

Becoming a Citizen

*The Process of Leaving a Gang in Cape Town,
South Africa*

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Abstract

This study investigates the process of how eight people left *competing informal institutions*, in the form of gangs, to join *substitutive informal institutions*, which is more compatible with a democratic society, and in this way became ‘good citizens’. The research question is as follows: How do ex-gang members explain their change in lifestyle, from past involvement in gangs to the subsequent transformation in their present day lives? Life-story interviews have been carried out with former gang members that have then been transcribed and analysed in alignment with Riessman’s (2008) *dialogic/performance* analysis and Rose Ebough’s (1988) Role-exit theory. Moreover, to understand in what context these personal processes have taken place and the impact they make on the society of Cape Flats, Helmke & Levitsky’s (2004) framework on how to analyse informal institutions, and their impact on political agenda have been used. Three main findings were made. Firstly gang membership is closely linked to shaping of identity. Secondly, the role of being an Ex-gang member was mainly portrayed as something positive and useful for society. Thirdly, to be accepted in the positive role of an Ex-gang member, the interviewees gained trust by presenting themselves referring to cultural credits as religion and taking family seriously. Finally, policy makers and practitioners, including both public and NGOs could benefit by acknowledging the process of leaving gangs. If more people left *competitive informal institutions* to join *substitutive informal institutions* Cape Flats may begin to move in the direction of a more secure and democratic society where development of social services can take place.

Keywords: Gangs, Gang-exit, Role-exit, Social Policy, Cape Flats, Cape Town

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Introduction

How does the transition from being a gangster to becoming a pastor or life-coach take place? To alter the direction of one's life course is not uncommon, but when it comes to leaving a life-style and identity filled with violence and drugs it may be a notable change. The southern suburb of Cape Town, South Africa – Cape Flats – is an area where gang activities, such as dealing drugs and violence, have become institutionalised over the past fifty years. Because of the unexpected prevalence of gang violence after the end of the Apartheid system 1994, many actions have been taken by different organisations, including the state, to disband these gangs, but still gangs and gang activity remains (Hagedorn, 2008:11-18). Despite this, there are people in Cape Flats who *do* leave the gangs and for this study eight of them have been interviewed. Arguably it can be said that the interviewees have left one informal regime consisting of gangs to join another informal regime consisting mainly of organisations working against and to prevent gangs and gang violence.

This study is noteworthy for two main reasons. Firstly, because of high levels of gang related violence in Cape Flats, social institutions has not established to the extent that was planned in the Post-Apartheid era (Hagedorn, 2008:17-18). Research in the area, therefore, is in the interest of the development of security and social services in Cape Flats. Moreover, the results of this study could be taken into account by policymakers active in different sectors, both in preventing initiation into gangs and in helping people to leave gangs. Secondly, previous research on the topic of gangs focuses mainly on why gangs exist and how they are structured, e.g Hagedorn (2008) & Andersson (1999). There is, however, only limited research made on the process of leaving a gang, especially in the South African context. This study's ambition is therefore to contribute to the sociological field in which research on how the process of leaving a gang is situated, and further, what effects gang exit may have in the area of Cape Flats.

Purpose and Research Question

The base for this study aligns with that the situation of gang violence in Cape Flats is to be taken seriously and development towards a more secure place for the residents is needed. The study will, as explained previously, approach the problem from a perspective of looking into the life changing process of people who have left gangs and now are involved in preventing

gang violence. More precise, the aim is to investigate the process of how eight people left *competing informal institutions*¹, in the form of a gang, to join *substitutive informal institutions*², which is more compatible with a democratic society, and in this way became ‘good citizens’. The research question is as follows: How do ex-gang members explain their change in lifestyle, from past involvement in gangs to the subsequent transformation in their present day lives?

Limitations

This study is limited to the process of role-exit and role-intro and does not investigate more deeply what type of gang or organisation the interviewees belonged or belong to. Focusing on the process of leaving a gang in this specific condition makes it possible to attain valuable information about how gang exit takes place and what is required from the individuals and the surroundings for this to occur. Furthermore, due to the fact that the study focuses on security for the population in the Cape Flat region, the organisations and religious groups, which for this study are classified as *substitutive informal institutions*, should only be classified as such when considering the field of ending gang violence and not in other fields of development or other situations.

Thesis Outline

First the introduction is given, along with a presentation of the aim and research question for the study. After this the chapter of previous research explains the historical and political situation in Cape Flats in more detail, and highlights parts of previous research on gangs and gang-exit. This is followed by a methodological framework explaining the procedure of the thesis. After this a theoretical framework built on Ebaugh’s (1988) Role-Exit theory and Helmke & Levitsky’s (2004) framework of informal institutions are presented. This is followed by the analysis. Finally, the conclusion is presented consisting of the main findings.

¹ For further explanation of *competing informal institutions*, see theory chapter p.24-25

² For further explanation of *substitutive informal institutions*, see theory chapter p.24-25

Previous Research

The previous research has been selected to give an understanding in to what context the role-exit of the interviewees have been taken place, and further to give a deeper understanding to how being in a gang can be connected to the shaping of identity which is central for the thesis.. First research which focuses on the context of Cape Flats, its relation to gangs and further how the situation has been dealt with in the Post-Apartheid era are presented. The following overview is concerning why gangs exist and research regarding disengagement from gangs. The fact that many gang members eventually leave gangs has gotten a growing amount attention in academia over the past decade. This study is aligned with this academic focus but as stated in the introduction there is still limited research on this topic, especially in the South African context. Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to this academic gap.

Cape Flats, Gangs and Policymaking

Cape Flats and Gang Violence

The area of Cape Flats, mainly consisting of Coloured³ people, was created during Apartheid in the 1960s by the Area Removals Act. The act relocated tens of thousands of people who lived in Cape Town into race determined neighbourhoods. In this way Coloured people, as well as African and Indian people, were segregated from white areas by law, highways and violence (Hagedorn, 2008:15). The first gang, according to Jensen (2006:80-81), started before the relocation, ironically as a countermovement against the increasing crime rate. However, due to economic needs and state-police pressure the gang's actions started to become more unethical. Furthermore, once segregated by the Area Removals Act the gangs expended and took control of the communities and, according to Ted Legget in Hagedorn (2008:15), "*have been controlling the same turf for generations*". It can, therefore, be understood that both Cape Flats and its gangs have their roots in the Apartheid system (Hagedorn, 2008:15).

³ This term relates to one of the four main racial groups with which the Apartheid state operated, the others being white, Indian and African (Jensen, 2006:298). Since the interviewees refer to themselves as Coloured, and sometimes even "proudly cape Coloured", this term will be used in this thesis. However, the problem of categorisation and potential racist implications are understood. Jensen (2006:298) also remarked upon this problem and argued that in post-Apartheid era, even within academia, there is an increasing understanding that the category is lived and might even be the basis of a positive identity (Jensen, 2006:298).

After the democratisation of South Africa in 1994, the global economic crisis and the ineffective management by the new government, among other things, resulted in economic difficulties for the public sector in the country. Furthermore, the new government failed to tackle the large labour surplus which still remains a problem (Nattrass & Seekings 1997:456). Additionally, in Cape Flats gang violence and drug use did not decline as predicted (Jensen, 2010:78) and the quality of the welfare provisions established in the area have been affected by gangs whose actions take place in public spaces and consequently affects the communities of Cape Flats (Lambrecht, 2012:795). Moreover, the security of the community is low due to the great amount of gang violence and gang wars. For instance, there are many cases where residents, many of them children, have been hit in the crossfire (Swingler, 2014).

According to the South African Police Service, there are today twelve recognised street gangs and three prison gangs in Western Cape (Swingler, 2014). However, there are also a number of smaller gangs and, according to Standing (2005), the total number at the end of the 1990s was estimated to be one hundred and thirty gangs with approximately one hundred thousand gang members in Cape Town. In Cape Flats gangs currently account for a large proportion of the drug dealing and have therefore created a large informal economy (Swingler, 2014). They are also involved in a lot of the violence in the region. In 2013, 12 percent of 2,580 murders reported in Western Cape were gang related. In Cape Flats, on average, a life was lost to gang violence every five days. Furthermore, the legal system in the area functions poorly. During the first half of 2013, only 29 of the 115 murders in Manenberg, a part of Cape Flats, led to a conviction. In Lavender Hill, an area with similar social conditions, the numbers were 2 out of 72 (Western Cape Government, 2013).

Gangs and Welfare Provisions in a Development Context

Even though gang activities are not limited to Cape Flats, the area is a place where gang violence and related activities take place in public spaces. Consequently, these gang related activities become part of everyday life for the whole community. Furthermore, Verbaan (2015) described in *Cape Times* how gangs and residents of the community of Cape Flats live in a symbiotic relationship where it is common for the gangs to give support such as money, food and security in exchange for, for example that the residents of the community hiding drugs or not disclosing gang activities to the police. In addition to this, the gang members live as part of the community which makes it easy to recruit young people, commonly as young as

twelve, to the gangs (Ward & Bakhuis, 2010). A student explained to *the Guardian* how he joined a gang when he was aged seven (Swingler, 2014):

“You get chosen. They see your talent and if they see you’re good looking, you’re clever, they’ll bring you in,” he says. “If you’re disadvantaged in life, the Mafias will come to you and help you. They’ll give you everything you want just for that short period of time” (Swingler, 2014).

Wood & Gogh (2006) suggest that when welfare provision is not fully established in its most basic form, security, it is common for other potentially non-reliable groups to intervene. Arguably, this can be seen in Cape Flats as identified by Lambrechts (2012:806), who describes how power is shared by criminal groups (gangs), local state and community. The gangs’ position as providers of security may initially appear contradictory to their violent nature. However, this can be explained as the gang members are part of the community as well, and therefore sometimes see it as their job to protect ‘their own’. An example of how this is quoted in Lambrechts (2012) study where a religious leader explains the phenomena as follows:

“...When I came here the church was fenced with barbed wire which was very old and rusty and people were getting in all the time. So on weekends, at least once on a weekend, I’d wake up hearing somebody breaking down the door or somebody breaking in to our church hall and stole everything that was in the hall and then still come back sometimes when I was supposed to be inside. So I asked for funding... to put up [an] electric fence... Then when we were putting up the electric fence, people interfered with the guys who were putting up the fence. They robbed them and caused them trouble. Of course I was very upset and then one of my parishioners came and said: unless you speak to the gangsters, this is not going to stop and also the gangsters are upset with you for putting up the fence. So I said: Why are they upset with me for putting up the fence? And they said: No, because they feel that they have to protect the church. It is their job” (Lambrechts, 2012:795).

It is, however, common that the gangs ask for something in return, for example protection against the police. The gangs could be classified as unreliable actors and not compatible with a democratic society as they often have agreements with people in the community and use violence if these are not followed. Wood & Gogh (2006:1697) highlight the importance of developing a formal way to provide security and to de-clientalize unreliable actors. Furthermore, welfare in the developing world is seldom provided by the state alone and Wood & Gogh suggest that the course of action cannot be generalised and each situation must be

judged according to its circumstances. This allows for universalistic approach to achieve the end point of formal security; however, the means to establish this remain relativistic. Developing countries, for example, often ask for more actors in the public domain than the state which fundamentally contrasts with Western social policies (Wood & Gogh, 2006:1697).

Policymaking and Actions against Gang Violence by Different Actors in Post-Apartheid Era

The State of South Africa's recognition of gang violence in Cape Flats differs on national and local level. The national level, represented by the government, claim that the situation is under control. However, the local level representing the City of Cape Town calls for more action to be taken (Western Cape Government, 2013). The State's role in Cape Flats could, however, be described as one actor amongst many others (Lambrechts, 2012:806). For example, religious organisations are very active in initiating actions which seek to reduce gang violence. Cape Flats consists of a large population who identify as Christian, along with Sub-Saharan Africa's [SSA] biggest Muslim community. Consequently, these organisations have a high level of legitimacy in the area (Landguiden Utrikespolitiska Institutet, 2015). Moreover, the City of Cape Town has established Private Public Partnerships [PPPs] with organisations as Proudly Manenberg (UNODC, 2015), Ceacefire (City of Cape Town, 2015) and religious organisations whose intentions are to stop gang violence and that aim to utilise local people to build a strong civil society to encourage residents' to stand against gang culture in civil society (Western Cape Government, 2013; Swingler, 2014).

Jensen (2010) has looked into what impact the State has had on the Cape Flat communities by policymaking against gang violence. The unexpected prevalence of post-Apartheid gang violence resulted in the state trying to take control over the violence, as exemplified by the introduction of the Prevention of Organised Crime Act [POCA] in 1998 based on California's anti-gang Street Terrorism Enforcement and Protection Act [STEP] (Hagedorn, 2008:17-18). Jensen (2010:83-84) discusses how the POCA has become counter-productive and that the "war on gangs" that the state has declared in this act has become a war against the whole community of Cape Flats. This is exemplified through the broad definition of who is counted a gang member which arguably includes nearly all Coloured men living in Cape Flats. Furthermore, Jensen (2010:95) argues that due to the act the Cape Flats population has become caught between the gangs and the State. The residents cannot be loyal to both the gangs and the state, and as the gang members are often also family members or neighbours it is easy to side with the gangs as it is these people the residents meet every day. Jensen argues

that this has resulted in a *differiented citizenship* which is defined as people who are included in the polity but are excluded from substantive rights (Jensen, 2010:92). Jensen (2010:77) also argues that security is necessary in order for development to take place. However, the problem with the social policies in Cape Town is that the security policies which have been established are mostly there to protect the city's affluent parts and restrain the residents of Cape Flats rather than assist them (Jensen, 2010:94-95).

Gang violence has not declined since POCA's introduction in 1998. Gangs are still institutionalised in Cape Flats and deeply connected with people's identity (Hagedorn, 2008:17-18). However, it appears that there are more actors in the public domain than the state that try to prevent and deal with gang violence as discussed in Wood & Gogh (2006). For example, religious organisations which are not necessarily a part of the state can still work to fulfil the goal of preventing people from entering gang life, or helping them to leave. In this sense these organisations are consistent with a democratic welfare society. As mentioned, for this study the process of leaving gangs to join such organisations will be closely studied.

Overview of the Sociological Field of Gangs

Why do gangs exist?

Many gang members join gangs in adolescence, a period when much of the identity formation takes place and develops (Erickson, 1950, 1968). In contrast to previous modernity-sociologist and -criminology theories, for example Merton (1938, 1968) that emphasised that gangs was mainly due to poverty, Hagedorn (2008:xxx) argues that the question of becoming a gang member has mainly to do with identity. The problem of gangs therefore cannot be fully solved by government anti-gang programmes, an increased number of jobs, better schools or "zero tolerance" police tactics (Hagedorn, xxx).

Gang culture can be described with the help of Castells concept of *resistance identity* which is defined as "*contagious culture of rebellion*" (Hagedorn, 2008:85). Castells specifies that during the industrial era there was a faith that politics could bring change to the low socio-economic status of people's lives. In post-modernity this faith has expired. The insecurities which accompany growing urbanisation are creating areas with high unemployment and marginalised people who experience exclusion from the larger society. Those who experience this marginalisation and social exclusion often create more localised, religious, ethnic and/or

racialised identities to protect their personality or their neighbourhoods from the insecurity which accompanies globalisation and consequent urbanisation. As specified by Touraine, “*Anyone that is no longer defined by their activity soon constructs or reconstructs an identity built on their origins*” (Hagedorn, 2008:60). Hagedorn (2008:85) relates *resistance identity* to rap and hip-hop culture and closely links it to the identity of a gang member.

The identity of being a gangster is attractive for many in this position. Therefore, Hagedorn argues that one solution to stopping gang violence could originate in inclusion of marginalised people. Hagedorn suggests the controversial solution of bringing gangs into social movements and inviting them to become a part of larger society which has proved historically successful in some cases (Hagedorn, 2008:60-61). He does, however, note that this does not mean that his solution will work in all circumstances.

Impact of the Area You Belong To

Although gangs exist in many places, gangs and violence often correlates with a low socio-economic status (Hagedorn, 2008, Pinker, 2011). As established in the introduction Cape Flats exemplifies this. Psychologist Pinker argues that this is due to the lack of a legal system rather than the lack of morals:

“The main reason that violence correlates with low socioeconomic status today is that the elites and the middle class pursue justice with the legal system while lower classes resort to what scholars of violence call “self-help” (Pinker, 2011: 83).

In areas where there are no formal or working institutions to counter violence, the *code of honour* adopts this position. The residents of the community believe it is more effective to either punish people themselves or to take help from local gangs instead of using the legal system. Consequently this leads to more violence and the idea of ‘blood for blood’ (Pinker, 2011:82-83).

Anderson (1999) asserts that inner-city black America is a place often stereotyped as having a high frequency of violence. He conversely states that there are a large number of unwritten rules that is referred to as *code of the street*, which in turn regulate this violence. Anderson discusses how the *code of the street* essentially is built on the individual’s ability to command respect in a certain way and teaches people to negotiate public spaces. Anderson (Ibid.) does, however, clarify the situation and argues that *the code* is a response to a lack of jobs that can

pay a living wage, stigma of race, the heavy presence of drugs, alienation and a lack of hope that often exists in these areas (Ibid.).

Hagedorn (2008) also draws the conclusion that the area a person lives in affects the probability for that person to end up in a gang. Hagedorn (2008) discusses how the prevalence of gangs relates to globalisation. Although gangs do exist in various places globally, they commonly exist in slums and are joined by marginalised people. Hagedorn (2008, xxiv) has three main points when explaining this phenomena. *In his first point*, he states that gangs are not particularly unique, but are one of many armed groups who occupy uncontrolled slums. Globalisation, has brought with it the expansion of slums due to urbanisation, immigration, and with that more of angry alienated men and women. Hagedorn's (Ibid.) *second point* is that gangs are shaped by racial and ethnic oppression, poverty and slums as a reaction to despair of inequality. Gangs can be of any ethnicity but to understand them fully gangs' history of racial and ethnic oppression and resistance should be considered. The *third point* is that it is in the power of identity where a counterforce can be made against the nihilism, misogyny and self-destructiveness of youth (Hagedorn, 2008, xxv).

Disengagement from Gangs

Samson and Laub (1993) developed a theory of informal social control built on a longitudinal study by Sheldon and Eleanor Gluecks: *Unravelling Juvenile Delinquency* (1950) and the eighteen years of follow up material. Samson and Laub (1993) discovered that the people who had distanced themselves in order to leave a deviant lifestyle did so after some kind of turning point, for example military service, employment or marriage. Sampson and Laub (1993) saw these turning points as crucial for the process of change which highlights the importance of context even if the context alone cannot explain why the individual had initially become deviant. For example could Psychological factors been interacting with the context or been the cause alone (Ibid.). In later research they concluded that the quality of social bonds, in this case marital bonds, mattered for desistance from crime (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998).

Decker, Pyrooz & Moule (2014:270) highlight that conventional wisdom, which is often based on accounts in the media and from police, says that there are considerable difficulties in leaving a gang. It is often claimed that gang members must go through the process of "blood in, blood out", meaning that once a person has joined a gang the only way to leave is to die or

to somehow prove worth by, for example, killing their mothers (Ibid.). This may have been the case for many individuals, but simultaneously historical accounts show that, at least throughout the 1960s, leaving a gang was a natural consequence of aging, getting a job or getting married (Ibid.). Furthermore, Sanchez-Jankowski suggests six usual ways in which to leave a gang: age, death, going to prison, getting a job, joining another organisation, or leaving as the group divides or disbands. Decker, Pyrooz & Moule (2014:280) argue that the way most likely to be successful is increased family ties combined with assumed adult responsibilities and, occasionally, employment. Therefore, they argue that enhanced prosocial ties combined with decreased ties to individuals involved in crime would probably help people to leave or disengage from gangs (Ibid.). In the discussion of their study concerning gang members' exiting processes, Decker, Pyrooz & Moule (2014:281) conclude that it is "*precisely these processes that scholars, practitioners, and policymakers must recognise so as to meaningfully address gang membership*" (Ibid.). By understanding the process of leaving a gang, programs are better able to support gang members in the process of leaving a gang and address needs that are often neglected or overlooked.

Leaving gangs to enter religion has recently become the focus of research within sociology. This research has mostly investigated gangs in Latin America and Chicano, and the role of Pentecostalism; a fast-growing sect of Christianity (Flores & Hondagney-Sotelo, 2013:467-477). Additionally, the interest in secular recovery programs has grown, and programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, 12-step programs and recovery homes have been further analysed. Flores & Hondagney-Sotelo (2013:487) focus their study on gangs, religion and masculinity. Their work was aligned with previously presented theories and highlight that gang exit is not solely based on economic factors. They recognise that having employment is an essential factor, but emphasise that therapeutic rehabilitation and religion are essential aspects of gang exits. Flores & Hondagney-Sotelo's (2013:487) main findings were that gang exit was facilitated through two interlinked processes connected to the practice of new verbal rituals and negation of Chicano gang masculinity. Gang masculinity was to be replaced by a new masculinity – being a man of God. This included being the male breadwinner, working, and taking responsibility for one's family. The masculine hegemony was still present but the macho-culture was put aside (Ibid.).

Conclusively, it could be said that the gathered previous research presented in this section agrees that the causation of gangs are wider than just economic factors. Giving people the

possibility of making a liveable wage would not hurt, but it would not solve the problem fully either. Instead focus should be upon working with culture and identity shaping. Critics would say that working in this way would be to “soft on crime” and does not take the victims of gang violence seriously (Jensen, 2010). However, policies that are ‘hard on crime’, for instance POCA, have not been proved successful and therefore new or complimentary solutions are called for (Ibid.).

Methodological Framework

In this chapter the method and the implementation of the study are discussed, presentations of the interviewees and Cape Flats are given, followed by a section which explains narrative analysis in the context of life stories. Finally, methodological reflections are made.

Implementation

Life-story interviews have been carried out with former gang members which have then been transcribed and analysed in alignment with Riessman's (2008) *dialogic/performance* analysis. Ten interviews were undertaken of which eight will be used as a basis for the analysis. Two were dismissed as they did not address the study's research topic; gang membership and the explanations surrounding this. They did, however, contribute to my understanding of the society and the culture of gangs in Cape Town. Through my contact person, a police officer known to me through a Social Worker I had previously worked with during a stay in Cape Town, I was able to find the interviewees. My contact person was able to introduce me to participants and accompany me to the interviews. Interview meetings were set up during my first week in Cape Town and were carried out during the following seven weeks.

When planning the settings for the interviews, the criteria of safety, openness, and the importance of a relaxed situation were taken into account (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:144-145). To encourage the creation of this environment a number of things were done. The interviews were carried out in open areas and even though the interviews themselves only involved me and the interviewee, the contact person and often other friends and family were always around. Not only did their presence help to create a more relaxed situation, but as the interviews were carried out in English, which is the second language for both myself and the interview people, this ensured there was help available to overcome potential language barriers. Furthermore, many locals were concerned about me and warned me about the risk of my position being taken advantage of. As a young European woman, there was a risk that people would want to speak to me for these factors and not because of the study. Having people with me removed a lot of these concerns, especially since many of the interviewees were previously known to my contact person. I believe that both my own and the interviewees respect and trust in the contact person was essential for the study to take place as it enabled us to relax and speak freely despite our respective positions. When possible I also met the person

that would be interviewed a couple of times before the interview was carried out which made the situation more relaxed, as discussed in Kvale & Brinkmann, (2009:144-145). The specific location of the interviews varied. Three of the interviews were carried out in restaurants or coffee shops, three were carried out in the interviewees' home, and four of the interviewees came to the house where I stayed during the visit. The life-story interviews usually took between forty and sixty minutes. The interviews were mainly focused on how the people interviewed grew up, the circumstances which led to their joining gangs, how they entered and ended their time in the gangs, their current life-situation and their job position. Additionally, many of the interviews developed into sequences of discussions, as the interviewees gave their opinion on topics including politics, gang violence and its solutions, corruption and poverty.

Ethical Considerations

Before the interview the interviewees was informed of the aim of the research and their anonymity, and agreed to have the interviews recorded. Furthermore, the interviewees were told that they could interrupt or end the interview and that they could withdraw their answers later on if they wished so. None of the people that were interviewed asked for anonymity and instead gave permission to publish their names. However, I decided to keep the interviewees identity anonymous by changing their names, the areas they live in and the organisations they work for as some of the information that will be published could be viewed as sensitive. Furthermore, due to the sensitive nature of the information, and to follow the *code of ethics* established by the International Sociological Association [ISA] (2001) this has also been done for the security of the interviewees and those around them.

Presentation of the Interviewees and Their View on Gangsterism

The interview people are all males between the ages of 29 and 38 who have somehow been involved with a Cape Flat's gang, and who have then left that gang, and who now see themselves as honourable men who want to do well for society. Furthermore, and important for the study, they were all willing to explain the process of leaving a gang. There were a total of eight interviewees of which four had been members of prison gangs, five members of organised gangs and all eight had been members of street gangs in their youth. Their familial circumstances as children differed. Three interviewees describe themselves as having grown up in 'good families' and that even though they didn't have everything their parents took good

care of them. Five of the eight interviewees, however, described their childhood as chaotic including violence, drugs, and poverty.

Today, all of the interviewees are somehow involved as volunteers or hired by organisations that are working with the prevention of gangs and to help people out of what they call 'gangsterism'. As I understand it 'gangsterism' can be defined as a way of life and as an identity which one can be very "deep in". To be deep in was explained as having a high rank in the gang, being involved in drugs, and living after the codes of the gangs which can involve, for example, rape, knife crime, drug dealing and robbery. There is also a part of gangsterism which refers to a belonging, a brotherhood that looks after one another, and along with this provides an identity, or social role, which you can be more or less attached to. All the interviewees claim to have been through exit process before having entered the role of a morally good man (which will be discussed later on in the analysis chapter). Amongst other things this involves taking family responsibilities seriously, being a good father (six of the eight have children), and working for a living. Current living situations differ for the interviewees. Five of the interviewees lived in suburbs in Cape Flats, where some gang violence and shootings take place daily. Therefore, their current involvement with their previous life was presented as more intense. The other three interviewees have moved out of these areas and may therefore have disengaged themselves more from their role as a gang member as people around them in the new areas do not know about their previous life.

Presentation of Cape Flats

The following section is a short presentation on how Cape Flats was perceived by me. It is largely a general description of the coloured suburbs Heideveld, Delph, Mitchells Plain, Lavender Hill and Elsie's River which could be deemed to represent the coloured neighbourhoods in Cape Flats in culture and in socio-economic standard. Almost all the suburbs of Cape Flats have the view of Table Mountain in the distance, characteristic of Cape Town, and can watch the sun both setting and rising. This view is possible due to there being no significantly tall buildings, and also due to the vegetation being flat, as can be understood by the name, Cape *Flats*. More precisely the area is built on sand-dunes and in some areas close to the ocean there are commonly sandstorms. The public spaces in Cape Flats are in my opinion filled with a lot of contrasts. There are many local shops, often small tuckshops in peoples' homes, hairdressers, and food places, all with low prices and painted signs. At the

same time, in many suburbs big shopping centres with modern coffee shops and the newest brands have also opened. On the highways there is a high volume of traffic as many people work in Cape Town centre and therefore commute. Simultaneously, it is not unusual to see horse-drawn carts, also on the highway. Furthermore, when in the suburbs the mix of culture and religion is evident. For example, whilst standing in front of a church the call to prayer through the speakers at the local mosque can also be heard, and it would not be unusual at this point to see a Rastafarian.

The housing is a mixture of formal and informal settlements. Most people, however, live in small overcrowded houses or apartments with often many generations under the same roof. It is also common that households rent out small informal buildings in their backyards. Cape Flats is often described as an urban ghetto and in the neighbourhoods you can see evidence of gangs in various ways. Much of the population does not have any gang connection, or embody the stereotype of a gangster, but it is not difficult to locate someone with a gang tattoo or who is missing their four front teeth, which is a sign of gang fashion. Furthermore, the graffiti on the walls include gang related information, usually to mark which gang is ruling which neighbourhood.

My personal visits involved a society full of life, nice people and were a lot of fun. However, at the same time it is apparent that it is not always an easy place to live. Most people I met knew someone that had been in prison, had been shot or had been in a gang. Furthermore, the area is in many ways run-down and most schools and hospitals are secured with barbed wire fences and gates. However, problems often seemed to be met with humour, perceivably as a way to deal with difficult life situations. For example, when driving around in Mitchells Plain with my contact person his nephew, who lives in the area and aged about thirteen, started to point out the different gang territories, which street they fight on and where they usually congregate. Another person in the car commented on this, lightheartedly, 'that is good, then there is protection'. The comment was half a joke but there is also a lot of truth in it. If you are friends or family with one gang they protect you against other gangs and look after you if you get into trouble. Often this means that the residents keep quiet if the police come. Additionally, the need of protection could be exemplified through the following experience. Me and my contact person and his wife were driving around Delph when my contact person pointed out that there is only one police station which is not big enough to cover the area.

Therefore he, as a policeman, admits that if something happens in the community the police cannot be trusted to be there when needed. He exemplified and commented on this further when we drove by the same scene of a car accident we had witnessed one hour earlier, and noticed that no police or any other rescue vehicle had yet arrived.

Studying Narratives

A story is shaped by the context as a story teller speaks to someone who in turn interacts with the story teller, for example by supporting, asking questions or objecting. It is possible to explain an event in more than one way, both because the story tellers may understand the event in different ways when it first happened, but also because they may tell the story in different ways depending on the context in which they tell the story. Therefore, is it hard to distinguish a story from the context in which it has been told (Wästerfors, 2004:21). Due to this it is hard to view the resulting narrative as the truth, or as a mirror of society. Instead, narrative analysts usually regard narrative as their own reality, since the narratives instead of corresponding to reality, constitutes it in the specific context where they are told (Riessman 1993:22). What differentiates storytelling from other types of interaction is the effect that the social interaction has, which can become an entry for a narrative analyst. Firstly, individuals and groups can construct their identities through storytelling. By telling stories it is possible to picture who you are and who you are not. Secondly, personal stories can encourage people to act in terms of political and social mobilisation (Riessman 2008:8). Stories or narratives also serve different purposes for individuals and groups; however, these purposes can overlap. A person's narrative can remember a certain event in a specific way, to justify something they have done, to persuade, to engage, to entertain or to mislead an audience. Conversely groups can, through the narratives, foster a sense of belonging, which can then serve to mobilise others. Narrative in this form plays a social role since they are able to do political work and in this way they are connected to the power relations in society (Riessman 2008:8).

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis refers to methods, withholding different perspectives, on how to interpret texts (oral, written, visual) which are told in the structures of stories. The investigator focuses on sequences of actions for a specific actor, place and social time. The aim is to not only understand how and why a story is told, but also to understand the content of the story (Riessman, 2008:11). This is done by asking questions such as:

“For whom was this story constructed, and for what purpose? Why is the succession of events configured that way? What cultural resources does the story draw on, or take for granted? What storehouse of plots does it call up? What does the story accomplish? Are there gaps and inconsistencies that might suggest preferred, alternative, or counter-narratives?” (Riessman, 2008:11).

For this thesis the analysis will concentrate on what Riessman (2008:105) refers to as the dialogic/performance analysis, which investigates how speech is interactively produced and performed as a narrative (Riessman, 2008:105). This perspective takes into account that stories are shaped by, and received in, a historical or an interactional context. The dialogic/performance analysis makes the interviewer become more present in the text and it is important that the person being interviewed, as well as the interviewer and the context are included in the analysis (Riessman, 2008:106). Additionally, the dialogic/performance perspective allows the narrator to acquire an identity through their story. Again this takes into account that it can be the interpreter that enhances this meaning for the person interviewed (Riessman, 2008:106). If the dialogic/performance perspective is stretched further it could be said that the stories told are just products of creating an identity/self-image. The storyteller would then angle the story in a way that mirrors who he or she desires to be (Goffman 1959/1991:182). Wästerfors (2004:23), however, notes that Goffman (1959/1991) should be used with some caution. The performance perspective is important but it should not steer the analysis since the topic which is discussed could impact the story as well as the storyteller (Wästerfors, 2004:23-24). This perspective is implemented in this thesis' analysis as the research topic (gangs) which together with the political context gives the story an additional layer of understanding. As Wästerfors (2004:23) indicates, this method also requires humbleness as the interpretations are a process about reason and argument and will therefore never be faultless or complete.

The choice of using this narrative analysis instead of, for example content analysis is based on the interviewees, along with the above mentioned information. Knowing that the interviewees had a past as gang members, and therefore may be accustomed to manipulation, there is a chance that they did so during the interview session as well. Furthermore, I noticed both during the interviews and in the spare time spent with the interviewees, that they are good both at story-telling and in being aware of their words. An example of this was when one person tried to teach me a simple card trick. The focus when teaching me the trick was not as

much on what to do with the cards as on how to distract and read the audience attention and behaviour. To conclude, I perceived that the interviewees were very good in what I would call conscious *impression management* and I, therefore, find it appropriate to use narrative analysis and focus more on why they are telling a story in a certain way instead of analysing what they are telling.

The analysis will, amongst other things, consider morality and the life-story interviews as speeches of defence. Charles Tilly (2006) discusses how stories do social work in the third chapter of his book '*Why? what happens when people give reasons... and why*' (Tilly, 2006: 93). He argues that stories do not just explain events which have happened in the past, they also challenge, redefine and confirm social relations (Ibid.). By telling stories people steer the impression they make on others, and in this a moral to the story usually lies (Tilly 2006:16). The basis for stories is to give accounts. Tilly further poses that the point of understanding stories is to understand the stories' causes and what functions they fill (Tilly, 2006:XI).

Scott & Lyman (1968) state that there are two forms of legitimate 'accounts' when a person has confessed to having acted immorally. If the negative actions are presented together with one of these accounts, these actions are not seen as being as bad. The first account is *justification*; to not admit that an action was wrong and instead try to justify the action. Freedom from liability is not asked for, since an apparent morally negative action can be justified or at least understood due to the circumstances. Scott & Lyhman (1968) assert that the second account is *excuse*. The person agrees that what he or she did was wrong but they give reasons to try to make the actions morally understandable for the listener.

The above mentioned analytical framework will be addressed in the analysis together with why the interviewees are discussing moral questions and why they feel the need to explain their actions. Examples of these accounts will be given in relation to the creation of identity/self-presentations and through the life stories. In relation to this it will also be analysed which cultural script the people interviewed draw upon to make themselves trustworthy.

Methodological Reflections

My interest in gangs in Cape Town comes from my having spent time working there as a volunteer within different organisations for nine months in 2009-2010. This was before I

began studying at university, and I had no intention during this time to write about the topic. During my time as a volunteer I met victims of gang violence as well as gang members, visited people in their homes and lived together with Coloured people. This previous knowledge of the interviewees' culture has feasibly impacted the interpretation of the interviews. In addition, the interviews themselves are affected by this. Both in the formation of my questions and my understanding of the interviewees' answers. Furthermore, it has probably influenced my way of carrying out a dialogic/performance analysis since I have a context, aside from an academic one, to make these interpretations against. This contextual knowledge was also further developed whilst carrying out this study as I stayed with a Coloured family, and through them frequently visited the Cape Flat area which gave me the opportunity to partially participate in and observe the culture (through events such as birthday parties, barbeques, funeral, church, supper). I see having lived in close proximity to the culture as mostly positive for the study since it has allowed me to better understand the historical and social context of the interview people, even if not fully. However, the fact that I became familiar with the culture could also mean that I did not notice some things that might be particular for the interviewees as they have become too familiar to me.

My role as an interviewer was to support the interviewees in telling their stories by listening. I mainly kept to how-questions as suggested by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009:153). Moreover, narrative studies require role-taking where one of the persons gets to speak more than the other. Some of my questions and comments were, however, undoubtedly leading and could at first be seen as angled and, according to a traditional view, the empirics could now be considered contaminated (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997:156). Wästerfors (2004:19) does, however, argue that being restricted, careful and passive does not have to be the most effective way to activate and develop the story. To answer, to try to develop the person's argument, show wonder, or remind the person of something which has happened can also be a way of supporting the person's story, which makes the interaction closer to a normal conversation. The story can otherwise risk being undeveloped if the listener does not give the story-teller confirmation (Wästerfors, 2004:19). I felt that this was called for in the interview setting, perhaps as it is a rather sensitive topic. The people interviewed expected me to react, ask questions, subtly provoke, and in that way contribute to the story. Therefore, I do not consider my empirics to be contaminated.

The interviews carried out for this thesis have involved a large number of stories of different forms on violence. For example, as an interviewer I have heard stories on how the people interviewed have performed illegal activities such as robberies, murders, shootings, drug dealing and rape. Some of the participants have served time in prison for these criminal acts, some participants carried out most of their offences whilst in prison, and some participants were never brought to justice for the crimes committed. In order to follow the ethical guidelines put in place by IAS (2001), all participants have been given total anonymity. All details connecting participants to their stories, such as names, areas where they live, work places, and any other identifying features, have therefore been changed. The interviewees themselves, however, were not concerned by this. Instead, all of them gave permission to publish their contributions using their real names. However, even though I informed all participants of the aim of the study and my role as a Master's student, it is possible that they have interpreted that information differently than me, and therefore I have not published these identifying features. The potential risk is that participants viewed the interviews as a way to gain acknowledgement for themselves and their stories. Additionally, I have not published the names to protect the identities and anonymity of the victims of the crimes discussed by the participants.

As the interviews involve explanations to how violence can be justified and understood, it is necessary to explain that nowhere do I attempt to defend the participants' actions. Instead I try to understand how the participants interpret past events and understand the justification behind a person's actions through how they are discussed, and in this way answer my aim and research question. Hanna Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A report on the Banality of Evil* (1964) considers the topic of evil. Arendt (1964, 2006) argues that there are no clear distinctions between 'good' and 'evil' and 'us' and 'them'. Instead, evil or mass violence should be understood by looking at bureaucratic duties and political structures which makes ordinary people do evil things (Ibid.). Being aware of different factors, such as psychological ones, could also affect the interviewees' actions and, as mentioned, without defending the actions of the participants, the mind-set of Arendt's view on evil has been used as a point of departure for this thesis as well as in the meetings with the interviewees.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis will be carried out with help of the analytical framework presented in previous section, Ebough's (1988) Role-exit theory and Helmke & Levitsky's (2004) framework on how to analyse informal institutions. Ebough's role-exit theory is chosen since it allows a more analytical perspective and identifies different stages in the process of leaving a gang. Therefore, Ebough's (1988) theory is also suitable to answering the research question: How do ex-gang members explain their change in lifestyle, from past involvement in gangs to the subsequent transformation in their present day lives? Moreover, to understand in what context these personal processes take place and the impact they have on the society of Cape Flats, Helmke & Levitsky's (2004) framework on how to analyse informal institutions, and their impact on political agenda will be used.

Disengagement

In Ebough's (1988) book, *Becoming an Ex: The Process of Role Exit* (1988), a theory regarding leaving a certain role or identity is presented. The focus of the book is on former nuns; however, Ebough states that the theory is also useful to analyse other kinds of role exit, for example as undergone by former criminals, transsexuals, widows or prostitutes etc. (Ibid.). According to Ebough, becoming an ex is a gradual process where people change identity. The theory is developed and based on literature in life transitions (e.g. Becker, 1963; Glaser & Strauss, 1971; Goffman, 1961) and role theory (e.g., Merton, 1957, 1968) (Decker, Pyrooz, & Moule, 2014:269).

Ebaugh (1988) differentiates *socialising* and *role exit* as two separate processes as before someone is socialised into a new role he or she must have left the previous one (Ebaugh, 1988:8). Moreover, role exit is equated with disengagement which she defines as a descriptive term of role loss and disidentification with a previous source of self-identity (Ebaugh, 1988:10). The concept of disengagement was, however, first introduced by Cumming and Henry (1961) as "*an inevitable mutual withdrawal or disengagement resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social system he belonged to*" (1961:14). They defined disengagement as three types of changes: decrease in number of people and decreased amount of interaction, qualitative change in interactions, and decreased involvement with others linked to preoccupation with self (Ibid.). Although aging and leaving

a gang are not directly comparable, this term allows for a better understanding of how the interviewees' surrounding context affects their possibility to leave a gang.

The likeliness that someone will leave a given social role depends on the role attachment and the degree of emotional intensity a person puts into a role. The more emotional intensity there is the stronger role attachment, which make it harder to leave a role. As an example, the social role that steers the behaviour towards the clerk in a store usually does not consist of as much role attachment as the social role of a mother, wife or religious fanatic (Ebaugh, 1988:16).

Four Stages of Role Exit

Ebaugh (1988) developed four stages to illustrate how the process of role exit usually takes place. These are: *First Doubts*, *Seeking Alternatives*, *Turning Point*, and *Creating the Ex-Role*. The analysis will show that those patterns can be found in the interviewed ex-gang members' life stories. Ebaugh (1988) does, however, draw attention to and makes it clear that these typical stages are not static. "*Role exit is a process that occurs over time*" (Ebaugh,1988:23). Moreover, "*In time, sometimes after years and often after only days or weeks, the individual becomes aware of what is happening and begins to act more self-consciously and deliberately*" (Ebaugh, 1988:23). This can be seen in the analysis where the interview peoples' stories differ and sometimes the different stages overlap or occur in a different order.

The *first doubts* stage occurs when a person starts to question the role he or she inhabits. In this stage, situations which have previously been taken for granted become an object for redefinition and questioning. This process consists of doubting and reconsidering the commitments that are connected to the role including reinterpreting values, judgements and the costs and rewards that the current role holds. In some cases the role exit process does not continue, but instead stops at this stage. In other cases it is a more rapid process and for some it can continue for years (Ebaugh, 1988:41).

The second stage of *seeking alternatives* is when a person has accepted dissatisfaction with his or her previous role. A person will now search for other options, especially if there is a lot of positive support from the surrounding community or settings. Many people think through and list alternatives before they make the decision on which route they might take if they leave the role. This stage involves weighing alternatives against the current role to evaluate if

the new situation will be better than the current one. In some cases, however, leaving the current situation or role is the most important factor and further assessment of alternative situations has not taken place (Ebaugh 1988:87). This second version was more common amongst the interviewees.

The turning point is a stage which can be described as an event that raises awareness that a person's old actions are complete, have failed, have been disrupted, or are no longer personally satisfying. Additionally, it provides the opportunity for the individuals to change the way they live their lives. After weighing the alternatives, and in some instances finding a new reference group, the turning point becomes the thing that causes a person to leave their role. The exit of a role is additionally often connected to some kind of action, for example handing in a job resignation (Ebaugh 1988:123). For many of the ex-gang members in this study this action was standing up to their gang leader in order to leave the gang.

After going through the stage of leaving a role, the final step of *creating the ex-role* takes place. The role of being an ex is a unique sociological phenomenon since the norms, expectations and the identity of the person in question are often not connected to the role the person is currently having. Instead, he or she is associated with previous roles and have what Ebaugh (1988:149) describes as a *hangover identity*. This connects to a wide range of psychological and social processes, which enable a person to establish a new identity. These processes are often painful and undermined by many current role models. In order to establish themselves in a new role, individuals often begin with *Cuing Behavior* (Ebaugh, 1988:150). The individual attempts to present their true self to help people place the individual in a new structure and in a new social role. This process is connected to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Goffman writes about *impression management* and social interaction and how people use this for their own benefit.

Critique against Role Exit Theory

Wacquant (1990:402) argues that *Becoming an Ex* (1988) draws upon many good insights regarding the process of disengagement from a role, but asserts that it is a description of how people left a previous social role rather than a part of the field of *Role-Theories*. Furthermore, that the ingoing empirics may have occurred at the cost of the theory (1990:400). Moreover, Wacquant criticises the idea that the theory should be seen as universal. For example, there could be essential differences between people who exit their roles voluntarily and people who

are forced to exit their roles. The stages of *doubts* and *seeking alternatives* will not take place for a person who loses their job over night or has an unexpected teenage pregnancy as for a person who exits his or her role voluntarily (Waquant, 1990:401).

As will be highlighted in the following analysis, many of the interviewees somehow reached a point where they were almost forced to leave their role as a gang member. Therefore, especially the *seeking alternatives* stage, often seemed to be vague in the interviews. This highlights the problems with the theory as described by Wacuant (1990). I do, however, still see the benefits of using Ebaugh's (1988) theory for this study. Even though not followed perfectly, which Ebaugh (1988:23) indicates is not the main aim of the theory, the different stages do provide a framework to discuss and understand the process of leaving a gang. For example, even though the stage of *seeking alternatives* is vague, it allows us to see that the gang members had a clear picture of who they aspired to be.

Informal Institutions

In developing countries formal rule, often represented by new democratic market and state institutions, commonly coexist with informal rule; such as corruption, clientelism and patronage. Helmke & Levitsky (2004:725) have developed a framework to understand what impact different forms of informal rule have on actors behaviour and consequently on politics. Helmke & Levitsky (2004:727) define institutions as “*rules and procedures (both formal and informal) that structure social interaction by constraining and enabling actors' behavior*”. What is specific for informal institutions, however, is that they are “*socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside officially sanctioned channels*” (Ibid.). Different forms of informal institutions are presented in Helmke & Levitsky's (2004:725) framework. The division depends on how the relation to formal rule is viewed. For example, sometimes the informal rules fill in gaps and support the goals of the formal rule; other times it is the opposite. For this study focus will be on how gang members have made the transition from *competing informal institutions* to *substitutive informal institutions*.

Both *competing and substitutive informal institutions* coexist with *ineffective formal institutions*, for example a state that is not able to fulfil its procedures. The main difference, however, is that *substitutive informal institutions* are convergent with the *formal rule/regimes* in the outcomes as *competing informal institutions* are divergent (Helmke & Levitsky,

2004:728-729). Moreover *competing formal institutions* are incompatible with formal rule. Common examples of this sort of institutions are corruption and clan politics. *Substitutive informal institutions* instead aim to do what formal rule was supposed to do but failed with (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004: 729).

As previously discussed, the research question of this thesis aims to investigate the process of how eight people left *competitive informal institutions* to join *substitutive informal institutions*. The process of joining such an organisation is of interest as it affects the political agenda, and will highlight what elements are needed for such processes to take place in the context of Cape Flats. The following chapter consisting of the analysis aims to answer the research question with help of empiric findings and the theoretical framework presented in this part of the thesis.

Analysis

As mentioned in the methodology section, the interviews focused on how the interviewees grew up, how they joined gangs, their entrance and exit from gangs, their current life-situation and job position. When analysing the collected stories, the shaping of the narrative as its own reality (Riessman, 2008), and why a story has been told in a certain way in the interview situation will be in focus. Furthermore, the analysis is made according to the methodological framework of narrative analysis and will be structured around, and understood with, Ebaugh's (1988) theory of role exit which discusses the different dimensions of role theory connected to leaving a group. Moreover will the process of role exit be put in the context of Helmke's & Levitsky's (2004) framework of informal intuitions and focus on how the interviewees have left *competing informal institutions* for *substitutive informal institutions*. The outline of the analysis is as follows: The first part of the analysis will discuss Helmke's & Levitsky's (2004) framework in relation to the situation in Cape Flats followed by a presentation of the people interviewed; After that a section about the different dimensions of role exit will be presented; Followed by a discussion on role intro that will focus on how the interview people explain their new identity. Finally, the role of being an ex-gang member will be addressed.

Informal institutions in Cape Flats

Gangs in Cape Flats can be viewed as what Helmke & Levitsky (2004:729) call *competing informal institutions*. *Competing informal institution* coexists with an ineffective formal institution, in this case the state of South Africa or the local state: City of Cape Town. The relation between the gangs and the state, however, is that gangs in the form of *competing informal institutions* make it possible for gang members to violate or ignore formal rules and procedures in a situation where these rules and procedures are not systematically enforced. Actors cannot follow both the procedures of state regime and the regime of gangs at the same time, since, to follow one rule, the other must be violated (Ibid.). For example, in Cape Flats, as previously mentioned and argued by Jensen (2010), the community is caught between the gangs and the state. The community needs the gangs for protection, so if they report the gangs they will not be safe or receive an additional income. This allows the gangs to exist and makes shootings and drug dealing a part of everyday life (Jensen, 2010:94-95).

As discussed in the introduction, there are actors in Cape Flats other than the state who are attempting to end gangs and gang violence, for example religious organisations, and non-religious organisations such as Ceasefire and Proadly Manenburg. These should largely be viewed as informal institutions, especially within the religious community, as they have high expectations on their members. These actors could also be seen as *substitutive informal institutions*, in relation to fighting gang violence. These kinds of informal institutions coexist with ineffective formal institutions, in this case the state of South Africa and the local state: City of Cape Town. The actors of *substitutive informal institutions* expect that the formal rules that exist on paper will be enforced and they will “fill in gaps” that are missing (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004:728). During the interviews Nathan expressed how he and his church loyalty towards the government differed from the gangs’ loyalty:

Nathan41: Yeah, you see, gangsters is like that, you see, because if they control certain places. They have money, they can control anyone now. They can manipulate you also, because they believe the ground belongs to them. But we believe the grounds belong, it can’t belong to them, it belongs to the government.

The quote shows that there are people at Cape Flat that do not accept the gangs’ power position and aim for more reliable actors. It can also be that even if the implantations against gang violence at Cape Flats continue to be weak, a substitutive informal regime is established. The limit of this study does however only go into this regimes impact in the field of gangs and gang violence and do not go deeper into what other impact they have on the relation between the state and local organisations otherwise.

Role Exit

Cape Flats and Gangs

To give a more holistic picture of the process of role exit the interviewees’ stories about how they initially became gang members and how they describe the role of a gangster in their neighbourhood will be presented. To be a young man in Cape Flats is described as being associated with being a gangster. This was presented very clearly in the interviews and it could arguably be seen as the norm to be a gangster in the area. For example, David explained his time as a teenager as follows:

25. David: “hm the gang was big, the gang was basically the whole neighbourhood that we was living in, so to live in the neighbourhood you have to be part of this one gang. You can’t be living

in the neighbourhood and be a different gang. Then you gonna be killed or gonna get hurt. So I would say the whole part of Manenberg I was living in was part of one gang. So a couple of hundreds was the gang, so the gang was big.

26. I: How would you say, like the people that was not in the gang, were they connected to the gang, like normal...

27. David: Like the people that wasn't part of the gang was maybe because they were too young, or they would be too scared to join the gang, ...[...] ... David: Or they were too much into their school work, they were more into the collage, so they didn't want to be part of the click. They didn't care if they had friends or if they don't had friends".

As explained here it was common to be part of a gang. It is important to add, however, that it is mainly young men who are referred to when talking about 'the whole neighbourhood'. Furthermore, this characterisation or institutionalisation of gangs in Cape Flats can be seen in the following explanation from Jason. He explains how the role models that boys have in their lives in Cape Flats are mainly gangsters, and therefore they believe that this is what they too are supposed to be. He believes that to stop 'gangsterism' there needs to be other role models:

85. Jason: "It's a vicious circle, it is an old mentality. My daddy was one, my uncle was one, my cousin was one; I must be one. Its, you have to change the mind-set".

What Jason says seems to align with the general view of a stereotypical Coloured man, which the interview people represent, and is common both in Cape Town and, as will be described in the next quote, other parts of South Africa. This view is that a Coloured man from Cape Flats has been or is part of a gang. Andrew describes how people see him when he is outside of Cape Town:

87. Andrew: "I mean gangsterism is something that has been going on for years in Cape Town. In the Western Cape it is the biggest thing ever, you know when they look at me, a Coloured boy in Joburg [Johannesburg], I work in Joburg now. A black guy look at me and today ... well they tell you, you been part of a gang before. That's how they see a Coloured man in the Western Cape. You have to have been part of a gang unless you, and unfortunately but true, most of them were".

In conclusion, it can be seen that the interviewees associate the role of being a gang member with the identity of being a Coloured man, which aligns with for example Jensen (2010),

Andersen (1999), Hagehorn (2008) and Pinker (2011) which are presented before in the chapter of previous research.

Gang Life – a Good Life? (First Doubts)

The interview people's stories of exiting gang life differ. They do, however, follow Ebough's (1988) stages of role exit. The first stage, *first doubts* will be addressed in this section of the paper. For some of the interviewees there was nothing strange about entering the role of being a gangster when first joining the gangs. For others there were doubts from the start and they did not want to be in this role but nonetheless felt forced into it. Andrew was one of the people who did not really question his role as a gangster from the beginning. He, together with four others, was the leader of a youth gang and was seen as one of the most admirable or 'coolest' people in the neighbourhood. However, after a while their quite innocent gang, as he put it, started to get involved with more serious gangs and they began to lose control:

20. Andrew: "And have daily fights, go look for trouble there, go look for trouble there. Trouble there, get chased up of guns there. And you know it just escalated up. The gang thing never stopped because once you start it's all about territory. So it's up and down, you make peace, then the peace is made, but one person still don't like someone in your gang. And it will steer up, they meet each other in a club and something will start and then it starts all over again. You know so it's never real peace. Ja, and it went like that for years. Until I realised that look, I'm still very young and I think I got an opportunity and can get out of this. And I wanted to finish high school, because, I wanted go to university. And then my brother actually helped me with, we had gotten in so deep...".

Andrew describes further how he realised that what he was involved with was not what he wanted for his life. He began to question what he was doing and realised that those elements of everyday life which he had taken for granted were not what he wanted. He instead wanted to go to university and leave the gang and the gangster role. This type of process was experienced by a number of the gang members. Initially gang life was something normal which everyone did. However, it was then realised that a life of 'gangsterism' was not leading towards a desired lifestyle. For example, the following was explained by Peter:

41. Peter: "yeah, I was addicted, for 15 years of my life. But I was still dealing drugs. But, people didn't know, 'cause I was a drug dealer you see. I was using my own stuff all the time. And, it came to a point when I stopped dealing with drugs. I was in slum, I didn't have any money, all my

friends is gone you see, and it wasn't, I'm not use to this. I'm use to driving fancy cars, I've got money, I've got everything. And now I've got nothing. I'm just doing drugs every day".

Peter was in a process of weighing the rewards of his current role. His role is not what he expected it to be. He was at the top of one of the biggest organised gangs in Cape Town, but the drugs made his life miserable and caused him to question the gangster lifestyle.

As previously discussed some of the interviewees did doubt the role of being a gangster from the start. Even though it was the norm to become a gangster and it was the popular thing to be as a child, many interviewees understood that what they did was wrong but felt that they had no other options other than to become a gangster. At the same time most of the interview people explained that they always knew it was wrong. Examples that were given as to why they entered gangsterism was to be cool, to have a sense of belonging, because of the feeling of hate towards society, or because they did not have a choice. Including those who did not especially doubt the role from the outset only one of the interviewees explained it as his ambition in life to become a gangster.

Many of the interview people in some way questioned and doubted the role of being a gangster for a long time before entering the stage of *Seeking Alternatives*. It is conceivable that this is the case for many of the gang members in Cape Flats, but, as Ebaugh (1988) explains, many people do not go any further and stay at the first doubts stage. All of those interviewed for this study did continue from this stage and managed to exit the role as a gang member.

Is a Way Out Possible...? (Seeking Alternatives)

The stage of *seeking alternatives* is described as follows: when approaching the stage of accepting the dissatisfaction associated with the role and attempting to leave (Ebaugh, 1988). As mentioned, the interviewees highlighted the difficulties which are encountered when leaving a gang. They explained that leaving a gang ends in death and some of the interviewees still didn't know if they were safe because of their previous way of living. However, when the interviewees described the process of leaving it was a discussion about being concerned about morality, danger to their families, and that gang life was not what they wanted, rather than seeking alternatives for where they wanted to go after they exited. Continuing Andrew's life-story, he explains how he wanted to leave gang life:

21. Andrew: "Yeah, at the end of the day it is not that fun anymore. And then it came a stage at life when I had to leave school. Because I couldn't go to school. Cause if I had to go to school I had been killed. I mean they shot on me at school already a couple of times. So for two years I left school and I just stayed at home".

22. Andrew: "But look here I said, the only way to get out of this is to go to this gangs, this rival gangs which fighting you. And go tell them look that you are out, you burn out your thing; burn out your gangster tattoo [showing scar on the hand]. And you learn and you go to them and you have to learn, hm the hard way, the hard way of getting out of a gang you know. 'Cause these guys can do whatever they want to. Now you are alone, 'cause if you wanna leave your gang, your gang is not there to support you. And you going to a rival gang saying that you are out, they can do anything to you".

Even though it was a hard way to exit the gang, Andrew did have a plan for who he aspired to be. He wanted to go to university, get a job, and live a "normal life". The alternatives he had was gang life or not gang life, and the not gang life was to try to finish school to be able to make your own honest living. Therefore the 'list of alternatives' was not that long but rather a period when thinking of the price that must be paid if he should leave.

Furthermore, another alternative to 'gangsterism' for many of the interviewees was to become a Christian. Therefore, even if there was not a long list of alternative many of the interviewees had an image of what kind of person they wanted to be. This was usually explained by the interviewees as to do the right thing and to give their life to God. Most of the interviewees were raised in a religious way and there was no question if the religion was true or not, rather that they just have to choose to follow it. Kyle explains this as follows:

50. Kyle: "You know, and I, there was one, one of my friends. One of my late friends, he passed away. His name was Baider and he was actually a prophetic word, spoken in our gang. When he told us, he told us in the gang, that, 'guys I'm gonna give my life over to God'. And I said, 'the day when you give your life over to God, then I'm also gonna give my life over to God. Because if God can save you my brother, then God can save...'. Because he was worse, he was worse. And what happened in that time, he actually converted, he actually gave his life over to God. And since that time without him knowing that was a word, I spoken prophetically over my own life, since that we he gave his life over to God, it never left me. It was like; it was just like pounding when I was laying on my bed. So I knew, I would sit and smoke, I would sit and I would do the wrong things, and I would tell my friends that guys, I'm gonna give my life over to God. And, they would laugh and say, 'You? Never!' And things like that".

As can be seen here, for Kyle the alternative to the gang role was to become a Christian. This was, however, not uncomplicated since the interviewee wanted to do this in an honest way. Even though he had decided to leave his old life, he was evaluating how to do this by weighing the alternatives. In both Andrew's and Kyle's cases it is evident that this stage included the influence of people around them. Both people "encouraging" them to leave and people "encouraging" them to stay which resonates with Ebaugh (1988). Andrew had support from his brother, who was not a gang member, and the gang he was in already. Kyle was influenced by religious people, however he was also, which was told later in the interview, influenced by his father who abused his mother and sister. Since Kyle's father was a pastor he became a negative example of Christianity, which caused him to closely evaluate if he wanted to leave gang life and become a Christian.

Finally, despite not reasoning through the alternatives and not having a detailed plan for life after exiting the gangster role, the interviewees did have a clear view of what kind of person they wanted to be; an honourable man who takes responsibility. The interviewees saw this as an alternative to gangster life even though they understood that there would be a high price to pay. It is possible that they also looked up to people who had already managed to exit the gang and form a new life, since this was seen as having a strong character. In Kyle's case Baider was such a person.

Out of the Gang! (Turning Points)

A turning point common for many of the interviewees was when someone close to them died, they themselves came close to being killed, or their children were at risk or being threatened. This served as the moment which caused them to take the first step to start to leave gangsterism. David gives an example of this from his life:

19. David: "And they heard about me the money guy and they come after me. And the boss that I was working for gave me two friends to hang out with me all the time. And they would have guns, and I was just like, back then I got my driving license. And stuff like that so I was driving most of the times. And one night I did that for two years. But one night I was walking home, for some reason I didn't use my car. Cause I was just in the back road of my street. When I was walking home a car pulled up next to us and the window went down and one of my friends was shot dead in front of me. And they were shooting still, and I was running away, went over a few fence and I was sitting behind a bush. And I heard these guys were looking for me. And I was sitting in the bush for an hour maybe, and they were looking for me. But then they heard the sirens of the police

people coming, and that was the sign for them to leave. And ah, I think that was the point when I came to my senses that I need to get out of this now. It became too dangerous, 'cause the other gang didn't know my family, they didn't know the family. So that night I spoke to god. I told God that if you take me out of this, I would believe this. I told, I never prayed before then, and ja, I came out of it I came home. My parents did stand outside scaling at me, telling that there was a shooting just here in front. But I was too scared to tell them that it was for me. You know. And the next day I went to the boss that I worked for. I gave all his gold back; my hand was full of gold. Gave his chains back, told him that was the part that he gave me, and that I don't want to be a part of this gang anymore. Hm, and he very respectfully told me, it's fine, but he told me if any other person would come and said they wanted to leave the gang, they would have killed that person. Because to leave a gang back then, wasn't possible, once you are in you in. You can't get out, but because of my parents once again. The respectfulness and stuff like that".

During the turning point stage it was common for the interviewees to pray, as in this case with David. A common thought was that "If God takes me out of this I will live a good life, become a good person, and leave gangsterism". The experience of something bad happening in conjunction with a religious awakening appears to have pushed the interviewees to live as they had promised to God. In their opinion they believed that God has saved them from the situation and that they would have been dead without this intervention. Their gratitude to be alive therefore causes them the desire to 'serve their saviour' (God). When asking Andrew if all of his friends who had left the gang had "got saved" he gave the following answer:

49. Andrew: "No, it's not like all of them got saved, but I think a, once you get older you start to realise that you getting nowhere doing this. And that is something that you need to change. Some of them have kids, and I think that that open their eyes, the father, attitude kicked in, or the mother attitude kicked in, and stuff like that. And that's how a lot of them change ja. So it's not like everyone got saved but, I think realised when people got older that this is not the life they want to live you know. Sometimes you are so hooked in it. Like I know people, friends that wants to get out of it, but they are so hooked in it. They are in their 40s already. How are they gonna get out you know. How are they gonna do, they never worked, not lived a proper life, they've been in and out of jail. Ja, so it is difficult at that time. It is so difficult at that time".

As mentioned in previous research it can be seen that leaving a gang is not impossible even though it is often difficult. Usually, as in this case, there are also surrounding factors in the form of turning points that makes this possible. However, there was sometimes a longer period of time between the turning point and the role exit. The stages of the turning points and seeking of alternatives are not clearly delineated in these cases but overlap. This shortcoming

of the theory was highlighted in the theoretical chapter; however, the following quote demonstrates how the stages take place simultaneously. After explaining a near execution, which he sees as a changing point in his life, Kyle expressed himself in the following way:

47. Kyle: “So, that was the life changing point in my life you know. In a way, when I thought to myself that I couldn’t, I can’t stay like this, but you know, but I still went back, and I still did wrong stuff, still did wrong things, because I thought there was no other way for me, you know. Cause I need to embrace, because I don’t know where I’m going to. But I started staying away, and I told my mother I wanted come back to the house”.

Again the difficulties of leaving a gang once the decision has been made are evident. However, in Kyle’s story the action was connected with attempting to reconnect and communicate with his mother. It can be seen here that the stage of seeking alternatives is not clear in his case. Even when a person has accepted the need for change, and taken the first steps, it is hard to believe that you both could find the way out of the situation you are in and that it is possible to attain the life that is aspired to.

Mutual Withdrawal

Before entering the section *Role Intro* where the fourth stage – creating the ex-role – of Ebaugh’s role exit is discussed, and the importance of the context when leaving a gang will be assessed. Referring to Cumming and Henry’s (1961) definition of disengagement as a *mutual withdrawal*. For a gang member to leave the gang, the gang also need to leave the gang member. According to the interviewees it appeared that for mutual withdrawal to take place there first had to be a way for the interviewees to show themselves worthy of leaving the gang. Gangs may otherwise not allow exit to occur. However, as discussed in the previous research chapter, leaving a gang is not impossible. The interviewees explained that leaving a gang was a hard process. It was common that once a gang has been joined, it is joined for life and the alternative to being a member is death. To illustrate this Jason described his and his friends situation as follows:

105. Jason: “I told you my friend, he was in witness protection, one day at home and they killed him. How do you protect that? My one friend, his whole family is kepted, because of they can’t protect him, just for information. And I say, I’m not gonna go that route. I’m not going, I’m gonna, face them every day, every time”...109. Jason: “I’ll never do that. I’m under the bubble wrap”.

After leaving gangs one of Jason's friends had died whilst under witness protection and another friend had fled the country to live abroad with his whole family to avoid being killed. He did not see it as an option to confess and then live under witness protection since that had not worked for his friends. Instead, he stood up to gang leaders and challenged them by demonstrating to them that he now lived an honourable life to show that he didn't want to live a gang life. He explains that he is "under the bubble wrap" which is his way of saying that he trusts God to protect him

As explained by the interviewees, they needed to prove themselves worthy of leaving the gang. As can be understood in David's story about leaving a gang, the respect could also be related to the person's family's status in society. His parents were well known and respected in society and therefore the gang leader made an exception. Conversely, Andrew explains how it was easier to leave his gang as he was one of five founders, and they made the joint decision to quit the gang. However, he also expressed that he had done a 'full service' to his gang and therefore was worthy enough to quit:

72. Andrew: "Look they just discarded me, look I did a full service to my gang. Whenever there was a gang fight, I was there. Sometimes, other people weren't even there. I was one of the founding members of our gang. So we had reason to pull out. Cause most of the time, we the founding members didn't even start the troubles. But we were always the ones ending it. And sometimes the ones that started the troubles weren't even part of it. So that was easy for us to get out there. In that sense, because the five men, we used to call us the five men. The founding guys who started it. We actually went together before we broke up. And said, look this is the route that we take. We can all go to whatever but we breaking up this. Founding men of gang. And that is actually how we broke up but, we can break up, people don't know that. They still see you as a gangster in that area you know. You still have that name, you will still be known by that name by people. And only when I went round by all the gangs, they knew I was out. And when people started joining other gangs, you know that this gang has broken up".

Andrew had to individually win the respect of every gang leader and burn out his gang tattoo. From the interview stories it appears that if a person has 'served well' in a gang, dares to stand up to the gang leaders, and is able to prove that they can live an honourable life, there may be a chance to exit the role of gang member and mutual withdrawal can take place. There are still, however, many situations where this is not the case which could account for why many people do not take the initial step to leave. Andrew also noticed that, although contradictory, other gang members are sometimes proud when a former gang member

achieves success outside the gang. He explained that this may be due to the fact that the gang understands how difficult it can be to leave, and what it consequently must take to be able to then create a normal life. Therefore, to achieve a new life is greatly respected when a person has been a former member of a gang.

Role Intro

The section on role intro will mainly address the fourth stage of Ebaugh's Role-exit theory; *creating the ex-role*. This stage was the one that was most discussed in the interviews and that is, arguably, is the most important for the study since it brings up findings that are more specific for the situation at Cape Flats. Therefore, it has also gotten more space in the analysis than the other stages.

Being an Ex – The Status of the Role

After leaving the gang, the interviewees had to socialise into another role. In some cases this was very difficult, especially for those who had been to prison where the main way to live life was to be a gangster. For many it was difficult to find a job as they felt that they were labelled as a gangster. Being associated with 'gangsterism' had given the interviewees difficulties in society. However, what was mostly discussed in the interviews was how the role could be of benefit, or how important the role as an ex-gangster could be in a variety of different settings. This part of the analysis will therefore focus on how the interviewees portrayed the role as an ex-gangster as something positive. Stonequist (1937), Gist and Dourhin, (1972) discuss how a 'marginal culture' can be created by 'Exes' to support each other and to cope with the different stereotypes that might be imposed on them because of being for example an ex-gangster. Arguably, the interviewees present that there is a culture of ex-gangsters and it was explained in the interviews that there is also some status in having this identity in the society of Cape Flats. The interviewees explained that their past lives were reprehensible, however, they also appeared to be proud of having been through this process and were able to find benefits from this. Additionally, it appears that it is not only the ex-gang members who are proud of their transformation. They also feel that others look up to them and that they have achieved a certain status because of it.

106. Peter: "Yeah but today I'm saved man. And the whole gang know about it and they got respect for me".

Furthermore:

137. Peter: “No, I’m the only one. Like I said my family is all, they are saved. Some of them are pastors. So I was the only one. And it was heartbroken sometimes when I was in jail, and they come to visit me and. To see, look at my family, but they are still reaching out to me you see. But today, they proud of me man, cause I have a good testimony, say, that Jesus is the Lord and that Jesus saved me and, ja, it wasn’t people that saved me. The night when I call out to God, and he just touch, everything just change, I can’t explain it. But from that evening, my whole life changed, I never used drugs anymore, I slept away from the old person that I was. Yeah, and I’m very glad man, yeah, to serve the Lord today. I’ve seen the benefits of it”.

As explained by the interviewees it is both the gangs and their families who now have respect for them. The second quote from Peter ends with his reflection that he has seen the benefits of living as a Christian and not as a gangster. Since he has a ‘good testimony’ he wins respect with both his family and the gangs. There we can see how the new role appears closely related to the previous role.

Hangover Identity and “Have Been There”

The hangover identity is a part of the fourth stage of creating a new role and emphasises that the individual needs to deal with their past, their present, and their future (Ebaught, 1988). Three of the interviewees had moved out of the Cape Flats area and lived in a context where people are not necessarily aware of their previous life. Therefore, they may not be affected by the *hang over identity* to the same extent as the others. Additionally, these interviewees had the benefit of not having the look and language of a stereotypical gangster (e.g. visible gang tattoos). They were easily able to blend into a ‘normal’ society with how they speak, dress, and look and this consequently made it easier to pass as a non-gangster when out of the gang. This may be harder for a person who, for example, has gang tattoos on their face and only knows how to speak and move in a way that is connected to being a gangster.

Even though the interview people have been able to move on with their lives, they still carry the old identity with them and have to incorporate this in their new lives. They have established relationships with new groups e.g. churches or, as in David’s case, by joining the police force. They also know how the gangs work and identify with them. The ex-gang members view themselves as having a unique position of understanding both worlds.

Other ways that the interviewees were able to use their previous role in was to take advantage of the fact that they ‘have been there’. Due to their past gangster lifestyle they have the knowledge to show other people who are ‘caught in gangsterism’ how to exit, if they would have had the desire to do so. This is especially true for the people who are today working with criminals in their old neighbourhoods. In the following quote it is evident how David’s *hangover identity* affects the way he works as a police officer:

65. David: “So, ja, I tried to change the young people’s mind first. Before I look them up. So if I do catch them they can’t tell me that I didn’t warn them. Then I can tell them that I did tell you so. So when I do lock you up then you know why I lock you up.

66. I: Do you think it is common for police to work in that way?

67. David: No. hm, no, police is trained to take drugs off the street. Not to have conversation, if they see something wrong, take it off. Lock up. No second chances. For me, giving second chances ‘cause I knew what it was to be in a gang. I knew if I was caught back then, I would like to a police officer to give me a chance at least, give me a warning at least. And say look here, if I catch you again this is gonna happen to you. Then I have a warning. You know. And that, I always believe that young people need to get second chances in life. Not just kill them and hm, I thought that was the right way. No first tell them, ‘it is wrong’. ‘So next time, when I do get you it is not gonna be the same talk’. ‘Then I’m gonna lock you up’”.

This quote exemplifies how David’s role as an ex-gangster affects the way he works. He feels that he is able to relate to the gang members and therefore he found it important to give them a second chance. This was important for many of the interviewees, who presented themselves as holding a very important role in society.

Kyle and Nathan, now pastors, were working with youth groups in prison in their community, and giving lectures about how to help people leave gangs and gang violence. According to their stories they had won the respect of the gangsters they once grew up with, and therefore saw themselves having a position that was desirable. Kyle explains this in the following way:

89. Kyle: “You see what makes it easy for me in my community, what makes it easy to work with gangsters, is the fact that I know them all, you know. When they were high rollers, hm, we were all friends. So most of the guys that are today high rollers, drug dealers and all that stuff, is when I started, dealing with drugs, and doing drugs,

90. Kyle: So I mean, it is nine ten years later. So I'm on a level now, so they know me. So I can go into a place, I can walk into a place, I can walk into an area, respect will be there you know. Because they know me, ten years I lay my life on the line you know. They see change in my life, they respect me you know. Even the biggest of gangsters, when they smoke a cigarette, they will hide the cigarette. That is the respect they have. You know, even though I will tell them, 'no its fine, you can smoke, God sees you, so who am I to judge you?'. You know, so even the big gangsters asks me to come and pray for them sometimes in their houses. To keep a prayer meeting, or stuff like that. So the respect level, in the community, is there. Especially for me and for Nathan. That come out of the area. That come out of it, know the environment. And know how to approach guys, because we come out, I come out of it. So my approach will be different to someone that doesn't know, how to approach, or how to go ja... So that is was make a difference”.

The interview people showed that they believed they were able to uniquely contribute to ending gang violence. Being an example to others was something which most interviewees referred to. This was also the way in which some of them left gangs. For example, Kyle stated that he had previously seen his friend leave the gang and since he had been worse Kyle felt he would also be able to leave.

During the interviews the interviewees expressed some irritation about other organisations coming in to their neighbourhood without knowing the area and trying to do the work to get people out of gangs. Jason explained how he and his friend usually went home to people to try to convince them that there were better alternatives and that another life was possible. They explained that people usually listened to them and took them seriously. When asked what he thought about programmes from the city of Cape Town in the same general area, he expressed himself in the following way:

85. Jason: “They always use people, never stays in that areas, and has never been through that. I can't take you to Waterfront if I haven't been there. It is what I normally says, so I can't take you to Mugg & Bean if I don't know where it is. So they normally use people, that weren't among the gangs, they weren't involved they don't stay that side. You know. And he just go to say our time, and he say, he is just going there. And he will go back to his town when thing like that happen. Spend the day there with kids. The kids just do it for the sweets and stuff, whatever they spending on them. They don't actually, you know”.

Jason meant that it is better to get actions towards gangs made by people who know the area where they work rather than using people who come from other places of Cape Town. It is evident from the stories that Jason, along with many of the other interviewees, views himself

as very intelligent. Jason, for example, has been at the top of organised crime which involves being able to understand business. He presents himself as a person with the highest grades who worked his way up through the gang. Additionally, he has managed to leave the gang. This contrasts with the stereotyped image of a gangster as a school drop out with no other choice. He assesses himself as more intelligent than some of the organisations that are helping, and he believes that the programmes that are run to prevent gangsterism are generally nonsense. He believes that he and other ex-gang members are crucial in helping to solve the problem of gang violence.

Manliness & Growing Stronger

For many of the interviewees it was important to show that they were ‘real men’ which included being able to protect your family and your friends. Because of having gone through the process of being in gangs and subsequently leaving the gangs the interviewees believe that they have developed their character and that they are able to stand up to people and take responsibility. They expressed a need to go through this process of gangsterism, facing themselves, changing their life situation and taking responsibility to become ‘a man of God’ or an ‘honourable man’. Whilst interviewing Jason in a cafeteria he illustrated the role of being strong and protective by explaining how he had stopped doing violence, however, he also stated that if, for example, someone offended me, his interviewer, he must show that that was not ‘okay’:

56. Jason: “That boldness I had in the old is the same boldness I have now. ‘Cause I can be very bold sometimes. And it scares people but it is what, that density is what God wants. ‘Cause he didn’t, if I must protect a sister, say if I must protect you. A guy comes here and he wants to say touch, whatever, take anything from you. I can’t go, ‘sorry don’t do that.’ I can’t go like that. I’ll give him a piece. He knows his is not allowed, he will know he must not to touch you. That boldness, by that time I was like that because obviously I was filled with drugs and alcohol. But because of like you just don’t, sometimes you have meetings and you have to put your guns on the table. They busy speaking and then I start shooting because you guys still talk man. I don’t like talk. I’m a doer I’m not a talker. And that, people would go like, ‘that man is crazy’. Now, the same density we had with that, now, you know like...”

This quote additionally shows how his past has made him stronger, which was common among many of the interviewees. They explained that the process of leaving the gang had taken a lot of effort and had caused them to grow stronger:

137. Andrew: “Look, I must be honest in what happened, and my experience in that lifestyle, have made me, I’m very street wise now. I can see something happening on the street before it happens. Because you can read people’s attitudes, you can read peoples body language. And that’s why I’m very street wise now”.

The identity as an ex-gangster is accompanied by many stereotypes and difficulties. However, as discussed, some of the interviewees, especially those who had been out of the gang for longer, retold their stories in a way that transformed difficulties into something useful and something they were able to be proud of. For example, being a strong man and a strong person who could deal with many difficulties and understand things on the street before many others. This is in line with Flores & Hondagney-Sotelo (2013:487) who show the importance of providing a new kind of manliness to a person who is in the process of leaving a gang.

Why is It Explained in This Way?

The analysis so far mostly describes how the interviewees retold their experience of leaving the gang member role. Why stories are told in a certain way in the specific context of an interview will now be addressed. This includes many factors and should be viewed as an ongoing discussion rather than static facts.

Impression Management

As an interviewer I often felt that the interview people wanted to convince me that they had left their old lives and started new ones. To be a morally good citizen often became the centre of the life-stories. When examined using Goffman’s concept of *impression management*, it is understandable that when telling their life-stories the interview people want to distance themselves from their previous actions and also explain why they behaved the way they did. This was to ensure that they are now seen as honourable men who take responsibility for their actions. This can, for example, explain why at the very start of the interview when asked how his life looked today, the first thing Nathan told me was:

1. Nathan: “Today, I’m a married man, children, a wife, many responsibilities. Hm, take accountabilities for my actions. And taking the responsibility as a man, in my house, and then. Yea I can say, my life starts every Monday, morning I need to go to Poolsmoor, and then I work in Poolsmoor prison, with the inmates. And, I believe that it is a calling from God, that I can do his kind of job, cause I didn’t plan to do it. It wasn’t my mind. Wasn’t in my heart, and today I’m working with drug addicts, I’m working with, the highest criminals in prison. Like the 26, 27, 28s

and people that is not part of the gangs and, people that was abused and all that so ah. So what we do is that we do drug prevention, try to stop children to make bad choices”.

Nathan could also be seen as having *Cuing behaviour* (Ebaught, 1988:150). He wants to help me to understand what role he has today. In his case, he has gang tattoos over his entire face, neck and arms and speaks with a voice and an accent that is connected to people who have been in prison. Therefore, it could be that he is accustomed to helping new acquaintances understand who he is, or at least who he wants other to believe he is.

Furthermore, it appears as though the surroundings also cause the interviewees to tell their story in a certain way in order to set a moral example. Since all of the interviewees are engaged with helping people to leave ‘gangsterism’, it could be that by telling their life-story in a certain way they ‘make an example’ of how a life can be turned around and they continue to show this example in the setting of the interview. The life-stories appear to be designed to orient the listeners morally. They give an example of where the life of a gangster will lead you, and stress that it is not the right direction to go. This is also an element of *impression management*, to show that the ex-gang members who were interviewed can not only take responsibility for themselves, but they have also been trusted to work with helping people to leave ‘gangsterism’. It is apparent that for previous gang members it is important that they should be able to live what they define as normal lives. By presenting themselves in this way they have something concrete which shows that they have distanced themselves from their previous life. However, at the same time it appears to be the context which interacts with them. If they want to be accepted in society and pass as non-gang members they need to be able to tell a life story that shows that they have changed.

Additionally, to have been in a gang and to have been able to exit it and build a good life is evidently something that people wish to achieve. To achieve this, however, there must first be a story to tell and a person needs to ‘have been there’. Sometimes it appears that the worse a person has been, the better this is, and a bigger transformation becomes a way of winning respect. Therefore, some of the interviewees may have told their stories with pride and potentially embellished them. It is possible that they believe that they prove their honour by showing the personal journey that they have made. This can of course not be proved; however, the importance of having a story to tell is evident. This was something Peter seemed aware of. He himself had been in both Prison gang and at the top of the Hard Livings gang, an

organised gang outside prison. He discarded his life as a gangster and hoped that people would leave gangsterism. However, he did say that people first wanted something to talk about:

106. Peter: “Yeah but today I’m saved man. And the whole gang know about it and they got respect for me. For doing this, it is my prayer, that they will also take that step. But they got that mentality that they want to be, they want to build up something to talk about. You know. But, all of the guys are not so lucky. Like I said, it is by the grace of God that I can still speak about it today. That I was deeply involved with this gang. But I’m saved, by the grace of God”.

The narratives also made clear that there is a right and a wrong way to live life. This connected to morality, and the importance of trustworthiness, both of which will be further addressed in the following section, where the life-stories will be evaluated as speeches of defence.

Cultural Credits

How can it be explain that a previous gang member has now become a police officer or a pastor responsible for youth groups? How have they gained the trust of the surrounding society and been allowed to enter these positions. To go into the role of an ex-gangster can be one way to win trust and trustworthiness. This has become a way to show that the interviewees have changed and allow them to become active citizens. This section will address how the interviewees present themselves to be trustworthy, and how they credibly explain that they are now different and honourable people.

People become more believable the more cultural credits they are able to draw upon (Rapley 2004:15-33; Silverman 1993/2006; in Liljeholm Hansson 2014:83). To clarify, the more the interview people stand for something that is highly valued by society, the more trustworthy they will be in society’s eyes. In this case I acknowledge two main cultural credits that were referred to in the interviews and also cross-reference with informal talks and observations from my time in Cape Town. Firstly religion, as many of the people in Cape Flats have a lot of respect for religion it seemed easier to pass as an honourable man if it is obvious to others that a person is man of God and the person has a legitimate story to account for this. Secondly, it seemed to create trustworthiness when responsibility is taken for family and a person is able to be the “male breadwinner”. If former gang members prove that they can live

up to traditional family values as well as with traditional gender roles, they are considered to be trustworthy. The more these values are exhibited the more trustworthy a person will be.

Explaining Towards?

Tilly (2006) states that the interview people are speaking to someone absent. This person, not present in the room, becomes central as – even when the interviewees were not asked why – they all answered “why questions”. Who the interview people may have had in mind during the interviews will now be discussed.

Firstly, the interviewees allegedly shape their own identities and how they understand themselves, and are therefore speaking to form their own identity. Secondly, the interview people in the study appeared to take into account how the stories should be received: in a way that would gain trust in community, families, and neighbours. Furthermore, during the interviews their desire to explain to me, a researcher, that they are not the person they used to be could be seen as rhetoric that was formed to win my trust. This may account for why they need to explain themselves in the way they did. Thirdly, they appeared to form their story so that they would win respect in the gangs they used to be in. Lastly, the interview people might need to retell their lives in this particular way as it will give them a bigger chance to find a job. The stories are retold not just to be reliable for any job but are formed in response to specific job opportunities. These four elements appear to be something common to all interviewees.

A Speech of Defence

The explanations that the life-story interviews contained could arguably be viewed as speeches of defence. Not as in defending themselves in court but as using this way of speaking as a part of their new role creation. By finding ways to explain or justify their past the interviewees are able to create trust and trustworthiness which also enables them to become ‘good citizens’. It is possible that the interviewees also understand themselves and find a way to come to terms with what they have done, when they frame their lives in this particular way.

By considering the life-story interviews as speeches of defence a partial understanding of how the ex-gang members have created their new role in society can be gained. Scott & Lyhmann (1968) will be used to clarify how the interview people used life-stories as a speech of

defence. They argue that there are two forms of legitimate 'accounts' when a person has confessed to having acted immorally. If the negative actions are presented together with one of these accounts these actions are not seen as being as bad. The first account is *justification*; to not admit that an action was wrong and instead try to justify the action. Freedom from liability is not asked for, since an apparently morally negative action can be justified or at least understood due to the circumstances; for example, as it was the norm to be in the gang it was not that bad. Scott & Lyhman's (1968) second account is termed *excuse*. The person agrees that what he or she did was wrong, but they give reasons to try to make the actions morally understandable.

At the early stages of this study, I assumed that there would be a lot of links drawn to Apartheid, or that the reason for being in a gang would be due to oppression or racism. This was sometimes present in David's explanation which also can be seen as a *justification* of why gangs exist:

118. David: "Back then, being a youngster, we were said that white people want to kill us, and we need to stand up against white people. And that's where the brotherhood came in. We would stand together as a unit. And ah, when I grow up Apartheid area was on its peak. Every day was fighting. There was times when I was in school, then the school would stop because of fighting going on outside where white people would just come, and just hit the people that was just walking on the street. Teargas would fly everywhere, just to burn your eyes. And, for us being Coloured back then was a hard thing. Because Coloured then was the scum of the earth. Was the people that we need to kill. I believe back then, the order of the police was to kill everything they get the hands on. I saw young people be beaten half dead, and police got away back then with everything. And that's where, 2-3 killings came passed, 5 killings came passed, and then the community got sick and tired of it. The gangs got sick and tired of it, and then violence started to increase over night. Because of someone's daughter or because of someone's son got killed because of the police, and then the community went crazy. So that's I think how everything started in the Western Cape".

This was, however, after I brought up the subject of Apartheid. In none of the interviews was Apartheid the first thing mentioned as an explanation as to why the interviewees had become gangsters. Instead, the focus was more on family, identity, being part of a group, being young, being a victim themselves, and other similar factors. David further *justifies* by describing how being in a gang is more like joining a club.

35. David: "Hm, I would say, there was a mix, but more of the hard core gangs, that people that kill, the people that sell the drugs, you know the gang bosses, are more the older type were more in

the 50s. And the killers, would be in the age of the late 20s and the early 30s, that would be then. And the people that would deal with the drugs, sell the drugs would be like us say up to 25 area, and we would be the guys who deal and make the money for the gang. So it was basically be part of a club. Like the soccer club. You would have the people that work, and you will have the people that make the money, and you will have the people that runs the business. So that's how it used to look like then. But the gangs nowadays, they kill each other, so. It is more of drugs and killings. Back then it was more of joining a family, that you never had. Like you go to college, a fraternity group that you join. That is like a family that you don't have. That you can hang out at this person's house, you can hang out there, chat. It wasn't, like back then, I talking maybe 1998/1997, back then, be part of the gang was to be part of the click. It wasn't a bad thing to be part of the gang, yes there was killings, yes there was drugs, but it wasn't so crazy that it is now".

56. David: "Ja, dealing with drugs, you know it is the wrong thing, you know. And police will look you up if they caught you with drugs. And because being in a gang, like the brotherhood, like the click that I was in, it was a building up a soccer club. You know building up a club, we would have a kitty, they called it, a kitty, a money box that we will build up. So end of the year, every year, we would hire a say a few taxis, and the whole club would go out for one day. Go out barbequing; go out swimming, so it was a club basically. So doing the drugs, it was like a club. And, yes we knew it wasn't the right way to erase money, and the right way to have fun. But the police was always a pain in the butt. That will, deter us from making money. I would not say that I hated them, but I always disliked them. Cause I always wanted to make money, cause next month I want to by a pair of takkies [sneakers], or next month I want to by a pair of levis, to look more good you know. And back then I dressed up very good. And it was always about looks, always about the new takkie just went out now, the new Nike. And everybody just wanted to wear Nike. So when it was a new thing it was like, yeah I want to wear that. So, that's how I disliked the police".

By presenting the killings and drug dealing in a context of something resembling soccer club and a brotherhood where people cared for each other it could make it more understandable. Many people, including me, have been part of different youth clubs, so he is framing his life as something that is similar to other people's lives and that is not that bad. He does admit that there were drugs and killings, but he formulates this in a way that explains that this was not the main function of the gang. This aligns with Scott & Lynn's description of the account of justification. Telling the story in this way could arguably also serve to make the person more trustworthy for others and therefore make the role of being an ex-gangster more stable.

A common element which interviewees mentioned as a reason for involvement in gangs was the lack of a father figure during childhood. Although the exact details differed, the theme of fatherhood was always mentioned. This varied from accounts of having a good father but no relationship with him, to the father being completely absent, to the father being abusive and a gang member himself. The fathers' behaviour was identified as rejection by the interview people and a perspective that was, as I witnessed, commonly given in the rest of the local society. This could be due to the commonly held belief that if the children do wrong it is the parent's fault as they were not there. Clement explains:

20. Clement: "Okey, the way I grow up is, I can't say that I had a tough life growing up. My parents did look after me and so on. But I made the choices of age of nine years old I told you. *Me and my father didn't have a relationship like that.* Father and son relationship. That is maybe what causes me trigger those stuff like that. Because of the age of nine I had an argument with my mother and my father and I hurt, they were always saying.. He was always saying that 'my son', 'I'm not his father' and so on. And that was what triggered me to ran away from home. Sleeping on the streets and so on. And, I used to break in by buildings, that was.....[silence]

21. I: were you alone or was it other people with you?

22. Clement: I was, first I was alone, running away from home. But afterwards, when I've got, get bigger, of age of 11 I started to move with people. That was when happen when I was raped. See, of the age of 11. This was the time were I started to move with people. Breaking in by houses and shops and stuff like that. And, I started by the age of 11. By the age of 16 I stopped with the running away from home. I worked, and I, I did, I hurt a lot of people and I'm not proud of it, stabbing them with knives. Maybe put them in wheel chairs and stuff like that. And, I'm not proud of what I did in the past. And I'm glad that God change my mind. Set my heart, just to be a better person, and to know that I can maybe guide my children, I've got two daughters, and my wife is now pregnant with the last one, maybe the last one. But is now a boy now. The one is 17 and the other one is going to be 9 next month. But the reason why I'm doing this to change my life. The reason why I took God in my life is because of my children".

In the above quotation Clement clearly admits that his actions were wrong. However, to defend or at least to try to understand his own actions he describes it beginning with his relationship with his father. This is a story that was common for all the interviewees. This relates to the second account which Scott & Lyhman (1968) term *excuse*. The person agrees that what he or she did wrong but they give reasons to try to make the actions morally understandable. It is also evident that Clement found it important to be a good father figure

himself, and that he was trying to break a bad cycle. That is the reason he has change his life. If his 'enemies' cannot reach him they will instead pursue his kids. He therefore decided that he is going to be a good father and not put his children's life in danger. Many of the interviewees, including Clement, understand that they have the responsibility for their children's lives. As many of the interviewees see the lack of a father (figure) as a reason for becoming gangsters, presenting themselves as good fathers, or family members, becomes important.

Bradley is a further example of how interviewees admit to immoral actions using the account of *excuse*. Bradley explained how a childhood full of violence and abuse made him become a gangster since he could not see any other alternatives.

15. Bradley: "Yeah, I was abused, hm, in my family. My mother don't know today. She didn't know, cause I don't want to tell her. You see, I give it to God, and made peace with him. My mother, friends, when they drink, they also abuse me. A women, but I didn't tell my mother. I make peace and I forgive. You see, then I grow up and I, before I forgive. I was carry inside of me hate. And rejection. And rebellion. And I was fight a lot. You see. The community, I don't listen to my mother. Sometimes I ask why I'm born. And sometime my mother was, I was living by my granny. Then my uncle was fighting a lot there. Took the food out, now, we must eat that food from the ground. That bring hateness inside of me. Then sometimes we can't sleep in the house we must sleep in the mountain.

16. I: Because of the violence?

17. Bradley: Because of the violence. Then you not, you see that clay, that thing God make us out. Now we eat that. Our granny give us this to fill our tummies. And that thing that, [pessies]. We take that and we eat that. So I grow up with my family. With many hateness, rejection, rebellion. I drop school.

18. Bradley: I was also, I was run, 100 meters. I was running that, I was good in that but there was no one who encourages me in my family. You see, sometime you I am so good. But that is no one support me when I must run for the school. And when I look around theres other families there, there is no one from my family there for me, you see. And I become a gangster, I drop school and I become a gangster".

Nathan additionally explained why he thinks people join gangs which is also a good summary of how he explained his own life:

118. Nathan: “The main reason is because of this hm, they want to fit in, because of self, the image they want to give to other people. Because of brokenness, they join people. They join gangs, ‘cause sometimes people are not there to make positive choices for themselves. Then other people make choices for them, so they are too weak to make positive choices. Because of brokenness, because of poverty, because of a lot of things, there is no people around them to support them in whatever they want to became. And now they see themselves as failures because my dad is a failure, and I need to be like this. This is why, the curse in on me to live this way”.

Those stories in no way glorify gang life. Both Bradley and Nathan took a stand against their actions but when explaining it they wanted to give their full story. They appeared to have thought about why it had turned out as it had and they readily shared this with me. In this way they can still become morally good citizens as they have some kind of excuse for what happened. Even though they made bad choices they could at least justify why. This arguably helps them in the process of disengaging from their previous role.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the process of how eight people left *competitive informal institutions*, in the form of a gang, to join *substitutive informal institutions* for example a church. The latter lifestyle is seen as more compatible with a democratic society, and the interviewees can in this way be appreciated as citizens who work for developing a more secure and democratic society. In the following section the main findings that answer the research question: How do ex-gang members explain their change in life-style, from past involvement in gangs to the subsequent transformation in their present day lives? This is followed by a discussion of the findings relation to previous research To conclude, the importance of the findings for policymaking is pointed out followed by suggestions for further research.

Main Findings

The process of leaving gangs has been showed to follow the four stages of Ebaugh's (1988) role exit theory, that discuss the process of leaving one social role to enter another. The role exit was showed to be both a sociologically and psychologically difficult process and was explained with pride by the interviewees, since to go through such a process was something the interview people portrayed as admirable. The first three stages of Ebaugh's (1988) theory consisted of disengagement from the gang and to morally understand what they had done wrong. Common turning points told by the interviewees were that someone close to them had died, that they themselves were close to death, often together with a religious experience –The life of a gangster did not attract them anymore and therefore they made a change –. Some of them even felt as though they had no other options then to try to leave the gang and therefore started to move in a new direction in life.

Furthermore, in the interviews most attention was paid to Ebaugh's (1988) last stage of creating the ex-role. Entering a new role after leaving the previous gang role seemed important for not re-joining a gang. Moreover, an essential part of this stage was the support and trust of family and community. One way to achieve this was by joining a *substitutive informal institution*, for example a church. Furthermore, the ability to explain why the gang members had acted as they did, or if they could justify that their gang actions were rather due to circumstances than their own lack of morality, could also be seen as important for entering

their new role. The explanations and justifications, or ‘speeches of defence’, and the entering of *substitutive informal institutions* allowed community members to trust former gang members to take responsibilities; as pastors working with youth or as a policeman working with law enforcement, even though they had a history of murder, rape, robbery etc. Moreover, to win trust it seemed to be useful for the interviewees to draw upon and live up to cultural credits. In this case it appeared as though being a good family man or being someone who takes religion seriously made people trust the person in question.

The role of being an ex-gang member was mainly presented as something positive and as something connected to holding admirable characteristics. An example of this is being an honourable and strong man who takes responsibility for his actions. Furthermore, the role of an ex-gang member was presented as useful, both for protecting family and friends and for helping to get others out of gang life. This was motivated by the fact that they ‘had been there’ and therefore knew what had to be done to either protect people from gangsters or to help someone exit gang life. Additionally, their experience could act as an example for others to show that it is possible to change one’s life course. The fact that the difficulties and stigma of being an ex-gang members, was not discussed to the same degree as the positive parts of the role, may be due to *impression management*. The interviewees told the story that portrayed who they wanted to be and how they wanted to be viewed by others.

Discussion

The interviewees explanations of leaving a gang seems to be in line with Deeker, Pyrooz & Moule (2014) and Samson & Laub (1993) findings that gang-exit is often connected with growing older, a turning point of some kind and that the existing of social bounds are essential for this to happen. Findings which have been new in this thesis are mainly how the gang members seem to turn their past into something positive and useful for their society and families. For example, the interviewees explained how they now wanted to be honorable men who took responsibility for their actions, and further that to be this they could use the strengths they have gained from have been a member in a gang.

Gangs as a consequence of racial identity, power of identity, an answer to marginalisation, unemployment, lack of established juridical system as presented by Hagehorn (2008), Natras & Seekings (1997), Andersson, (1999) & Pinker (2011) could also be found in the interviews. Theses finding strengthen the argument that when working against gang violence, identity

should be in focus. Furthermore, since the institutionalisation of gangs at Cape Flats have a close connection with the community of Cape Flats concerning welfare services (Lambrechts, 2010), focus needs to be on creating more reliable actors in the welfare services as presented by Wood and Gogh (2006). Having looked into people leave *competing informal institutions*, in the form of a gang, to join *substitutive informal institutions*, could be seen as example of how reliable actors or supporters of reliable welfare services take place, even though in a small amount.

Importance of Findings in Policymaking

The processes of leaving gangs are important for the development of Cape Flats. Due to the violence and drugs, which are highly connected to the gangs in the area, development of social institutions has not taken place to the extent that was planned in the Post-Apartheid era. The importance of identity and the four stage process of leaving a gang could be beneficial to take into account for policymakers active in different sectors, both in preventing and helping people to leave gangs.

Further Research

Finally, for further research it could be interesting to look into how to take care of the willingness of ex-gang members who 'have been there' and want to help others out of gang life. For example, by looking into how programmes driven by ex-gangsters function, or in which position they are most useful when working in an organisation. Moreover it could be interesting to make a comparative study between different gang-preventive programmes to gain further insight into how support best can be given once the process of leaving a gang have begun.

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