) and an infant is so important because this is how children learn, through being nurtured, to control their emotions, such that their emotions do not overcome them. This is also a time when our environment and the kind of care we receive have an impact on our genes in a way that can have a life-long effect on how we respond to stressful situations and how we relate to others.¹⁴²

The reason for this is that the kind of care we get as infants determines how our bodies and brains respond to stress. The effect of warmth and affection on the brain and body was first observed in

rats. Rat pups that were often licked and groomed by their mothers were found to grow up to be more resilient to stress than pups that were not licked and groomed as frequently. The physical attention had an effect on the pups' bodies' ability to chemically regulate stress, to calm down after they had been stressed. But it took much longer for pups that had not received that affection to reduce their adrenalin levels. The research done on rats determined that the body's response to stress was genetically set a few days after birth – so that rats that had lacked affection had a permanently exaggerated response to stress. The same effect has been found in humans. Children who experienced the loss of a parent, or who were maltreated and didn't have sufficient care, were also found to have exaggerated responses to stress.¹⁴³ Thus Zibonele's response to stress, even to subconscious stressors, was likely to have been exaggerated because of adverse conditions during his infancy and early childhood. As we will see, however, this was only one of several experiences that would set his life on the path towards violence.

In recent years criminologists, educational psychologists and sociologists have studied the extent and effects of bullying, as well as the characteristics of bullies and their victims, particularly in developed countries, where it has been identified as a major problem.¹⁴⁴ Bullying instils fear in children who are subjected to it, and unsurprisingly is associated with anxiety and depression.¹⁴⁵ Kumpulainen and her colleagues refer to bullying as a form of abuse that takes place over an extended period of time and is characterised by an imbalance in the power relation between the bully and victim.

... bully-victims [are] the most likely to suffer from psychological disturbances ...

A Canadian study examined the correlation between bullying, aggression, anxiety and depression. It was found that children who were the victims of bullying had higher levels of anxiety and depression than other children.¹⁴⁶ Similar results have been found in South African studies.¹⁴⁷ While early studies of bullying tended to view 'bully' and 'victim' as fixed categories, we now understand that there is far more flexibility in these positions, with bully-victims (children who are both bullied and who bully) being the most likely to suffer from psychological disturbances as a consequence. Kumpulainen and her colleagues assessed bullying and psychological disturbances in a sample of 5 813 children of primary school age, and found that four-fifths of bully-victims, like Zibonele, were found to have psychological disturbances severe enough for them to be referred for psychiatric treatment, and most displayed anger, aggression and violence.¹⁴⁸ Being a bully is also a predictor of future criminality – a study conducted in 1991 found that 60% of boys who were bullies between grades six and nine had at least one criminal conviction by the time they were 24.¹⁴⁹

In a study conducted by the Medical Research Council into rape perpetration in three districts in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, Rachel Jewkes and her colleagues found that parental absence, exposure to trauma in childhood and having been bullied, and bullying were all significantly associated with rape perpetration.¹⁵⁰

There is also a large body of research that has established that children who are bullies are likely to come from families in which there are poor cohesion, a lack of adult supervision, domestic violence and harsh physical discipline, and where problems are solved through aggression and violence.¹⁵¹

So although Zibonele finds it impossible to understand how he came to commit the horrendous crimes for which he is incarcerated, it is possible, through tracing the trajectory of his life, to

understand how the build-up of toxic stress; weak attachment, leading to an inability to regulate his emotions; and the experience of being bullied, by other children, by the teachers at school, by the farmer, and by the criminal justice system that the farmer had the power to commandeer, all contributed to the transferral of his subconscious rage onto the girls. His rage may well have been triggered by their vulnerability, which mirrored his own vulnerability as a child, and stimulated the subconscious need to control, dominate and murder the representation of his vulnerable self.¹⁵²

Postscript

In March 2014 I visited the Free State to trace the lives of several of the men I had interviewed, including Zibonele. I drove from the small, crumbling town of Theunissen past Virginia and Welkom to Kroonstad. Along this road mines scarred the landscape, and dense settlements stretched up to the edge of the highway – middle-class suburban homes, shacklands and rows upon rows of small, almost new, concrete block houses. It was early afternoon and on the margins of the towns small groups of children walked wearily home, unaccompanied by adults, some carrying heavy bags, some walking alone.

I took the exit to the centre of Kroonstad and entered along South Street, past a modern strip mall and into a well-to-do suburb where Bettie's luxury guesthouse was to be found. It was hard to get a sense of the town from there. I walked down the road and past large houses with neat gardens. On the corner was a sprawling mansion, the past owners' delusions of grandeur captured in the now-crumbling columns. The paint was peeling, windows were broken and the house was slowly decaying. There were several houses for sale. Even this wealthy part of the town felt like it had been mothballed, tentatively holding on to a more prosperous time that was unlikely to come again.

William, the gardener at the guest house, offered to guide me to Seisoville where Kotsi, a drug dealer, truck hijacker, rapist and murderer, had grown up and near where Zibonele lived after he had left the farm in 1997.

I explained to him what I was doing and asked him where people who had lived on the farms, as Zibonele did, would have moved. He told me that he also grew up on a farm just outside Kroonstad with his grandparents and his mother. He and his grandparents moved to the town when his mother died of tuberculosis. He was doing grade six at Reitumela Primary, where Kotsi had finished his schooling, when his grandparents died. He left school then and found a job so he could look after his sisters, who were younger than he. They, like many of the people who lived on the farms, now lived in a small RDP house in Snake Park.¹⁵³

We drove through the centre of town, which, like the suburbs, had seen better days. The town seemed tired, the roads pitted and the paint faded. William told me that it was hard to get a job there. As we passed through town, through the industrial area and under the bridge to reach Seisoville, he pointed out the young men on the side of the road, several of whom were sniffing glue. He told me that crime was a big problem. There were lots of housebreakings, he said, 'they are looking for those flat screen, plasma TVs, because there is a small box at the back and there is something in there they use to make *nyaope*' [a highly addictive cocktail of heroin, dagga and other substances, the recipe for which varies from place to place].¹⁵⁴

As we drove towards Phuleng School the roads got progressively worse, deeply rutted from recent rains. This was a barren, desert-like place. In summer the heat was unbearable, and in winter the dry cold penetrated your bones and stayed there. In Seisoville, Maokeng, Snake Park, the houses were

grey, the streets grey, as though the colour had been drained out. Few if any of the new houses were painted; they were left bare, grey concrete. There were no trees and few homeowners had managed to get anything to grow in the dusty soil around their houses. The only *spaza* shops I saw in the area around Phuleng were dilapidated, tired. There was a tiny *hokkie* on the side of the road where one young man was selling cabbages – the only sign of economic activity.

William said that most of the people who used to live and work on the farms moved into the township in around 1997, the ironic and direct consequence of the passing of the Extension of Security of Tenure Act 1997 (Act 62 of 1997), which sought to prevent farm workers from being evicted from farms and secure their tenure.¹⁵⁵

We stopped in front of the school. It was mid-morning and all the children were in class. There were no green lawns, not even a patch of grass around the school, only dust. The large metal gate at the front of the school was closed but not locked. I shifted it open and slid through.

The children were sitting at their desks, the teachers taking them through their lessons. A young teacher walked towards me and offered to take me to the principal's office. First she checked into her class, telling the children to be quiet and carry on with their work while she was away. She was a new teacher there, it was her first year of teaching and she said it was tough, but she was coping. There was much activity in the office and the principal was out, but I was led through to the deputy head, Mrs Lydia Masoeng, who I could see had little time for me – she was buried in paper work.

I told her that I was there to understand the life of Zibonele, and told her about the cases of rape and murder. Mrs Masoeng remembered them well. The 12-year-old was a student at the school at the time. A lovely, sweet girl, she recalled. The school held a memorial service for her. She said there were pictures in an album they kept for her, but she didn't know where it was anymore. The girl had been doing grade 4 at the time when she was murdered, and lived in Marabastad. She was abducted in Seisoville and her body was found in Snake Park. 'We were all disturbed about that,' she said. There was no trace of the incident to be found in the local newspapers at the time – perhaps the killing of black children didn't warrant reporting.

Turning to how things were now in Seisoville, she said the biggest problem she faced at the school was the number of parents who drank heavily. She said that she also saw many cases of rape, children being raped by members of their own families. There were a lot of abused children in the school, she added.

This reinforces how difficult it is to break the intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse; and how difficult it will remain to disrupt well-established patterns of disadvantage. High levels of social and familial dysfunction, along with the persistently high levels of violence experienced in South Africa over many decades, are self-reinforcing and perpetuating. For those seeking to disrupt these patterns the challenges are significant, as it is clear we need to not only address the structural conditions that perpetuate poverty and disadvantage but also put in place systems and interventions to address the needs of individuals and families at an emotional and relational level.

Chapter 6

Untethered

Peter, Ryan, Velabahleke, Mosiuoa and Zibonele's stories reveal the difficulty of offering simple explanations for, or solutions to, violence. In each of these lives we see how individual characteristics and circumstances inform not only the experiences that affect and determine their trajectories but also the choices they make and how these choices are limited.

None of them is blameless – the crimes they have committed are cruel and often brutal – yet making sense of their behaviour and their choices is impossible without reference to the contexts in which they grew up. In each case their personal, familial and contextual circumstances had a significant impact on the course their lives took. This was the case for all of the men interviewed.

It is also clear from their narratives how in each case opportunities to intervene positively were lost or missed. For example, the educational psychologist who assessed Ryan after the death of his father could have used that as an opportunity to refer the family for further support. Instead the assessment failed to result in any supportive action, or even in any information being shared with him or his mother to help them understand his emotional state and behaviour. Peter should not have been sent to a brutalising reformatory that would prepare him for a criminal career; rather he and his mother should have received support and counselling to help him come to terms with the loss of his father, and his mother to address the abuse meted out by her new partner to her children. In Zibonele's life, opportunities to intervene were missed altogether. While it might have been possible to detect early indicators that he would resort to violence – particularly through his experience of bullying and his own bullying behaviour – no one was taking notice, and the teachers at his school who may have noticed were complicit in his abuse.

A primary challenge in any effort to reduce violence in South Africa is how and when to identify families and individuals who are at risk and then link them to services, which is dealt with in more detail in the concluding chapter.

A comparable study undertaken by the CSV and the HSRC identified much the same problem, noting that while the repeat offending of the men in their study had brought them to the attention of the criminal justice system, their behaviour had been apparent long before the criminal justice system became involved. However, without any possibility of diversion they fell into ever-deepening patterns of criminality and violence.¹⁵⁶

Overall, the men who participated in this study shared an early and overwhelming sense of loss resulting from feelings of physical and/or emotional separation from parents, carers, professionals

and responsible adults. Sometimes this loss was experienced as betrayal. In some cases this betrayal happened by omission, and in others it was deliberate.¹⁵⁷

Their loss was exacerbated by experiences of neglect and brutality (abuse) at the hands of family members (parents and others) and the staff of state agencies and institutions from whom they were entitled to expect care and support, if not love. Partly in reaction to this sense of loss and their experiences of violence at home and in their communities, they sought (desperately, in some cases) security and respect. They found some semblance of this in their associations with people – sometimes other family members, usually not – who were already involved in criminal activity. For most of them the routine use of violence was both necessary for survival (in other words, it was adaptive) and a means to acquire material symbols of status. Over time they adopted the hyper-masculine identities that were necessary to secure status, and maintaining this identity necessitated the use of violence – at least among their peers. They were able to do this in part because of their lack of empathy, particularly for their victims but often for their sexual partners as well. Their lives were characterised by an absence of warm, supportive and loving relationships with others – at first with adults, and, when they were adults themselves, with sexual partners.

Dropping out of school enabled several of the men to find peer groups and associates who were equally alienated from the structures of society. But while they were attracted (pulled) by the freedom from adult authority and material acquisition that being out of school and in some cases also living away from home offered, they were also pushed from school by the abuse many experienced at the hands of teachers. Several of the men seemed to have had difficulties learning at school, which are likely to have stemmed from undiagnosed problems (such as hyperactivity or cognitive deficits) that were left unattended. Dropping out of school signalled an untethering from prosocial bonds, and diminished opportunities to reverse their trajectories. Not having completed school meant that they were unable to secure the kinds of jobs that could offer them material and social status; it diminished their chances of accessing the social capital that might have enabled them to live a different kind of life.

All experienced stress and trauma from early in their lives, and several turned to alcohol and drugs as a form of self-medication. But this led not only to more violence but also to a deepening of their personal crises. The internalisation of feelings of inferiority, and an awareness (in some cases conscious, in others unconscious) of the injustice of their circumstances offered a justification for their behaviour.

In each case the intervention of the state or the criminal justice system deepened the problem. None was deterred from his behaviour by the threat of being caught, or by the threat of a long sentence. In most cases (Ryan's being an exception), the chance of apprehension for their crimes was very slim. This was especially true for those who lived in dense urban areas.

Two factors in particular seem to have had a significant impact on the criminal trajectories of the men who shared their stories with me. The one was where they lived. Men who had been born and continued to live in rural areas were less likely to follow a path from petty crime towards increasingly serious violent acquisitive crimes such as robberies, vehicle hijackings and home invasions. They were more likely to be involved in fewer and less serious property crimes as youngsters and then progress to non-acquisitive interpersonal violent crimes (such as murder of peers) or isolated cases of acquisitive crime. The men who lived in urban areas were more likely to follow a trajectory from petty crime, such as shoplifting, to ever-more serious and violent property crime. We may find part of

the explanation for this in the different opportunities that exist in urban or rural areas – there is more opportunity for violent property crime in urban settings than in rural areas simply because there are more houses, more vehicles and more shops to rob or hijack in urban areas. The anonymity of large urban areas also reduces the chances of apprehension, and there is a greater likelihood of finding peer groups who are engaged in the same activities. Moreover, the pressure to have status through materialism is greater in urban contexts.

The second factor is owning a gun. The narratives of the men who followed a trajectory from petty crime to violent acquisitive crime are distinguished from the others by gun ownership. These men, like Velabahleke, took possession of a gun early in their lives, several before they were 15. While having a gun did not necessarily initiate their criminal trajectories, it did have an effect on the nature and severity of the crimes they committed. It was as if by owning a gun they crossed an invisible boundary between ‘normal’ society and the criminal circles in which they moved, signifying a permanent shift, an ‘untethering’ from any bonds that might have restrained them.

Gun ownership signalled an increase in the violence of the crimes, and in the value of the crimes – they were able to rob more effectively with a gun than without. These men differed from the others in one other key respect: they enjoyed sharing stories of their crimes and seemed excited by reliving their experiences. Through their narratives (presented in summary below) we see how one thing led to another – and how in concert individual and circumstantial factors result in a violent, criminal trajectory.¹⁵⁸

Precursors to murder: Sehlolo, Kotsi and Hlupha

In the following three stories it is clear how the shared experiences of loss, neglectful parenting, alienation from institutions of authority (school and home), early school leaving and gun ownership, in combination with individual characteristics such as temperament, a lack of empathy and a tendency towards risk-taking, inform their criminal careers.

Sehlolo

Sehlolo¹⁵⁹ was only 23 years old when I interviewed him. By that time he had already committed more violent crimes – robberies, home invasions and rapes – than he could recall.

He was born in 1987 in Zondi, Soweto and lived with his mother, younger sister and extended family in the family home in Soweto for the first 10 years of his life. As a child he did not know his father, who was in prison when he was born. His extended family included his maternal grandparents, and his aunts, uncles and cousins. When he was four years old his mother died.

Things changed after his mother died. Now the adults in his life seemed much stricter, and he was often hit when he disobeyed their commands to stay close to home. He said beatings were regular, and often he would get into a lot of trouble for coming home late, and having eaten dinner at his friend’s house. He was not meant to eat at other people’s homes – because he might be given *muti* – so when he did he would be beaten.

He and his sister stayed for a while in the family home, with his cousin (his mother’s sister’s child) as their primary caregiver. After a while she became the children’s formal guardian. In 1995 his guardian got a job and bought a house in the suburb of Melville. Sehlolo and his sister moved with her and attended Melville Primary. He described her as having been warm and caring towards him and his sister. He said that they would pray together at bedtime, holding hands, but he believed that it was

because 'she loved god with her whole heart' that she was blind to his wrongdoing – what she didn't want to see, she ignored.

Over the weekends, when he would return to Zondi, he would hang out with older boys and go to Roodepoort, where they would watch children playing in the park. There was a pool in the park and the children would leave their bicycles while they went for a swim. Sehlolo and his friends would steal the bikes and sell them in Soweto. Sehlolo used this money to buy 'nice things' – 'those things you don't usually...'. They would buy pizza and go to the cinema in Hillbrow. He needed to ensure, at this stage, that he spent his money away from Zondi so that he would not be caught out by his family. He soon progressed from stealing bicycles to stealing copper cable and breaking into houses.

When he was in standard 6 (his first year at Melville High School) Sehlolo started to smoke cigarettes and dagga, and mix with 'bad company' – boys who were older than he was. He also started visiting shebeens and drinking heavily. He believed he was around 12 years old when this started. He also began stealing money from his guardian to buy alcohol. Soon he also started taking mandrax and skipping school, and getting in trouble at school for lying.

Throughout his school career he had found it difficult to sit still and concentrate, which suggests that he may have been hyperactive.

In 1999, Sehlolo progressed again, from stealing bicycles to shoplifting and breaking into houses. He made friends with a boy in Melville who had a gun and who taught him to rob pedestrians in the street. This was the first time that Sehlolo had used a gun and he found that this type of crime was much more lucrative than the crimes he had been committing – the first time they robbed someone in the street they took R1 200 and cell phones. All this activity required a considerable lack of adult monitoring and supervision. Until now he had concealed his criminal behaviour from his guardian by telling elaborate lies about his whereabouts, such as that he was spending the night with a friend. But having more money made maintaining the deception more difficult – he had to resist the temptation to buy extravagant clothes so that he would not be caught out by his family. He started drinking and going to nightclubs – another way of spending the money earned through crime.

The deception came to an end after a botched robbery at a Chinese-owned clothing shop in Melville, where two of Sehlolo's accomplices were killed in a shoot-out with private security guards and the third arrested. This incident led to his leaving school, afraid that the person who had been arrested would send the police to the school to find him. He returned to Zondi, and crossed yet another boundary by telling his grandfather what he was doing.

After this he moved into a shack at the back of his grandfather's house and furnished it with goods he stole in the suburbs. Although he hid the goods from his grandfather his grandfather could not have been unaware of his criminal life: he often arrived home late at night, his room was well furnished and he was not attending school. During the interviews he did not speak about his guardian again in relation to this period of his life. It was as though caregiving adults had disappeared from his life altogether.

When he was 12 Sehlolo was arrested for 'street robbery' and, because he was still a child, was sent to a Proteam Place of Safety in Pretoria. There Sehlolo learned from the other boys that house robberies were far more lucrative than muggings or burglaries. He decided that when he got out he would move on to home invasions. After his arrest he had given the place of safety and the police

a false name, so his family would not be notified. But he relented and gave his aunt's contact details to one of the social workers when he learned that he would only be released into the custody of a family member.

He was released later that year, after having spent seven months at the place of safety and after the social worker had convinced the court that Sehlolo's problem was his drug use. He was sentenced to 148 hours of community service and had to attend a six-month course offered by the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO).¹⁶⁰ Sehlolo was very conscious of working the system – he did his community service and attended his sessions at NICRO, only because he didn't want the court to see that he was 'fooling' them: 'I was waiting because I didn't want to get arrested, this thing the court they will see, *ja*, this man is fooling us, you see.'

After this Sehlolo stopped even trying to hide his activities from his family. Although he was still a child he now saw himself as an adult. This was reinforced by his accomplices – he had moved on to house robberies and his accomplices taught him how to drive. He believed he was driven by forces greater than himself (he was destined to be bad like his father), and he decided that he was going to take control of his own life, which meant increasing his offending behaviour. In 2000, he moved to Hillbrow and lived with a sex worker. The sex worker was much older than he, and yet he saw himself as her protector and provider.

He continued committing violent crime until 2002, when he was arrested for rape and housebreaking. He was incarcerated for a few months, but was released without standing trial because the court had lost his docket. After his release he went back to robbing houses. By this time he had a girlfriend and had fathered a child. Now he started training children younger than himself to commit crime. His final crime, for now, was a brutal attack on a family in which he and his young accomplices raped two girls in front of their father to force him to open his safe. After this attack Sehlolo was arrested and incarcerated, and was still incarcerated for this crime when I met him.

Hlupha

Hlupha¹⁶¹ was 29 years old when he was interviewed. As was the case with some of the other respondents (particularly Peter and Siphesingunwa), Hlupha's narrative came alive when he related the details of his crimes. This was the only time in the interviews when he expanded in detail, recalling what he and his accomplices said to each other, what each did and how they escaped from danger or from the police. He told these stories as though they were precious memories that he had played over and over again to himself.

Hlupha was born in Tembisa, a township on the West Rand. He had three siblings, a brother and two sisters. He did not know his father as a child, saying, 'He ran away since I was born, since I was young. Since I was born I didn't ever see him. I see him when I was old.' The first time he met his father was when he was 22, in 2003, and already in prison.

His mother was a domestic worker in Edenvale. When he was two Hlupha and his brother were sent by their mother to live with their grandmother and aunt in Boons, a farming district and village in North West province. Hlupha believed that his mother did not like the boys, or did not want to have them with her. He felt rejected by his mother from an early age.

Life in Boons was hard and there was little money. At the weekend when his grandmother and his aunt had been drinking, his aunt would insult the children, telling them that their mother was a useless 'bitch' who didn't even send money to care for her children. His cousin was a violent bully who often beat up his own mother, his grandmother and any one else who crossed his path. Hlupha was constantly told that he was bad and would end up like his father, in prison.

He started school in Boons in 1987, when he was six years old. He completed primary school in 1994 and went on to high school in the same town. Hlupha said that school was 'alright', but his problem was that he did not have money. 'At school I was doing all right but my problem was I suffering with money to buy things that I need.' He did enjoy sport – playing soccer and doing karate while at school.

He left school in 1997, after grade 10, and went to live with his mother in Tembisa. Asked why he left school, Hlupha said it was because he was tired of 'peer pressure', but went on to explain that, 'My friends they have got cars, they are working, they are no longer at school, see? Then I decided to draw back.' Asked what his plan was after leaving school, he said that he intended stealing enough money to build his mother a house.

By the time he was eight Hlupha had started stealing money from his grandmother and aunt to buy himself treats, such as Simba chips.

As a 10-year-old, he and his friends came across a light aircraft that had just crashed. There was still smoke coming from the plane and, remarkably, two injured survivors. The boys initially tried to help the survivors, but then saw a bag with money and guns. They stole the money, which amounted to R20 000, and the guns and left. Hlupha was proud of his takings – especially the gun – but was quickly dispossessed of it when he showed it to a neighbour, who took it for himself. Soon after this the neighbour took Hlupha under his wing. He taught him how to smoke dagga and rob shops.

By the time he was 16 Hlupha had another gun and shot a boy at school in the stomach for pulling his girlfriend's necklace from her neck. He tells this with little emotion other than amusement.

Having left the rural area of Boons to live with his mother in Tembisa when he was about 16, he found that he couldn't get on with his new stepfather, who insulted and abused him. He was sent from his mother's home again, this time to live with his stepfather's mother, whom he didn't really know at all. His living arrangements were very fluid. Sometimes he stayed in Tembisa, sometimes with an aunt in Hillbrow, and he meandered between Tembisa, Soweto, Daveyton and elsewhere.

By this time his brother was a drug addict who had withdrawn from life altogether – Hlupha said he was 'useless'.

Hlupha joined a gang in Tembisa, but it didn't seem to be much more than a loose collective of thieves. They spent time hanging around, smoking dagga and drifting from robbery to robbery – opportunistically – in-between trading cigarettes, fruit and vegetables on the side of the road. The money they stole during the robberies, up to R25 000 at a time, didn't last long. There was no apparent trust between the thieves, no ritual that bound them, no gang paraphernalia and, despite the high political temperature at the time, no connection to this at all. His existence was nihilistic and life was cheap.

Between 1998, when he moved to Tembisa, and 2001, when he was arrested for the first time, Hlupha was involved in several home invasions – at least two on farms. As he said, 'I was robbing,

always I was robbing, wake up in the night, go to rob someone, kill them.’ Many of these robberies took place in the suburb of Isando, near the OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg.

Although it was clear that Hlupha had never developed empathy, there appeared to be a progression towards increasing cruelty in his crimes. In one of his last robberies before his arrest he and three of his friends robbed a family – three children, a mother and father – who were having a picnic and fishing at Germiston Lake. They attacked the family, threatened them with guns, took all their belongings, tied them up and put them in their car. They then tied up the father with cable ties, loaded him into the boot of his car and drove off. They forced the man to give them the code for his bank cards and drew R2 000 from his account. They then drove to a hill in Krugersdorp where they tied him to a rock and drove away, leaving him there for the rest of the day and the night.

Hlupha and his accomplices spent the day driving around in the car they had stolen. The following day they drew another R2 000 from his account and went back to where they had left their victim, gave him something to eat and a cigarette and told him to leave in his car.

They attacked the family, threatened them with guns, took all their belongings, tied them up and put them in their car

In the end Hlupha was arrested for a murder committed during a home invasion. This was the first time that he was arrested, and thus the first time that he came into contact with the criminal justice system.

For Hlupha life in the correctional facility mirrored that on the outside, only with a little more structure and hierarchy in the gang of which he was a member. He moved up the prison gang structure, took on the vocabulary of the gang and its narrative, and played by its rules.

Often it was difficult to make sense of Hlupha’s narrative, to put into any kind of rational order his long ramblings about his crimes. Ultimately it would appear that for most of his life there was a lack of structure. It was chaotic. He and his peers/accomplices seemed to drift, with a lot of time ‘wasted’ moving between places, acting almost on whim, and certainly without any emotional engagement with their victims or their crimes. In the end his accomplices variously died, went mad (like K, who starts yelling at people and smearing himself with faeces) or were incarcerated for their crimes.

Unlike Sehlolo, and indeed Kotsi, whose story you will read next, Hlupha seemed to have avoided any contact with the criminal justice system until late in his criminal career. He was also at a remove from any social services – in Boons it was unlikely that his early abuse and neglect would have come to the attention of any institution or structure that might have offered social services. His mother appears to have abandoned her sons and was unable to offer them anything other than small contributions towards their living costs when staying with their extended family. Having experienced no warmth or love from very young and having faced conflict and violence at home, there is little wonder that Hlupha lacked the ability for empathy, planning or organisation, skills that might have led him on a different path.

Kotsi

Kotsi was born in Kroonstad in 1972. He was 37 when I met him for the first time, and was serving a 105-year sentence for truck hijacking, murder, attempted murder and theft of a firearm. When I met him again in March 2015, in a chance meeting at his home, he was out of prison on parole.

When he was four years old Kotsi's father left his mother for another woman, who lived close by. The children saw their father from time to time but he was not involved in their lives and only sporadically contributed to the family's expenses. Kotsi lived with his mother, his siblings, his cousins and his grandmother. His aunt came home from time to time, but worked in Gauteng. The family struggled financially.

Kotsi was close to his older brother, who was also involved in criminality and was later incarcerated.

Kotsi completed his first three years of school at a Zulu-speaking school, but had to change schools because of the riots in the mid-1980s. He started school again at a Sesotho-speaking school closer to home. He loved school and achieved well academically and on the sports field. He even sang in the choir.

The turning point in his life came when he did not have the R30 required to register for high school. He asked his father, who was a bus driver, for the money but it was not forthcoming. His father had now betrayed him twice – the first time by leaving the family to start another while his first family suffered financially; and again by preventing Kotsi from continuing his education. His father failed to see how important this was to him. Having left school, Kotsi started hanging around with older boys and men who were also not in school, and started with petty crimes such as shoplifting.

He spoke well and looked good, which enabled him to steal from shops because he was not an obvious suspect. This gained him respect and acceptance from the groups he hung out with. Soon he progressed to robbery, housebreaking and stealing cars.

Kotsi became involved in political protests in Kroonstad in the late 1980s. Although he had some political insight he saw the riots as an opportunity to loot shops and progress through the ranks of the gangs that operated alongside political organisations.

The first offence for which Kotsi was convicted was a brutal gang rape. Kotsi was 17.

At 18 Kotsi stole his first gun, from a man walking home from a night vigil. The gun opened a whole new range of criminal opportunities for Kotsi – he could use it to threaten people in their homes, 'not using it to shoot, but only using it to scare people maybe when I'm getting in your home ... to show you that I'm using it to frighten you ... you will give me what I want'.

The gun also meant that he and his accomplices were able to start hijacking trucks delivering goods to the shops in the township. The gun made him feel invincible. 'You see ... they can go to the police or whatever, even now when I've got this gun. I feel now I'm now alright.'

Kotsi was then arrested and incarcerated for four years for possession of an illegal firearm. While in prison he made friends with one of the warders, who gave him a car when he was released. For a while he used the car as a taxi to make money. But the car also made it easier for him to continue robbing. One day he gave a man a lift to Lesotho and was initiated into the drug smuggling trade. Kotsi excelled at it and ran a successful business smuggling dagga from Lesotho to Kroonstad

The turning point in his life came when he did not have the R30 required to register for high school

for several years, until he was arrested in Lesotho and held in prison there for a number of years. In prison he met a man who introduced him to even higher value crimes – hijacking large trucks.

Unlike Hlupha and Sehlolo, Kotsi was intelligent, manipulative and articulate. He was also tall and good-looking, features that were useful in his earliest crimes and in establishing relationships that enabled his criminal behaviour. He was cynical and created a persona that others feared, while he liked to appear fearless. He showed and acknowledged an extreme lack of empathy while involved in his criminal life.

Absent parenting and conflict in the home: precursors to violence

While for a short while in his life Sehlolo had some warm parenting from his guardian, for the most part caregivers were either not taking note of his behaviour or responded to him with harsh punishment. Kotsi – who said he noticed from early in his life that his mother was mentally unwell – also had little positive input from his parents or other adult caregivers. The adults in Hlupha's life were both neglectful and harsh. As children none of these men knew adults who discussed with them in any positive or meaningful way their behaviour, their future or their emotions. Because none of them grew up with both parents present, it has not been possible to see the effect that conflict between their parents had on their lives. But for several of the men I interviewed, violent conflict between their parents, or between close family members, was an integral part of their experiences growing up.

Intimate partner violence emerged in several of the narratives as having had a significant impact on the lives and educational outcomes of the participants. In Velabahleke's life we saw the disruptive effect that his father's abusive relationship with his mother had on the family, and how it contributed to the breakdown of his own relationship with his father.

Many of the participants in this study had experienced as children, and even as adults, their fathers beating their mothers. The most extreme example of this was Ndingedwa, whose father beat his mother so badly and so often that he left school to look after her. He was afraid that one day he would come home to find her beaten to death.

Thuto's father also beat his mother – usually when both his parents had been drinking. His sister would cry when that happened and he would sometimes stand at a distance, throwing stones at his father to try and make him stop.

Hluphizwe's father frequently beat his wife. He recalls one instance: 'My mother was in the bath and her phone rang and my father picked the phone up and a man answered the phone and my father threw the phone on the floor and took a brick and threw it at my mother.' She was hospitalised for her injuries. Often his father would choose to beat his mother when the children were not around, because when they were they would try to intervene.

Much has been written about the effects of witnessing domestic violence on children,¹⁶² especially its relationship to violence and aggression. In a recent survey of parenting and child behaviour in a small community in the Western Cape, witnessing intimate partner violence was found to correlate with children's aggression and violence.¹⁶³ This is important when it comes to thinking about interventions to prevent or disrupt violence. While the Domestic Violence Act 1998 (Act 116 of 1998) provides a framework for a criminal justice response to intimate partner violence, services to victims and interventions to address perpetration are far from sufficient to address the need.¹⁶⁴

Adapting to violence

The narratives of the men interviewed show clearly that in contexts where violence is prevalent its use is adaptive. This is not a sign of a lack of resilience but a form of resilience itself. Since the use of violence is often also supported by social norms (e.g., that physically disciplining your child or your wife is acceptable) it is perhaps surprising that our society is not even more violent than it is.¹⁶⁵

Earlier in this chapter I referred to the differences in offending patterns between men who lived in rural versus urban areas. Amukelani grew up on a farm in the Northern Cape and his story demonstrates how a violent context normalises the use of violence.

Amukelani

Like several of the other offenders who came from rural communities, or who grew up on farms, Amukelani was not involved in any property crime. His crimes of violence resulted from drunken fights, in which perpetrator and victim were in many respects interchangeable and determined only by chance and perhaps physical prowess. When I interviewed him he was incarcerated for a murder committed when he and his victim were intoxicated and after a dispute about property – Amukelani believed that the man had stolen his radio.

Amukelani was born in 1967 in Richie near Kimberley. He lived with his mother, father and five brothers and sisters on a farm outside the town in this remote rural area.

While he was growing up his mother had a position of responsibility, being a 'foreman' during harvest time on a maize farm near Hertzog, which meant that she was away from home for long periods. His father was a migrant labourer who travelled between the family home and the Ciskei, where he would earn money and visit his family. His father had two homes, one with Amukelani's mother and the other in the Ciskei, where he had another wife and children.

Whenever I asked Amukelani about fighting at school or corporal punishment, he always answered that it was nothing exceptional, just normal. Even the fights he sometimes got into when he had been drinking were nothing exceptional, 'just naughtiness'. He explained that when he had been drinking and his head was 'a little confused', he 'would always want to stand his man and so on, but it wasn't so serious. And at school when we were all together we would fight this week and then think, *ag no*, and then go on, and then maybe fight again next week.' This was just part of life.

During the second interview Amukelani admitted that he had a short fuse – he would quickly become very angry.

Amukelani did go to school when he was seven but said he was 'a bit weak' at school. He did not attend school consistently. Some years there was not enough money to pay school fees, so he would go to school when there was money for fees and leave when there was not. Sometimes, when he had no shoes for school, his sister would tell him just to stay at home. He left school when he was 14 to start working.

When I asked Amukelani whether he was ever involved in fighting at school he was dismissive, finding it amusing that I would even ask such a question about something so inconsequential and commonplace. He said he and his friends would stab each other with pens, and sometime get into fist fights, but this was not serious or even remarkable, it was just how things were. Everyone did it.

And violence on the playground was met with violence from teachers – children would be caned or hit with a sjambok when they fought.

After leaving school he did manual garden labour until he got a job at the local farmers' co-operative in Modderivier in 1988, when he was 21. He said this was a good, permanent job – a job befitting a man – where he would carry heavy bags of grain on his head and even drive the forklift.

He left this job in 1995 after an altercation with the manager when he had turned up drunk at work. After Amukelani left his job at the co-op he was out of work for about two years. He was supported by his sisters until he found another job (in 1998) as a labourer on a farm in the district, where he planted potatoes, vegetables and wheat. He held this job until he was arrested for murder in 2006. This, he said, was his only crime. He did not regard an assault committed some time before this as a crime, because the person he had assaulted did not bring a case against him.

In 1995 Amukelani got married and moved into his own house with his wife, with whom he already had been in a relationship for some years. By this time he had moved off the farm and into the location. He said he remembered the date well because his daughter (from another woman) was born on 29 September, the day before he was married. This was his third child, his first having been born on New Year's Day in 1990 and the second in 1992. Between these two children he had another daughter with a girlfriend in 1991. Amukelani had relationships with many women while he was married, some of whom his wife knew about. He said, 'They say a man is like a dog.'

Amukelani had an abusive relationship with his wife and she left him after finding out that he had picked up a sexually transmitted disease from one of his girlfriends. When his wife left he looked after their children, leaving them in the care of his older sister when he was at work and fetching them again after work. Amukelani also said he would often get very angry and hit his children, as did his wife.

He had a bad temper, which was aggravated when he had been drinking. It was this that finally led him to murder.

Violence as tragedy

It should by now be clear that responding to violence and crime with violence and retribution leads to little or anything positive. I will show further on that for some of the men in this study incarceration has offered a short respite from their fast lives, but mostly the possibility of harsh prison sentences is not a deterrent to violent criminality, nor does early incarceration (particularly in reformatories) lead to anything other than more violence. That being the case I am inclined towards James Gilligan's call to see violence as tragedy, because in doing so one is forced away from retributive responses to seek more compassionate alternatives. But it would be disingenuous to ignore or leave unsaid the effect of structural violence – the violence of being poor. I have heard it said in many public forums by academics and practitioners in the field of violence prevention that while conditions of poverty increase many of the risk factors for violence, we cannot hope or wait for poverty to end, nor is it within our power to address the macro-economic factors that drive and exacerbate inequality. This may be true, but we can be certain that a failure to address structural violence will at the very least increase the cost and complexity of preventing violence. As Gilligan said of the United States, and as is true in South Africa too:

Both the perpetrators and the victims of criminal violence are disproportionately the very poor. The kinds of assaults that the very poor suffer from the 'criminal' among them (rape, murder, assault and robbery) are so direct, palpable, and visible, so physically painful, so impossible to ignore, so life-threatening and lethal that they inevitably distract the very poor from noticing or fighting the more hidden, disguised assaults they suffer from the class system itself. As Representative Charles Schumer recently pointed out, it is in the political interest of the party that represents the interests of the very rich to foster as high rate of crime as possible; and even to exaggerate what the crime rate is, to foment fear and panic about violent crime far beyond what is realistically appropriate ... For the more that people are worried about crime and violence, the more the middle class will focus its anger and fear on the poor ... the nonviolent and the noncriminal poor will be angry at those other poor people who are violent criminals; and both those classes will be too distracted by their anger at the lower class criminals to notice that they have much better reasons to be angry at the very rich, and the party that represents the interest of the rich, than at all the violent criminals put together.¹⁶⁶

Violence as tragedy, and as a response to the injustice of structural violence, was never more evident than in Johannes's life.

Johannes was born on 14 March 1974 in Bloemfontein. He lived with his extended family, his parents and both sets of grandparents. They all shared the same yard, with four two-roomed houses around it in the suburb of Ashbury. Johannes was first looked after by his paternal grandmother and then, when she died, by his maternal grandmother, and when she died by his aunt.

When I asked him why his grandmothers and his aunt cared for him and not his mother, he said he was told that he was a big, fat baby. His mother was a small, finely built person and that was why she couldn't pick him up and breastfeed him. 'It's not that she didn't want to breastfeed me,' he quickly added, she did breastfeed him when he was very small, but she could not hold him or hug him because he was a 'giant baby'. Something that was hard to believe of the tiny man that he became.

When he was two his parents separated and he did not see his father again until he was 16. His father left Bloemfontein to live in Welkom with another woman.

About two years later his paternal grandmother (and primary carer) died (of natural causes) and he was cared for by his beloved maternal grandmother.

Johannes started school when he was six, but failed his first year. School was not easy for him or for his siblings. His younger sister got as far as standard six (grade eight) before leaving school; his other sister only made it to standard four (grade six). Both left school to be with boyfriends, 'and to build their own lives'. He explained that although there was food in the house there were always financial problems, and not enough money for things they needed, such as clothes and electricity. The only person who earned a salary was his uncle, who worked as a caretaker at the high school.

In 1984, when he was 10 years old and in standard two (grade four), his grandmother was killed. For Johannes, this was a critical turning point in his life. Until then he had imagined, he said, that he would be someone. Maybe a doctor, maybe a teacher, 'to be able to help people'. Although these careers might seem improbable or even impossible for Johannes, they signalled his sense of purpose, the belief that he could rise above his circumstances.

The death of his grandmother was exceptionally traumatic for him and it was only after much prompting and many hours of discussion that he could tell me that she had been knocked over by a car when crossing the road after leaving the hospital, where she had been receiving chemotherapy. The owner of the car was never brought to justice, as far as he was aware.

After his grandmother's death Johannes was distraught. He didn't want to do anything and he wished he had died with her. He spoke often about his grandmother, returning frequently to how she had raised him 'right'. He spoke of how well she cared for him, how she made sure he never went to bed without food. She also made sure he had breakfast before he went to school so that he could concentrate on his schoolwork. Speaking about this time was painful for him; it made him upset and angry.

After the death of his grandmother Johannes left school. He was living with his grandfather, but a social worker attended to the family and appointed a woman who lived nearby to care for them. Speaking about this Johannes became inarticulate, spoke in incomplete sentences and did not seem to be able to get his story out. He found this woman's way of looking after them difficult to explain, but it was clear that he did not like it. He only once mentioned her name. He said he 'gave her hell', would swear at her and started shoplifting and smoking cigarettes. He no longer cared about anything and did not accept the woman's authority or care. After many attempts to avoid discussing her, he told me that she was always drunk. Eventually, it would seem that when she could not cope any longer Johannes was taken to court. The court heard testimony from the school principal and sent him to a reformatory in the Cape.

I struggled to get Johannes to speak to me about what life was like at the reformatory. At first he was dismissive, saying he just went to school, attended artisanal training classes. But when I asked him about his relationship with

He spoke often about his grandmother, returning frequently to how she had raised him 'right'

other boys at the reformatory, he said there were a few boys who were 'against him', but he had no patience with that. 'I showed my manhood, even though I was a little boy, I proved I was a man, that I was not afraid of [inaudible] ... those men, they had respect, good respect ...' Johannes avoided speaking about the details of the bullying, saying only that he had learned to fight, and that when he came out of the reformatory there was one person who underestimated him, but he quickly set that right. Until he went to the reformatory he had never been involved in a fight, but there he had learned to fight.

Before going to the reformatory Johannes had not yet started drinking, but he did when he returned from the reformatory in 1990, five years after he had been sent there. By this stage in the interview, the discussion had become difficult, he seemed to have lost his train of thought, and he could not really hold the thread of his narrative because of the traumatic event he had to describe next. Shortly after returning home after having spent Christmas of 1989 with his father, his aunt was killed, and Johannes could not cope. He remembers in great detail the day she was killed.

Across the road from Johannes's family home was a tavern. Johannes was quick to tell me that 'the adults like to drink, but it's not their fault, it is because of their circumstances'. One day his aunt, who liked to sing, heard singing at the tavern and went to join in. From across the road Johannes could hear the singing and could hear that things were getting rough. He stayed at home, and went to lie for a while on the couch, hoping he would fall asleep. But suddenly he felt that something was

pressing him down, that he could not move. He forced himself to stand up. His sentences broke into fragments as he spoke. Someone was outside the gate. It was his aunt, with blood pouring from her neck. He ran to her and asked her, 'Who did this?' Her aunt named a woman who was a regular at the tavern, a close friend of the tavern owner and someone well known to Johannes and his family. He looked down the street and saw the woman running away.

An ambulance was called, but by the time she reached the hospital his aunt was dead. She had been stabbed in the neck with a 'panga knife'. After the murder of his aunt Johannes could not forget what had happened; it haunted him, he said, that nothing happened to the people who had killed his grandmother and aunt.

He could not tell me much about the next seven years, saying he just carried on until he was 23, when he was arrested for breaking into a vehicle. He was given a three-year sentence. Pushed to speak about the time between 16 and 23, he said he had a bit of work, distributing pamphlets and working as a handy man when a new mall was built. When he was 23 he started drinking heavily and smoking dagga and mandrax, quite clearly a response to his trauma.

When we approached the moment when Johannes was asked to tell me about the theft for which he was arrested, our conversation began again to twist and turn as though the language was taking the place of a physical turning away. He felt ashamed of what he had done, that his actions had betrayed the care and lessons he had been taught by his grandmother.

One night he and some accomplices broke into a vehicle. They were arrested and Johannes spent the next 19 months in prison. In prison he joined the 26's – something he was also ashamed to tell me. Coming out of prison he felt desperate. He was still smoking and drinking, and he started walking to the centre of town to steal. From time to time he would give some of the money he stole to his family to buy groceries. No one asked too many questions.

In September 2001 he committed the crime for which he was incarcerated when I met him; a crime of vengeance. 'It's so tragic and so painful because I feel what I did was wrong. I took the law into my own hands. It was not right. I murdered a person.' He paused and mumbled. 'One week I felt so bitter. I lose all my people and nothing happens to the people, nothing comes of it ... the people don't get punished...'

His first attempt at taking revenge failed. One night he crept into the house across the road. Everyone was asleep. He slipped in through a window. He was looking for the woman who had stabbed his aunt. There was a light on in one of the rooms where his cousin stayed. He peeped in and saw two people lying on the bed. The woman, who was with his cousin, woke up and said there was someone in the house. Johannes ran out of the house and down the road, slipping on some loose gravel. The next thing his cousin was standing over him with a knife. 'What are you doing?' he asked. Johannes said he was looking for Dina, the woman who had stabbed his aunt. 'But she is older than you,' his cousin said. 'Go home.' Johannes did.

Five weeks later he returned to the house, where he found the owner of the tavern alone. She screamed but it was late at night and no one heard (at least, no one responded). Johannes strangled her with his hands. He was drunk at the time. But not so drunk, he said, that he didn't know what he was doing.

Johannes was arrested the next day and ultimately sentenced to 14 years in prison.

The ease of criminality

For many of the men who participated in this study, slipping into a life of crime was easy, much easier than entering a formal work environment that few of them were equipped to deal with, not only because they left school early but also because they lacked the soft skills necessary for establishing successful interpersonal relationships in formal work contexts. Their social skills were honed for use among peers who shared their alienation from dominant social values. The criminogenic environment in which many of the respondents lived meant that it was easier for them to become part of a community of criminals than to integrate into broader society. Sqalekiso put this best when he said:

... when we're involved in this crime, we meet different people. It's like it happens automatically. We meet, like if we were going to church. We are all the same who go to church. We meet people there. It's the same in crime. If you do crime you meet different people who do different types of crime.

But getting out of a life of crime is difficult, for the same reasons that getting in is easy – the social networks that enable individuals to access opportunities for realising their status and material needs in mainstream society are difficult, if not impossible, for men such as those interviewed for this study to access.

If we are to understand and develop appropriate responses to crime and violence it is perhaps helpful to speak about and understand the function of social capital and human capital. Social and human capital, and strong social control (or social cohesion) are arguably three core ingredients for healthy communities that produce educated, productive citizens who are able to participate in the economy by having or creating their own jobs.

Social capital is about who you know. It is the ability to access support and networks that enable you to find jobs and solve a range of problems. Clear defines it as 'the capacity of a person to call upon personal ties (usually within social networks) in order to advance some personal interest'.¹⁶⁷

Human capital refers to the skills and knowledge that enable someone to be employable. Human capital is as much about the 'hard' skills that we might learn through schooling or a post-school qualification as it is about soft skills, such as the ability to regulate your emotions, communicate with others and work in a team. Indeed, it has been argued that these soft skills are even more important in a work environment than intelligence or hard skills.¹⁶⁸

Social capital and human capital are closely related, because you need people who are able to make connections, access services and resources, and have knowledge of systems, to enable social capital.¹⁶⁹ Todd Clear argues, and presents evidence to support the claim, that communities that are poor in terms of human capital are conducive to crime because they have many members who are unemployed and under-educated.¹⁷⁰

This has implications for the kinds of educational or rehabilitative programmes offered in correctional facilities, since they should not only incorporate the means to build human capital through skills development and education but also establish social support systems for those who leave correctional facilities.

Most of the men I interviewed had gone through a range of rehabilitation programmes, and they would name them in a long list towards the end of our interviews, often as a way of telling me how

much they had learned and changed while in prison. They had done courses in anger management, substance abuse and sexual offending, and several had learned practical skills such as carpentry, leatherwork or upholstery. But none of the programmes seemed to equip the men with the social skills or connect them to the social networks that would enable their successful transition into society, including through providing access to capital to start small businesses with the skills (such as leatherwork) they had learned while incarcerated.

In addition, it would seem that none of the programmes undergone by the participants in this study looked beyond their offending behaviour, seeking to address the need for offenders to consider their own life stories.

Narrative is so important to human societies that it has been argued that, without narrative, collective living would not be possible. This is because narrative 'ties together not only familial structures over generations, but importantly marks the generations of political hierarchies, establishing legitimacy of power. In Carrithers's view, human societies themselves would not exist without the glue that narratives make possible.'¹⁷¹ None of the men who participated in this study ever seemed to have had an opportunity to share family origin narratives with their parents, or their own origin narratives with others. Roach argues that working with narratives can yield opportunities for relieving the effects of trauma and assisting in the development of coping mechanisms.¹⁷² As we saw in Mosiuoa's case, having the opportunity to tell his story and answer questions about his life gave him new insights into his behaviour and reactions that seemed to have a healing effect, at least at the time. The use of narrative therapy could thus be considered by the DCS as a component of its rehabilitative offerings.

Incarceration as an opportunity

For some of the participants in this study, being incarcerated offered them the first opportunity they ever had to reflect on themselves, their lives and their actions. Kotsi referred to this, creating the impression that the fast pace of life, the chaos, adrenalin and pressures of daily survival outside a correctional facility meant there was little time to reflect. Mosiuoa too said, 'before I came to prison I never had time to sit down and plan my life, I was just doing it'. And towards the end of the interviews with Velabahleke he reflected on the interview process, saying:

I liked this interview because it was able to remind me of things that I did that I took decisions against that I will no longer do them and of other things that I must try and go back and do. What I also liked was that there are other things I am not able to open up about to other people. As I had said about my case that other things I did not communicate in court even though I knew I was guilty and I did not state I was guilty in court. I liked the interview because it reminded me of other things [I] must remove from my life and things that I must adapt. The interview also makes me look at things in a different manner now. It makes me want to encourage others who are starting to do the same things I did, it makes me want to encourage them not to do what I did because they will end up where I am. But I do not blame them because while you are doing wrong things you do not see because you think you will never get caught. I am also glad that we have courses such as Anger Management. I do not regret that I ended up in jail, because I have learned a lot, it has taught me about religion and Ubuntu. In jail we have church, I started going to church since 2001, I have seen the power of God.

This suggests that incarceration does offer a moment for positive intervention. What is important is to evaluate the existing programmes to assess whether they are achieving their objectives, test

new programmes for effectiveness, and over time develop a suite of programmes for which there is evidence of effect.

Conclusion

While we can see in each of the narratives that have been presented so far how a set of common factors come to inform these men's criminal and violent responses, there is a strong tension between seeing them as complex individuals with unique biographies and the inclination or desire to reduce these to a set of risk factors to which we might respond as a state or society. What is clear is that the early life experiences of each of the men, and their family circumstances, had a significant impact on their lives and on their offending behaviour. Longitudinal studies such as those undertaken by Farrington¹⁷³ and Moffitt¹⁷⁴ and that have categorised offenders have identified early adversity as a critical factor informing life trajectories.

While it is not clear from the current study that the categories offered by criminologists such as Farrington and Moffitt offer a sound basis for defining groups of offenders in South Africa, South African research conducted by Fleur Soverein, Catherine Ward, Ingmar Visser and Patrick Burton does underline the significance of childhood adversity on criminal behaviour. In 2015 these researchers published an article in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* in which they presented an analysis of the findings of a study of the data from the South African National Youth Offending and Resilience Study, to determine the percentage of young offenders in South Africa who could be considered life course persistent, using Moffitt's typology.¹⁷⁵ The sample of 395 offenders between the ages of 12 and 25 was selected from eight correctional facilities in four provinces. The authors found that 41.5% of these offenders could be considered persistent offenders. They also found that children who came from violent homes were more likely than others to start offending early; and that the severity of crimes increased when there were other family members who were involved in crime. These offenders also shared poor school performance, and experiences of violence and abuse at home and at school.

While the authors recommend that the DCS should focus treatment on offenders who share these characteristics, they acknowledge that the kind of treatment that has been shown to be effective – cognitive behavioural therapy and multi-focused therapy – is difficult if not impossible in a low-resource setting, because it requires highly skilled clinical psychologists. Not only are such skilled personnel in short supply in the department, the problem is exacerbated by the high number of offenders who would fall into this category – they estimate over 13 000 incarcerated offenders.¹⁷⁶

The implication of this finding is that our best chance of addressing persistent, violent offending (recidivism) is through interventions aimed at preventing violence in the first place, in particular through interventions to support parents and reduce child neglect and abuse, and programmes to prevent intimate partner violence.¹⁷⁷ This is the subject of further discussion in the final chapter.

Chapter 7

Conclusion and recommendations

This study has been concerned primarily with two things: understanding the complex interactions between individuals and their environments that lead to violence and criminality; and how to identify and respond to young offenders before they become repeat offenders.

The narratives reflected in this report have gone some way towards demonstrating how violence perpetuates itself in society – and how compounded experiences of violence, in combination with biological and environmental factors, set some children on a life course of alienation and violence.

It is clear from the narratives, and from the discussion that has accompanied them, that the best chance we have of preventing violent crime is to ensure that infants and children are not exposed to violence or toxic stress and are warmly cared for.¹⁷⁸ It is equally important to ensure that children are protected from violence at school and at home, and this includes violence perpetrated by other children and by the adults who care for them (teachers and parents).

Of course, not all children who grow up in adverse circumstances and are victims of violence or harsh punishment end up as violent criminals. The right combination (or, more accurately, a toxic mix) of factors, including biology, psychology, temperament and environment, is required to produce life course persistent offenders. However, as has been shown in a series of studies discussed in various reports,¹⁷⁹ a predominance of risk factors – including high levels of poverty, high rates of child and adult homicide, the prevalence of PTSD trauma¹⁸⁰ and harmful beliefs that sustain gender inequality and the use of corporal punishment – works against strategies to reduce violence.¹⁸¹

What is clear is that preventing recidivism at the point of incarceration, post-conviction, is probably the most difficult thing to get right and the least likely to succeed in reducing violent criminality in the long run. That is not to suggest that prison might not offer an important opportunity for reflection, skills development, education and even more intensive programming; rather it is to emphasise that if we wish to reduce violent crime in South Africa we need to take a more comprehensive approach. Such an approach needs to provide universal programmes (such as improving gun control and reducing the number of firearms in society) and targeted interventions to support individuals and families at risk (e.g. those living in poor, high-violence settings).¹⁸²

The findings of this study suggest that interventions aimed at reducing violence need to reduce the risk of children's exposure to physical and emotional abuse, and to intimate partner violence.¹⁸³ But once children have been exposed to violence we need systems in place to address this exposure, to reduce long-term harm. Once a child has come into contact with the law any intervention needs to be based on and informed by a comprehensive assessment of the context in which the child

has been living, his/her exposure to violence and maltreatment, and unresolved family conflict and dysfunction. Brutalising reformatories only exacerbate the problem.

This chapter offers a reflection on the research findings; reports briefly on the enabling environment that has been created for early interventions to prevent violence, particularly in relation to supporting parents; and presents what this study has found about the opportunities and challenges in identifying and responding to boys and young men who are at risk of becoming persistent offenders.

Overview

The stories that have appeared here in detail are a selection of those gathered during the course of this study. They are not intended to be representative, but rather to offer insight into the combination of events, circumstances and experiences that determines an outcome of violent criminality. These stories show how our lives are moulded by our experiences from conception to adulthood. The context in which we live and the nature of the relationships we have with our parents, extended families, neighbours and peers inform our trajectories, as do the broader political, social and economic contexts, as depicted in terms of risk and resilience in the WHO's ecological framework (see Figure 1).

This study sought to find patterns, and identify similarities and key factors that lead to violent criminality. It shares this in common with a number of articles, books and reports already published in South Africa.¹⁸⁴ Many of the issues raised in these articles and reports, in particular the report by the HSRC and the CSVr that also explored the life histories of violent offenders, are raised again in this monograph. Yet it would seem that despite the knowledge that we now have about the individual, community and social risk factors for violent offending, and how those play out in concert in the lives of men who end up committing violent crime, we are yet, as a country, to design a comprehensive response.

The 2008 HSRC/CSVr study,¹⁸⁵ like this study, sought to understand through the life narratives of offenders the complex interplay of factors that result in a life of crime. That study found, like this study did, that the respondents' (offenders) own experiences of violence are not restricted to discrete settings; instead violence experienced in the home is mirrored at school and in their communities. Also, each of these experiences of violence has a compounding effect – in these men's lives there are few if any safe havens.

Intimate partner violence emerged in several of the narratives as having had a significant impact on the lives and educational outcomes of the participants.

As often as the young men in these narratives turn to alcohol and drugs to numb the effects of complex trauma, so too does the use of alcohol also exacerbate situations, escalating a brawl into a lethal interaction.

We also find that many of the men in this study share common ideas about what it is to be a man. 'Men' are material providers, objects of affection only for so long as they are able to demonstrate their material wealth and share it with the women they have often-transitory relationships with; they must show fearlessness and bravery – which usually means a willingness to fight and a lack of empathy with their victims. Most of the men in this study, like those who participated in the HSRC/CSVr study, start their lives in adversity and experience loss early – loss of a parent, loss of trusting relationships, loss of self-esteem. Violent (and authoritarian) parenting, violent (and authoritarian)

schooling, bullying and harsh responses from the criminal justice system exacerbate their alienation from society.

Ultimately what the stories reflected here show, among other things, is that the combination of experiences of structural violence (seen in high levels of poverty, and lack of access to quality education and health care) and physical violence, in the absence of warm, trusting and caring relationships, gives rise to complex trauma and lays the basis for further violence.

Understanding this requires us to abandon simple dualities such as victim and perpetrator. In these narratives the children who become violent men are mostly victims themselves. They are variously the victims of trauma, racism, bullying, corporal punishment and brutalising institutions. They are also often the victims of dysfunctional families or families broken by the loss of a parent – to death, to the criminal justice system or to migrant labour – and have many experiences that reinforce their mistrust of adults and authority figures (such as teachers). This is not to excuse their often-cruel acts of violence, but it is important to acknowledge when seeking solutions, as in this context therapeutic interventions are particularly difficult and their chances of success difficult to predict. This being the case, primary prevention becomes critically important to breaking intergenerational cycles of violence.

Early intervention and primary prevention

There seems to be growing agreement among policymakers, academics and civil society organisations that supporting parents and enabling them to have non-authoritarian, warm and consistent relationships with their children is essential to preventing violence in the long term. Several national and provincial policies adopted in the last 10 years have identified the importance of supporting parents:

- Interventions to support and develop positive parenting are mandated by Chapter 8 of the Children's Amendment Act 2007 (Act 41 of 2007), which deals with prevention and early intervention. Section 144 of the act focuses on developing the capacity of parents to act in the best interests of their children, including through:
 - Strengthening positive relationships within families
 - Improving the caregiving capacity of parents
 - Using non-violent forms of discipline

This provides the legal basis for the provision of parenting programmes to address these needs.

- The South African Integrated Programme of Action on Violence Against Women and Children (2013–2018) seeks to 'provide support to strengthen and capacitate families especially in relation to parenting responsibilities; to decrease the vulnerability of children to abuse, neglect and exploitation' and very specifically to 'develop, strengthen and roll-out positive parenting courses'.¹⁸⁶
- The Department of Social Development's Draft National Strategic Plan for Prevention and Early Intervention (2013–2017)¹⁸⁷ identifies early intervention as being 'focused' or 'indicated' interventions that target high-risk individuals or families identified as having signs or symptoms of social problems (e.g. a child who is frequently absent from school, or whose caregiver is often intoxicated).¹⁸⁸ This strategy is intended to provide the basis for the Department of Social

Development to transform its services to children so as to significantly increase prevention and early intervention services and thus reduce the number of cases requiring statutory intervention. The strategic plan refers to the need to engage in evidence-based planning. However, the Strategic Plan for Prevention and Early Intervention currently raises the question as to how a parent who is often intoxicated, or who has multiple complex problems ranging from mental health issues to being a victim of intimate partner violence, for example, could gain from a parenting programme. In addition it is not certain how such programmes could or should be linked to other forms of support in order for them to be effective when children are at greatest risk. These questions remain to be answered.

Nevertheless, there is a strong policy basis for the provision of programmes to support and encourage positive parenting (by which I mean caregiving by an adult, rather than any particular biological relationship between the child and adult). There are also a growing number of South African programmes that have a demonstrable effect in improving parenting and child outcomes.¹⁸⁹ However, the reality is that despite the enabling policy environment, we are many years away from implementing parenting programmes at anything like the scale they would be required in order to reach sufficient parents who could benefit from them. In addition, parenting programmes are not a panacea; they need to be one of a range of interventions across the life course. But parenting is important because positive and engaged parenting can buffer the effects of violent communities.¹⁹⁰

In this monograph, reference has been made in the contexts of Ryan's and Zibonele's narratives to the importance of parental bonding or attachment with an infant, and how the absence of a warm bond with a consistent adult can affect children's lives by reducing their ability to regulate their emotions and communicate about their emotions. Later in life, parenting has just as an important a role to play. While self-esteem appeared to play a significant role in informing Mosiuoa's trajectory, self-efficacy – the belief that you are able to influence the outcome of events – is as important. As Caprara et al. explain, 'unless people believe they can produce desired results by their action they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties'.¹⁹¹ A great deal of research has shown that, particularly during adolescence, good communication and a positive relationship between growing children and their caregivers can prevent them from resorting to anti-social behaviour. There are several reasons for this. One is that when young persons are able to communicate their experiences, fears and expectations to their parents without fear of rejection or retaliation, they are better able to navigate the complex social pressures they experience. On the other hand, if they lack the belief that they are able to influence events and realise change they are more susceptible to negative peer influences. In the absence of supportive parents and open communication, children are less likely to resist peer pressure and less likely to believe they have agency to achieve prosocial outcomes.¹⁹²

In short, there is much to be gained from supporting and promoting positive parenting if we wish to prevent violence. But if we return to the WHO's ecological framework (see Figure 1 in the Introduction) we can see that such interventions at the family and relationship level need to be supported by change at the societal level; in particular through addressing working and childcare conditions for parents. Parents such as Velabahleke's worked long hours and were not able to be present to monitor their children's activities during the day, or help them with their homework in the

afternoon or evening. Hlupha's mother was a domestic worker who had to send her children to live with extended family members far from her. For people such as these, access to good quality and safe early childhood development centres and after-school care facilities is vital. And for those fathers and mothers who have to work in the early years of their children's lives, parental leave shortly after the birth of a child (for both parents) is also essential.

Opportunities for identifying and responding to recidivism

Truancy: an early indicator

Early school leaving was found in this study to be a significant indicator that something is wrong, and that it is likely to get worse. This was consistently the case across all the narratives. All the men who participated in this study dropped out of school between the ages of nine and 16, several after having been beaten at school for playing truant for a few days; and others (such as Amukelani and Zibonele) because their families could not afford to send them to school.

In almost all the cases, dropping out of school was accompanied by falling in with a group of peers who became involved in petty offences. In many cases these offences escalated over time, from shoplifting and theft to housebreaking, and then moved on to more serious crimes.

Truancy itself does not seem to be a cause of behavioural problems, but rather an indicator of stress in the child's life. Since teachers are likely to be the first state representatives to become aware of a problem, they need to be aware of the danger of responding to truancy with harsh punishment, and to be equipped to respond appropriately. Roach argues that truancy can be an indicator of social disorganisation where caregivers (parents) may be too stressed to address the needs of their children.¹⁹³

But teachers may either be unaware that truancy is an indicator of deeper problems, or may not know how to respond. They can also not be expected to be equipped to deal with the problems that children face in dysfunctional, violent or disorganised homes. If, however, truancy is the first indicator of a criminal trajectory, especially for boys, it is imperative to establish a protocol that teachers can follow when they become aware that children are skipping school. This protocol should include, if necessary, drawing on the support of other service providers, such as school psychologists and social workers whose assessment of the child should include consideration of the child's home environment and the ability of caregivers to monitor their children's activities sufficiently. However, for this there have to be enough school psychologists to meet the demand, and they need to be enabled to offer intensive interventions for children who present with clusters of risks.

Children in conflict with the law

Study participants' experiences of places of safety and reform schools were far from positive. If anything, the brutalising environments exacerbated their alienation from society and their criminal behaviour. Much has changed since the men in this study were held in places of safety and reform schools: South Africa has progressive legislation dealing with the prevention of violence against children and the protection of children, in the form of the Children's Act. The Child Justice Act lays down the principles of how we should deal with children who come into conflict with the law – and requires that children be incarcerated only as a last resort, and then for the shortest possible time.¹⁹⁴

But, as Skelton and Sloth-Nielsen have shown, transitioning places of safety from harsh, prison-like environments to places of care has not yet been achieved.¹⁹⁵

In addition, as we saw in the case of Sehlolo, the intervention by social workers at the place of safety where he was held focused only on his criminal behaviour and did not extend to a deeper exploration, which might have revealed the need for a more intensive response.

In Ryan's case, the social worker who accompanied him to court also focused only on his offending behaviour and was unable to influence the magistrate, who only saw before him a young criminal. No investigation appears to have been done into his background and the factors that led to his behaviour.

In addition to the urgent need to reform secure care facilities in South Africa such that they are therapeutic rather than retributive, this study has shown the importance of ensuring that magistrates understand criminal trajectories and the factors that influence them, are aware of the harm that may be caused by early incarceration and have sustainable options to divert children away from the criminal justice system.

Offender rehabilitation programmes

By the time the criminal justice system engages with men who are set on a trajectory of violent offending of the types described here, it is often too late to effect a dramatic change without considerable investment. The tools that the criminal justice system has at its disposal to address offending – arrest, conviction and incarceration – cannot, even with the best intentions, the most effective personnel and state-of-the-art facilities, prevent future offending. In addition, as was apparent from the life stories of the participants in this study, most of their crimes never resulted in an arrest or conviction.

At best, by incarcerating men like these when they are found guilty, we are containing them, holding them pending their release at an age when most (but not all) are unlikely to reoffend. Ironically, it is men like these, who will spend a significant proportion of their lives behind bars, who are the most likely to have sentence plans (a plan for their period of incarceration that includes the rehabilitation and skills programmes an offender will participate in).¹⁹⁶

The first time they come into contact with the criminal justice system (if they do) for petty offences is the best time for intervention, and probably also the time when they are least likely to be the recipient of any kind of programme. As such it is necessary to consider whether we are getting the best returns from making programmes available only to those offenders who are spending long periods in correctional facilities. Rather, it may be time to consider focussing programming on first-time offenders, and those who are incarcerated for between two and 10 years. This will have serious implications for the DCS's resource allocation, as there would be little time in which to complete assessments and sentence planning after sentencing.

Conclusion

It might be tempting to think that the accounts of their lives given by the participants in this study, their experiences of violence and their own criminal acts, are remnants of our past. But we need to keep in mind that, as shown in these narratives, the foundations for violence and criminality are laid anywhere between 10 and 20 years before the effects are felt by society. In other words, the way we, as a state and a society, respond to children who witness and experience violence, neglect and

abuse in 2015 will determine whether we will see the same levels of violence in 2025. This study should contribute to the call for action to urgently develop a comprehensive national response to violence and give effect to and colour in the lines offered by the National Development Plan.

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Appendix 1

Life history of violent offenders: interview schedule

For the recorder note the following prior to starting the interview

- Date
- Time (start and end)
- Location
- Present
- Spell respondent name
- Note languages of interview
- State “this is interview number XXXX with XXX”
- Note whether informed consent procedure was completed

Interview 1

The principle approach should be to deal with factual issues first, moving on to more difficult emotional issues as a relationship develops between the researcher and respondent.

The respondent must be reminded about the study and an informed consent form explained to him and signed before the interview starts.

The following information must be collected during the first interview:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Language in which the respondent is most comfortable
- Language of the interview
- Crime for which the offender is currently serving his sentence
- Place crime was committed for which the offender is currently serving his sentence
- How many living relatives does the offender have and where do they live (we are particularly interested in relatives who the offender has contact with or has had contact with during his life)
- Details of the significant other whom we can interview
- Personal health

The interviewer should use a large piece of card during the interview to note, chronologically, events and issues as they are raised by the respondent.

The interview should cover the following issues:

1. Family

- Maternal care
- Paternal care
- Extended family care
- Where and with whom the respondent lived (may be with different individuals at different times – all circumstances to be explored)
- Relationship with siblings
- Home circumstances
- Loss of family members
- Discipline at home
- Parental substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Sexual abuse
- Loss/death of parents and significant others

2. Living circumstances

- Did the respondent have a stable home or did he move from place to place (all details)
- Financial circumstances growing up (was there enough money for food, school fees, clothes, nice things, etc)

3. Experiences at school

- How many years at school
- Achievement/non-achievement at school
- Relationship with peers
- Intimate relationships
- Relationship with teachers
- Experiences of bullying (as perpetrator and victim)
- School leaving – why, how, when
- Aspirations
- Sexual abuse (as perpetrator and victim)
- Repeated years at school
- Discipline/physical abuse at school
- Substance abuse (marijuana, tik, cocaine, heroine, LSD or other hallucinogens, prescription drugs, alcohol)

4. Post-school experiences

- Intimate partners (including: quality of the relationship; extent to which the partner monitored the activities of the respondent; whether the partner supported/encouraged the use of violence e.g. if someone insulted you, how would your partner expect you to respond; violence within the relationship)
- Loss/death of girlfriends/friends
- Spousal/partner abuse
- Children
- Loss/death of children

- Work experiences
- Aspirations (and the extent to which they were met or not, how they were met etc)

5. Life experiences

- Explore substance abuse
- Relationships with peers
- Gang involvement
- Age of first incarceration
- Age of first crime
- Political involvement
- Involvement in recreational activities (sport etc)
- First arrest and subsequent arrests
- Fears and aspirations
- Income (legal/illegal/grants)
- Military service
- Routine activities: what do you do for fun, relaxation
- Interaction with social services

Interviews 2 and 3

Reconfirm informed consent.

During the second interview the interviewer should re-visit the issues raised in the first interview to solicit additional information. Ideally the interview should have been conducted with a significant other before the second interview takes place and the outcomes of that interview discussed with the respondent.

If that is not possible, the second interview should proceed to discuss the crimes committed and experiences in the criminal justice system (from first arrest or first contact with the police).

1. Incarceration (experiences of incarceration for each month/year/age group)
2. Correctional supervision
3. Violent events and violent-avoided events
 - Narrative of each event
 - Event setting
 - Actions during the event
 - Weapons
 - Outcomes
 - Linking events
 - Non-violent crimes

About this monograph

In this monograph, readers will meet some of the men who are responsible for violent crime in South Africa. The narratives presented here are based on interviews with men who have been incarcerated for murder, robbery and rape. These accounts show that the foundation for their criminal careers was laid early in their lives and compounded by their experiences of loss, abuse and alienation. Readers are taken on a journey through their lives to understand why crime in South Africa is so violent, and what needs to be done to prevent it.

About the ISS

The Institute for Security Studies is an African organisation that aims to enhance human security on the continent. It does independent and authoritative research, provides expert policy analysis and advice, and delivers practical training and technical assistance.

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Cover image by Chandré Gould, taken at the now dilapidated site of the Porter Reformatory School in Tokai, Cape Town, March 2015.

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