

**Mans is Ma Soe:<sup>1</sup>**  
**Ganging practices in Manenberg, South Africa and the ideologies of  
masculinity, gender and generational relations**

by

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**Introduction: Cape Flats gangs, race and masculinity**

This essay draws on an ethnographic study of masculinity, race and community in the Cape Flats townships of Cape Town South Africa. In this study of young, coloured working class male gang members in Manenberg, a township on the Cape Flats, I indicate that gang practices and coloured men's gendered identities cannot be divorced from the historical factors of racial and economic dispossession that the residents of Manenberg experienced in the 1960s. More importantly, I indicate that these gangs are central to the cultural grammar and reproduction of community and personhood in this marginal population. The structuralist analysis of gangs in urban African contexts by social scientists such as Pinnock (1984) and Owumi (1994) have indicated that this subculture is often an expression of and resistance to the dominant political economy of African societies in the 1980s such as apartheid South Africa and Nigeria under structural adjustment and military dictatorship. Social historians such as Glaser (1994) have indicated that gang subculture is also a finer cultural expression of the divide between the aspirant middle and working classes in townships as well as a manifestation of the alienation of working class urban African youth from their elders. The analysis that follows indicates that gangs are also an expression of social cohesion in peripheral communities. They exist within, and are an integral aspect of both the cultural and economic reproduction of personhood in a township community.

Structuralist analyses of South African township gangs by authors such as Pinnock (1984); and of gangs in the Nigerian city of Lagos, known as area boys (Ifaturoti, 1994, Olutayo, 1994; Owumi, 1994) have made important contributions to our understanding of this urban subculture, because they have indicated how this phenomenon is linked to structural political and economic features in society. However they offer only part of the explanation for the existence of gangs in the complex social landscape of urban African townships. Such analyses, that foreground male gangs as artefacts of resistance and survival do not offer satisfactory analyses of the rich social texts of cultural reproduction within the social and physical spaces of the township. These analyses do not explain the complex social and cultural relationships between the gang, and its individual members, on the one hand and the gang members' social relations within households and in the wider local community on the other. Gang members have other gendered identities that are embedded within the generational continuity of a household and that are woven within the richly textured social expanse of communal relationships and networks within the township.

They are also sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, lovers, friends and social mentors. These other gendered identities overlap, sometimes articulate with, sometimes conflict with, and ultimately shape their identities as gang members. Gangs are not just the social expression of young men's social alienation from and resistance to their elders (Glaser, 1994) or to mainstream society. They are also one of the means through which gendered personhood is affirmed and through which communities are forged and reproduced. They provide some of the social and economic capital through which households are sustained, and they uphold the informal system of township justice. They embody the structural bond between the dominant social centre and its peripheral communities, and they are the expression of the cultural and economic contradictions between the two.

In this study I build upon and continue the work of other social scientists who have mapped the relationship between gang formation in Black<sup>2</sup> South African townships and the wider socio-economic and political structures (see inter alia Breckenridge 1990; La Hausse 1990; Glaser 1992; Mokwena 1991 and Pinnock 1980). However whilst these studies have contributed a great deal to our knowledge of South African gangs, they all tend to explain gangs only in terms of their resistance to, or complicity in the dominant political economic system (Kynoch, n.d.). Some of these analysts argue either that township gangs are formed in resistance to an oppressive apartheid state (Austen 1986; Pinnock, 1980), as anti-social predators on fellow township dwellers (Glaser, 1994; Goodhew, 1993) or as the site for reactionary growth of ethnic chauvinism (Bonner 1993). Pinnock's study of Cape Town gangs in the 1980s for example, is grounded in a political - economic theoretical framework. He argues that coloured gangs exist as a means of survival in and resistance to the socio-economic and political forces that reproduce poverty in the racial ghettos of the Cape Flats: "Ganging is primarily a survival technique, and it is obvious that as long as the city is part of the socio-economic system which reproduces poverty, no amount of policing will stop the ghetto brotherhoods" (1980: 99). I argue that whilst the dominant structural factors of racial and economic marginalisation are important, one has to look beyond these factors and examine the gendered and generational relationships within the gang as well as between the gang and the community they reside in, in order to obtain more textured picture of ganging practices on the Cape Flats.

The gang does not only exist as a means of resistance and of economic survival for its members. Through the rites and practices of ganging these men create and offer each other alternative means and resources to assert their gendered identities as heterosexual men. These young men do not possess the dominant material and symbolic capital to affirm their heterosexual masculinity, such as a professional education, a permanent job, or the economic ability to support a wife and dependents. I show that in the context of the township, where men have limited access to the key resources that define a dominant heterosexual masculine identity, and younger men even less so, gang members use physical violence as an alternative means to assert their heterosexual masculinity and their personhood in the local context. I also indicate that an ambivalent relationship exists between the gang and the other community residents that can only be understood if we embed the gang within the social relationships in a community. I indicate how coloured male violent ganging practices in Manenberg township not only facilitates cultural production of personhood and community but also asserts a subordinate masculinity whilst

providing these men with the means to make sense of their location on the socio-economic margins of the township and of South African society.

## **Racialising space, gendering race during apartheid**

Male gangs in the coloured townships of Cape Town are notorious for violent bloody deeds that include severe physical assault, murder and rape. They are often cited as the reason why Cape Town bears the sobriquet of being "the murder capital of the world". At first, the gangs' violent practices may appear to be irrational and incomprehensible. I argue that we need to locate these male gang members within the social and historical context of the coloured townships as well as within the cultural notions of gendered personhood that have evolved within the township spaces in order to comprehend why violence is an important aspect of ganging here.

Coloured townships such as Manenberg on the Cape Flats, were created through the racialised legislative processes of the apartheid era. These townships and the processes of racial classification and forced relocation that created them imbued the racial category 'coloured' with unique political, physical, spatial and socio-economic meaning. Whilst apartheid legislation such as the Population Registration Act of 1950<sup>3</sup> defined who "the coloureds" were, the Group Areas Act of 1950<sup>4</sup> designated that they be allowed to live on the cities' periphery, away from the central business districts and other well-resourced amenities. Yet whilst coloureds were discriminated against vis-à-vis the white population, they were also relatively privileged vis-à-vis those classified African. Further legislation such as the Coloured Labour Preference policy<sup>5</sup> simultaneously created a hierarchy of deprivation the Western Cape, in which coloureds were given job preference over Africans as well as ensured a ready cheap labour force for the clothing, textile, canning and farming industries of the Western Cape.

Firstly, the spatial meanings that informed colouredness were informed by the group's relocation to the Cape Flats whilst its gendered meanings were shaped by the specific location and redefinition of adult coloured women within the apartheid bureaucracy, through welfare and housing regulations. Within the hierarchy of Black deprivation coloureds were given preferential access to social security grants such as the child welfare and disability grants over Africans (see Salo, 2003; 2004). In addition, more public housing was provided for coloureds than for Africans in the urban Western Cape than for Africans. This was done in order to create a stable racialised working class and secondly, to prevent the creation of a large urban African population in this region. Coloured women became the unintended beneficiaries of this set of racial legislation and were thus strategically located as the power brokers for their communities within the apartheid social structure.

The gendering of the racial category coloured occurred in two ways, namely through the bureaucratic assumptions about family formation that informed the state social security programme, and secondly through the specific feminisation of the industrial workforce in the Western Cape urban economy (ibid). In the first case, the apartheid state assumed that all households conformed to the westernised two-parent family norm where fathers and mothers fulfilled stereotyped gendered roles. Consequently child welfare grants were only payable to women as mothers and public housing was only provided to families with women and children.

Secondly within the economic sphere, the feminisation of the labour force in the textile industry, together with the impact of the Coloured Labour Preference policy in the Western Cape resulted in coloured women being the preferred workers. Until the early 1990s, adult women held relatively powerful economic statuses within these townships as the conduits to scarce economic resources and to shelter. These women's cultural statuses as power brokers still holds in the township in the present day, even though their economic power has diminished somewhat as many were retrenched from their jobs in the clothing, textile and canning industries. These women embodied and continue to embody the bridge between the national notions of coloureds as non-persons and of coloured personhood in the local context of the township. In Manenberg their relatively privileged economic status in relation to men is reconfigured to emphasise their social and moral obligation to their households and to the local community. Through the recognition of their social ties to individuals within their households and in the local community they ensure the physical survival of, as well as the recognition of other individuals as persons.

In Manenberg residents become persons through adult women who epitomise local respectability and morality. Adult women embody personhood in Manenberg, through the extension and the efflorescence of their economic and social mothering roles beyond the private domain. They mediate relations between the workplace, the state institutions and the local community. They also mediate conflict between individuals within the local community. Finally they signify and police the individual's moral standing within the community (Salo 2004).

The individual's conscientious observation of, or failure to abide by the local moral code is only meaningful when it is recognised, affirmed or condemned by the adult women in the first instance and then by others who know him or her intimately. Identifying and recognising the individual as a person is only possible and, indeed meaningful in the context of a small community where reputation is shaped through the minute webs of intimate, personal knowledge, gossip and visible performance. I argue that whilst women's economic activities and moral judgements imbue colouredness with gendered meaning in the local context, it is the ganging practices of the men that define the boundaries of the local community in which these meanings matter.

## **Men defining community**

In a township with a population estimated to be between 46 000 and 80 000 people, who is the local community and how is it defined? For the outsider Manenberg appears to be a homogeneous racial township, a single geographic and social unit. Certainly it is discursively described as such in newspaper reports and city planners' maps. However, for the residents of Manenberg, socio-spatial boundaries criss-cross the apparently continuous geographic unit, dividing it into multiple small communities. Whilst persons are identified through and by adult women, it is the men who embody and define the social and the spatial boundaries of the community among whom the women's opinions count. Men claim their agency in this local context by asserting the primacy of their definition of community over that imposed by the city and state town planners. For it is within the confines of male-defined boundaries that alternative meanings of personhood, gender, style and community are created.

The adult women's opinions about and actions on behalf of others are recognised as significant by the local residents, within these male - defined boundaries. It is ultimately the primary social arena in which the individual is acknowledged to be a person. The men resort to actions that are secretive, threatening, and often violent to define the local community. However as will be seen later, these actions also disrupt the work of civil institutions such as schools and clinics, whose origins are situated within a national notion of community and thus serve populations across locally defined boundaries. Finally, the men's actions underscore the contradictory nature of women's roles as they live across these boundaries.

## **Community, Masculinity**

In his work "Masculinities", Connell (1995) has argued that a hegemonic masculinity exists and that some men dominate other men. The local notions of masculinity in Manenberg are historically rooted in the apartheid era and are mutually imbricated with the familial trope that informed Afrikaner nationalism and racialised masculinity.

During this period national personhood was embodied in the white, Afrikaner patriarch. Later this prestige was expanded to include all white men regardless of ethnic origins. In contrast, African men personified the brutish, infantile primitive who required the white patriarchs' guidance to nationhood<sup>6</sup> whilst coloureds in contrast were officially included within the white South African geo-political unit as an inferior 'nation-in-the making'. During the apartheid era, the men who belonged to the more 'inferior' Black racial categories could therefore not be regarded as part of the dominant masculinity. Even in the contemporary period, they remain largely outside the discourse and practices of dominant masculinity. In the post-apartheid era, the definition of dominant masculinity has shifted from the emphasis on racial membership to one that emphasizes men's economic roles as breadwinners in the family and protectors of their communities. Few coloured men in Manenberg have access to employment and cannot claim to be breadwinners in their families. According to 1996 census data unemployment in the area is officially set at 30% (Statistics South Africa, 1996). In addition, men could only obtain housing if they demonstrated that they have a dependent wife and children. In this context a huge proportion of coloured men spend much of their adulthood in prison (Steinberg 2004). Factors such as long absences from the household during imprisonment and unemployment prevent these men from providing for their families through legitimate means. Consequently relations between men and women are often fraught and relationships are brittle, fragile and easily fractured. Working class coloured men quickly learn that they have to develop an emotional carapace in order to withstand the corrosive acid of structural violence and marginalisation. The everyday accretions of social and economic emasculation inform the cultural valorisation of emotional toughness amongst township men. This process of emotional toughening up that is colloquially referred to as "making strong bones" in Manenberg can be traced in the life history of adult men in Grande Street, like Uncle Buks.

## **Strong Bones: Making a working class coloured man**

A wet afternoon in June 1998 found me sitting in Aunt Dopie's house, talking to Uncle Buks and a few of his friends. The four men were quietly welcoming a friend home who had just completed his prison term. When I first began working in

Manenberg, I feared Uncle Buks. His neck, forearms and torso were covered in tattoos, the trademark of a gangster. His forearms were marked with the number "28", the insignia of the feared prison gangs. When I encountered him in the street, he appeared to be either morose or drugged. Initially, I would greet him apprehensively.

However, my curiosity about him grew after he had assisted in neutralising the tensions between the Dixie Boys and the Naughty Boys. He had fearlessly confronted the armed men who threatened Paul. A few days after the gang fight was averted, I asked him about the incident, inquiring whether he did not feel threatened by the Naughty Boys, who were armed.

"I am not afraid of that lot!" he said contemptuously, waving his arm in the air dismissively, as he brushed away any suggestion of fear.

"They're a bunch of kids. I've served two "Blou Baadjie" (long) prison terms. They know nothing about prison life." he growled, emphasising his experiences of being toughened up and surviving in prison, the institution that marked many working class coloured youths' life- path to manhood.

"They're still green. I go where I want, even when there is a gang war. I am not afraid of that lot." he said.

These were no idle words. Earlier, I had learned from Aunt Dope that Uncle Buks earned his living as an itinerant one-man security force for any organisation in the area that wished to hire him. At the time, he was safeguarding a marquee that was being used by a travelling evangelist who was visiting the area for a week. His responsibilities included patrolling the outer perimeter of the marquee grounds through the night. Before that, he was employed as a security guard at the local primary school after school hours. Here he was expected to deter local gangsters from writing gang graffiti on the walls to mark their turf. He was respected and feared by most local residents in Manenberg.

Uncle Buks was fifty-something years old and married to Aunt Dope. He recalled that in the 1940s he grew up "amongst white people" in Aberdeen Street in Woodstock. He said that "That time we lived alongside decent people. We lived in a big house. When we were married (in the early 1960s) Dope and I were given our own room in the house. The shortly after that we were forcibly evicted and made to move here. My first job was at the Docks (as an unskilled labourer). But it was always a situation where there'd be work for a few weeks and then there'd not be work."

Uncle Buks became a member of the Mongrels, a gang from the nearby township Hanover Park. The gang had a long association with his extended family. During his tenure as a gang member, he had burgled a number of houses "just in white areas, we stole from the rich." He was arrested for housebreaking and theft and was jailed for eight years. When he was released he re-joined the gang immediately and was arrested soon after for burglary. He was found guilty and given a sentence of thirteen years. During both prison terms he was an active member of the notorious numbers gangs in prison. During his first term he was initiated into the "28s", the gang notorious for using rape as an exercise of power over fellow prisoners. When I asked him why he had become a member of the prison gangs, he replied that "You have to learn to survive in prison. There the rule of either you or me holds." He said that when he entered prison for a second time, his eldest daughter, Bridget was only eight years old. When he was released, she was twenty-one years old and had a son of her own.

At this point in the interview, he stared intently at a small brass vase on the battered display cabinet in their living room. He rose, picked it up, and said to me "this thing, this thing has value. I paid for this thing with my life." The vase, an item he had stolen during a burglary, represented the long years that he had spent in prison.

For the older men like Uncle Buks emasculation consisted of a progressive cycle of gendered, economic and racial denigration. Their display of manhood finds expression in their proud though poignant narration of their emotional and physical ability to withstand denigration. The process of emasculation began in the early 1960's just as they entered adulthood, when they were evicted from their homes in the newly declared white areas. Thereafter, their adult lives were marked by the continuous search for secure employment as well as the means to support their families. The jobs they were able to find, as unskilled labourers in the dockyards, on fishing vessels or building sites, they were subjected to being called "boys" the peculiar term that is used to refer to unskilled labourers who are usually Black. Ironically, as many adult men attempted to meet the demands of dominant manhood, by supporting their families, albeit through illegal informal activities such as burglary, they were convicted and subjected to a seemingly endless cycle of imprisonment. Individuals like Uncle Buks had become men through a successive lifelong process of being toughened up. They learned to bury emotional sensitivity in self-deprecating humour and to withstand the everyday erosion of dignity and respect.

A subordinate masculinity exists in Manenberg, which is simultaneously constructed through, and upholds the dominant, racial and economic notions of masculinity that gained purchase during the apartheid era. The dominant notions of masculinity were embodied in white, Afrikaner control of the state apparatus, and upper class, mainly white men's control of economy in the public sphere, and their easy access to employment that ensured their ability to support a dependent wife and children in the private home. A small class of privileged Black men, often petit bourgeois businessmen, were able to fulfil the goals of the dominant masculinity. However their racial classification limited their economic and social ambitions. Men in Grande Street, as elsewhere in Manenberg, could not realise this vision of masculinity during the apartheid era Discriminatory racial policies such as job reservation, trapped them in seasonal, unskilled, low paying jobs as labourers in the fishing, construction and services industries. The dominance of feminised industries in the Western Cape locked them out of the few opportunities for permanent employment.

This emasculation continues in the contemporary post-apartheid period, as the dominant definition of masculinity shifts to one that emphasizes men's economic roles. These township men continue to be excluded from the labour market due to their low levels of education and their lack of appropriate cultural capital. They still cannot become breadwinners in their families. In the local context, women remain the economic mainstays of the household and the community. Alternative ideologies of masculinity in the local context had to be found.

In the local context, adult men and women have actively constructed an alternative ideology of masculinity that emphasizes these working class coloured men's economic and social marginality in the broader, public context, whilst cordoning off the social and moral sphere in which they are recognised as persons of worth. Yet, whilst the alternative ideology of masculinity originated in, and reverberated from the



dominant notion of white, nationalist personhood in the old apartheid era, it has also been reconfigured in the local context as it informs ganging practices and some men's authority and agency as gang leaders are asserted. In the following vignette I indicate how these men's authority is asserted over other gang members; whilst it is simultaneously recognised and reinforced by older women and other members of the community.

### **Respectable *Ouens en skollies*: Respectable men and Skollies<sup>7</sup>**

Paul is the leader of the Dixie Boys, a small gang located in Grande Street. While other young men were curious about me and willingly shared their conversations with me, Paul kept a respectful distance. When I arrived in the road, in late 1997, I would spy him standing at the top floor window of the first floor apartment he shared with his aged mother Aunt Gwen and the extended family, or squatting on his haunches at the end of the staircase. He would nod in acknowledgement to my rather over-enthusiastic greeting I shouted up to him. I first befriended the younger members of the Dixie Boys as discrete individuals: Ziempe, Loppa, Lippe, Zahir and Markie, a group of adolescent boys who often hung out in Moreda's postage stamp frontyard, playing marbles, or just hanging out, sharing a cigarette. They appeared to be caught somewhere between the innocent activities of boyhood and the style of tough, young manhood. During my first visits these boys were on the margins of my circle of acquaintances in Grande Street. I was interested in befriending the adolescent girls, intent on discovering their world and issues that were important to them. These issues turned out to be some of their relationships with the very boys whom I initially regarded as peripheral to my inquiry.

One afternoon, whilst we were seated on rocks on the edge of the street, in idle conversation, the girls spoke of the current conflict between the local gang the Dixie Boys and the Naughty Boys, the gang who was located at the court in the adjacent road. The Naughty Boys had accused Zahir, a Dixie Boy, of stealing wheels from a car that belonged to one of their members. The Naughty Boys had vowed that they would exact revenge for the theft. That very afternoon, an ominous group of young men sauntered down the road and congregated in front of Paul's house. The girls whispered 'here they come' under their breath as they glared at the approaching group with lowered eyes. One of men ascended the concrete stairs to Auntie Gwen's flat, knocked on the door and was admitted into the apartment. As we waited with bated breath, Zellie pointed out that most of these men stood with one hand thrust down the front of their trousers. This was a sure sign that they were each armed, clutching a weapon concealed in the crotch. They all wore baseball caps and dark glasses, through which it seemed they surveyed everyone balefully.

The lackadaisical atmosphere of the afternoon had changed to one pregnant with ominous apprehension. Even the afternoon sunlight that seemed soothingly warm now appeared to sting my skin. "Uncle Buks and Auntie Dopie have come, Nadia said with relief. By now, a number of older women, colloquially known as "moeders" or "mothers" and a few men had approached the group, all wearing determined faces. Uncle Buks was part of this group too. He was known to be fearless, having spent two "Blou Baadjie"<sup>8</sup> (Blue jacket) terms in prison for theft. During his imprisonment he was a member of the Twenty-Eights, one of the prison gangs that were notorious for



being extremely violent. Before that he was a member of the Mongrels gang in Hanover Park, a sister township.

"Go inside Elaine" Aunt Mary said to me meaningfully, as she descended the stairs to join the group. Her tone made it clear that this was no place for me or for any other younger people. All the other girls had disappeared into Morieda's living room by this time. I ascended the stairs obediently though reluctantly, torn between curiosity about the discussion that was now taking place below and concern about my safety. I chose to take up a position in Aunt Mary's doorway, where I could still survey the proceedings in the street below yet access the sanctuary of the living room if any trouble occurred. About ten minutes later the leader of the strange group reappeared and descended the stairs to the street, now followed by Paul. He was clutching his four - month old son in his arms, wrapped in a cotton blanket, a gesture that, on the surface, seemed incomprehensible. But, even as I shook my head at his apparent lack of concern for the safety of his little boy, I was overawed by his determined display of caring, loving fatherhood. He lovingly embraced the little infant's body, apparently communicating to all that watched from the street below, through cracked doorways or apartment windows, that fatherhood took primacy over all else.

As he approached the menacing group, the older women residents and the few men surrounded him in tight, protective formation. Soon everyone was gesticulating and talking very earnestly. Fingers and hands rose and fell in concert with voices and taut facial expressions. Fragmented bits of conversation drifted up to me like verbal shrapnel. The harsh, though muted voices kept me rooted to the doorway and I remained where I stood, even though I was increasingly frustrated at not being able to hear what was being said. The steely voices and the memory of Aunt Mary's command prevented me from descending the stairs. After a long while, their bodies relaxed. The talking hands and fingers now hung quietly by their sides. Faces regained composure and voices became more fluid. Soon the circle loosened the group of strangers separated away from the residents and moved away from Paul. The leader shook his hand and they all turned and walked away, their lengthening shadows retreating after them. It was clear that they had reached an agreement that was acceptable to all parties.

Aunt Mary ascended the stairs and I stepped aside for her to enter, waiting eagerly to hear about the discussion. "What happened, Aunt Mary?" I asked, unable to contain my curiosity. She pointedly ignored my question, bustled through the door and loudly demanded of us to "Turn on the TV, its time for "Bold". Marlene, make some tea please!" silencing any further inquiries about the averted crisis. As Chantal hurried to turn on the TV, Aunt Mary sat down in the nearest couch with grace and ease, and was rapidly engrossed in the images that flickered across the screen. She had just assisted in defusing a menacing gang conflict and prevented a chain of retributive violence that could have stretched over a few weeks, traumatising every resident. Yet she did not appear to be drained by the effort. I gawked at Aunt Mary's ability to orchestrate the day's activities back into the routine pattern almost seamlessly, thereby actively shutting out the young men's chaos that threatened to disrupt everyone's lives in a bloody war.

It was six o'clock in the evening - a time when everyone *should* be watching the schmaltzy American soap opera, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, sipping restorative cups

of tea before preparing the main meal of the day. A palpable calm reigned over the small living - room, as we were rapidly absorbed in the soap characters' endless struggle for true love. As I watched, I realised that I would have to wait until the next day, when one of the adolescent girls who was able to eavesdrop on the adults' conversation in an overcrowded bedroom overnight, would tell me what had ensued in the street below. For now, I had nothing else to do but watch and wait.

The next afternoon I returned to Manenberg, and encountered a despondent group of young men leaning against the corrugated iron fence that separated Morieda's front yard from her neighbours. Their eyes wore the hooded look that I had rapidly learned to associate with repressed anger. Some mumbled a greeting; others ignored me and stared moodily onto the street. I entered Morieda's house and slumped down into a chair. It seemed as though the angry, hostile faces I encountered in the yard had burned up my initial eagerness to see the residents in Grande Street. I berated myself for only wanting to satisfy my curiosity about yesterday's events. The young men's angry faces spoke volumes about a solution that was reached after my departure. Clearly this solution had angered them, even though it had warded off a potentially ugly gang conflict. Zellie and Nadia were watching Simunye's youth programme on TV. They too seemed subdued. I gave Marel some money to buy soda, bread, cold meat and cigarettes for the little group. Nadia made some sandwiches, poured the soda and offered some to the young men outside. Soon everyone was in a more relaxed mood and began chatting idly about the TV programme. Conversation began to flow more easily as we ate the sandwiches. As I watched and listened, Zahir winced visibly, his torso contorted in pain. "What's happened to you?" I asked. A wary silence descended on the room as everyone looked at Zahir. "Nothing, Elaine." he mumbled he said with downcast eyes. "He's just a little sore, Elaine" Zellie said cagily. I had unwittingly touched upon an issue that had made everyone wary. "Why are you walking crookedly?" I persisted. "They've beaten him up because he burgled a car belonging to the Naughty Boys gang. Speak up, you lot!" Piesang said, looking at the others defiantly, apparently daring them to ostracise her for breaking a community code of silence. "Who beat him up?" I asked. "Paul-them and the other Dixies. Yesterday." Claudette responded tentatively.

They were soon telling me about the events that had followed the tense meeting in the road. After the stand-off between the Dixies and the Naughty Boys had occurred, Paul and the senior members of the Dixie Boys gang had questioned the younger members to establish who had participated in the burglary. All the other members had then punished the guilty party, Zahir. I was perplexed by Zahir's punishment. "Why would you beat up your brother and then sit here and pretend as though it was nothing?" I demanded of the other young men. Loppa seemed to smirk at my middle class notions of justice and then said laconically "Elaine, you would not understand." At that, the young men all walked out into the backyard. "They had to do it Elaine." Piesang explained. "Paul is their leader and what he says is the law." "But why did they have to beat him up so badly? He is their brother!" I said plaintively, still at loss about why supposed blood brothers would beat up one of their own so badly.

Piesang moved slowly in her chair, as she sought a more comfortable position. It was as if she was preparing herself to provide a long, patient explanation to me, the naïve, privileged newcomer, who knew little about tough discipline in the township. "Yes, but he knows that you don't steal from your own people. The Naughty Boys would be

forced to take revenge on all the Dixie Boys if Paul did not punish Zahir himself. When he (Zahir) became a member of the Dixies, he knew that he would have to have tough bones."

I tried to make sense of my initial perception of Paul against the one that was now emerging. He appeared to be modest almost shy, usually squatting on his haunches, by himself, at the end of the concrete staircase, scrunching his eyes against the harsh sunlight as he surveyed the action on the street. Now he seemed to be a wise gang leader who was clearly capable of carrying out severe physical assault. I laughed inwardly at my own naiveté and my benign reading of character. I was dismayed by the severe punishment meted out to Zahir. Yet Piesang's patient explanation had clearly spelled out the local cultural grammar of community and unacceptable crime. I now understood Paul's reasons for the beating. He had decided to beat up the individual who was guilty of the crime and thereby averted a more serious threat to the overall well-being of the Grande Street residents. Zahir had put the lives of his fellow gang members as well as that of the other residents at risk and nearly caused a gang war through his rash actions.

Residents preferred the gang's kangaroo style court to a formal investigation by the police. The police may have investigated the car theft, but they would also have learned of other, often illegal economic activities, that the impoverished township residents necessarily rely on to survive. The Grande Street community were under no illusions about their right to seek protection from the police. The "Boere" or the "Boers", as the police were commonly called in the township, were considered to be part and parcel of the township communities' systematic denigration. Most residents acknowledged that theft was unpleasant. However they made a moral distinction between theft committed against the local poor, who could ill-afford any material loss, and the nameless wealthy who were safely insulated from the ravages of poverty and who seemed to care very little about the less well - off township dwellers. Theft from township residents was considered to be morally reprehensible while theft from the wealthy, who probably possessed insurance against the ravages of crime, was considered to be an unpleasant but necessary aspect of survival.

Paul had displayed the leadership expected of a male gang leader when he exercised his authority over the younger gang members and decided that Zahir be punished. His actions implicitly reinforced three important communal rules about local justice. Firstly, Paul had advised the Naughty Boys that he was in control of his turf, but that he would appease their call for revenge. In doing so he had reinforced the locally constructed, physical and social boundaries between communities and also averted a gang war. Secondly he had also informed the younger men and the other gang members that he would not tolerate any rash actions that could endanger other Grande residents. In doing so he had taught the younger men wisdom – about whom one could steal from, and whom not. This is a key skill needed to survive in a poor community such as Manenberg. Finally Paul's actions had affirmed his role as a fair judge who upheld would the local values of morality and crime. In doing so, he had affirmed his own and his gang's loyalty to the Grande Street community.

In contrast I was blundering my way through the unspoken, subtle web of protocol expected during situations like these. I had underestimated the extent to which the older men and women in Grande Street had supported Paul's actions. "Come" I said to

Zahir, "I'm taking you to Jooste." "Jooste" was the shortened term commonly used to refer to the G.F. Jooste Hospital located on the outskirts of the township. "I'm going along!" Markie, another Dixie piped up, eager, I supposed, for a break in the monotony of his day. "Me too." Lippe said. Soon I found my little car filled with teenage boys, their lanky, bony limbs stretched into all available space. "Where are you going with that lot?" Auntie Gwen screeched from her perch. "I'm taking Zahir to the hospital". I shouted back. She shook her head grimly, and replied "You're wasting your time, he's not worth it, he's just a skollie. He deserved his beating!" Then she looked into the distance, ignoring me. She had deliberately used the informal direct Afrikaans form of address "Djy" instead of the usual formal third person form of address that connotes respect. Moreover, she had defined Zahir as a skollie, a worthless man. In doing so Auntie Gwen had communicated her strong disapproval of my actions. I was assisting someone who had broken the cardinal rules of the local community, by stealing from a local resident. Through his actions he had defined himself as worthless, a potential traitor to those who supported him. I drove off, angry at myself for breaking ranks with many other residents who felt that Zahir had deserved his punishment and deserved no sympathy. In addition, I had forgotten that in order to reach the hospital I had to drive through Naughty Boy turf. Paul had appeased the Naughty Boys by punishing Zahir. In contrast I appeared to be approving of his actions by seeking medical assistance for his injuries. I was endangering the others and myself by driving through enemy territory with a carload of Dixie Boys.

## **Gendered boundaries, gendered persons**

The local notions of masculinity are anchored in men's actions as they simultaneously embody and define the socio-spatial boundaries that frame local community. It is from *within* the confines of the local community that men can be recognised as, and perform their responsibility as men. And it is within these confines that the adult women identify and ultimately control the ideological means whereby men become persons. Men define the boundaries of the local social and moral community, by embodying the markings of the gangster, the non-person.

The local moral community is insular, and considered to be a sphere of loyalty, where everyone is connected in a fine web of actual or imagined kinship. This is the community where moral and social obligations to others take precedence over crude economic instrumentalism. Here values such as loyalty, inter and intra generational ties, mutual respect and assistance shape relationships and are valorised. It is the community within which the adult women's power is exercised, and within which the person is identified. Consequently men anxiously guard over and defend the women's continued membership of the local community.

Persons within the community are defined in opposition to the non-persons who exist outside its boundaries and can only be identified by those who are not community members. Non-persons are considered to be anti-social strangers, those without any visible social ties to adult women's households in the area, or who threaten local men's ties to the women. In addition, they are also those who place economic gain over and above the survival of the community, acting out of self-interest and who commit immoral, shameful acts in the eyes of the local residents. The gangster identity is equated with the non-person who exists beyond the boundaries of the local

community. Therefore members of the local community would not be able to define another member as a gangster. If they did so, they would be classifying them as social strangers.

Paradoxically, in order to identify the boundaries beyond which the non-person, the gangster exists; local residents also have to possess tacit knowledge about the gangs' activities. Consequently men embody the non-person identity, and police the boundaries that set apart the person from the non-person. However men do not become non-persons only by virtue of being men. They have to be made into particular men, namely the gangsters, those who simultaneously embody the non-person and police the boundaries of the local social and moral community. The rite of passage whereby they become particular men is widely accepted to be secret, even though local residents, who are pressed for the details, do reluctantly admit that they know about the details of this rite of passage. For if an individual claims to know about the rite, s/he admits to associating with non-persons.

## **A lesson in defining community**

During the first planning stages of research in Manenberg, I relied heavily on my older brother, Bertram Salo, for his insight into the social issues in the area. He was the rector of the aptly named Anglican church, Church of Reconciliation in the area. During a visit to his house in November 1997, I told him of my plans to conduct ethnographic research in Manenberg. He reached for a map rolled up on a bookshelf in his cramped study. "You have to be aware of the gang turf in the area," he said. "Work in a single gang turf. Don't work across gang turfs; you could endanger your life unnecessarily".

He unfurled the map and spread it out on the tabletop. The now familiar map of Manenberg township that the city council planning unit had produced had been transformed into eleven discrete units. "This is the map we (the church members) use to locate parishioners and to predict which communities would be caught in gang violence, when gang war erupts" he said.

He had used a different coloured felt marker to demarcate the boundaries of each geographic unit in which a particular gang dominated. He pointed out the turf of the different gangs: the Hard Livings and the Americans controlled the largest areas. The remaining area was divided between the smaller gangs, namely the Young Dixie Boys, Clever Kids, Naughty Boys, the Junky Funky Kids, Respectable Peacefuls, Wonder Kids, School Boys, Scorpions and Yuru Cats. He explained that young men who resided within the boundaries of each gang turf would be identified as members of the local gang, by rival gangs on the outside, even if they did not actively associate with gang activities. Young men living within each community marked its boundaries with the peculiar graffiti associated with their gang. The letters "HL\$" demarcated the Hard Livings' territory, whilst YDB\$ stood for Young Dixie Boys. WK\$ referred to the Wonder Kids; SB\$ for the SchoolBoys; JFK\$ for Junky Funky Kids; RPF\$ for Respectable Peacefuls; SB\$ for SchoolBoys; CT\$ for the Cape Town Scorpions and YC\$ for Yuru Cats. By coincidence, I had befriended the young residents in Grande street, the single street controlled by the Young Dixie Boys (YDB\$).

In Manenberg, graffiti is scrawled on almost every perimeter wall, building and even road signs. The graffiti I had seen scribbled on these surfaces around the township now took on new meaning. For the uninitiated outsider the arbitrary letters along with the cryptic, yet ubiquitous dollar sign, \$, seems at its most benign, to be nothing more than mindless, meaningless vandalism in a township ghetto (UCT Monday Paper March 2001). The scribble's apparent meaninglessness also seemed to be confirmed, when I asked Sharlien, a Grande Street resident about it and she dismissed it with a wave of her hand, replying that "Oh, it's just the lads who write their gangs' names."

The meaning of graffiti takes on new significance, when it is clear that, unlike other urban media such as company advertisements splashed on huge billboards, the creators and the symbolism are intended for a select audience. The graffiti's message, though recognised by all in Manenberg, is commonly understood to hold significance for a select few only, namely the all-male members of the individual gang and its rivals. This peculiar discourse actively confers meaning on place and person. Not only does it mark off the boundaries of local community; it confers both gender and identity upon a particular sector of the community, namely the young men residing outside its borders. This process of conferring identity and gender upon individuals, as well as maintaining the boundaries of local communities are especially pronounced during gang warfare.

### **Gang warfare, gender and boundaries**

During my initial visits to Grande street in November 1997, these local boundaries appeared insignificant and did not appear to affect the round of daily life. Indeed, except for the occasional reference to "the lads" no one made reference to the gangs or to their territory. The notorious gang members were all but invisible during my early visits to Grande Street. By then I had befriended Zahir and his adolescent friends and they appeared to be just another group of young men from impoverished homes, who were at a loose end, undecided about whether they should return to school or get on with the endless search for jobs.

Then, during February 1998, a gang war erupted between the Hard Livings gang and the Clever Kids gang. The war, like so many others, had ostensibly erupted over turf expansion and the control over the fairly lucrative local drug trade (Cape Times 25th Feb 1998). One Sunday, senior members of the Hard Livings gang abducted three teenage members of the Clever Kids gang from a shebeen situated in a neutral zone. According to local rumour as well as newspaper reports, the three were taken to the Hard Livings headquarters, "Die Hok" (The Cage) where they were beaten and tortured. All three were later shot and killed. This incident sparked off a major conflict between the HL\$ and the CK\$.

During the days that followed the killings, two smaller gangs, the Young Dixie Boys and the Wonder Kids had become embroiled in the conflict, each siding with a primary antagonist. The YDB\$ had formed an alliance with the Clever Kids and so were now in opposition to the Hard Livings and their allies the Wonder Kids. These two small gangs occupied adjoining turf - whilst the YDB\$ occupied Grande Street, the Wonder Kids could be found in Grande Walk. Tensions rose in Grande Street during this time and the young men spoke fearfully of crossing Wonder Kids or HL\$ turf.

Boy, an 18 year old homeless member of the Dixie Boys, was especially anxious about crossing Wonder Kids territory where he would be at risk being beaten or shot by the gang's members. He relied heavily upon the older women's goodwill for food and shelter. In return he ran errands for them on a daily basis, purchasing electricity or groceries at the local mall, Nyanga Junction. Daily, mothers like Auntie Gwen and Auntie Mary would set aside a plate of food for him allow him to use their bathrooms or provide him with bed linen and a bed in their backyard shacks. He was provided with this assistance in the most discrete manner, so that he was able to retain his dignity as a person.

On his daily round of errands, he usually walked to the shopping centre, which was situated about a kilometre away from Grande Street. On foot, his route took him across two gang turfs, namely Wonder Kids and Clever Kids territories. Usually these boundaries were insignificant and he was able to navigate his way safely across these areas, except for the occasional hand sign from a member of another gang, to indicate turf possession. Now, his identity as a gang member living in the YDB\$ territory was primary. His errand run had become dangerous.

During the gang conflict, he would take me aside, out of earshot of the other youth and harangue me to run the errands in my car or to drive him to the mall. Most days I would accede to his requests. However on one occasion, feeling tired and irritable, I crossly asked him why he couldn't walk by another route himself. "But if I'm with you, they (members of the opposing gangs) won't touch me", he said. "Why not?" I asked. "Because you're a woman and they usually leave the women alone And, besides, we're driving", he replied. "How would they know that you were a member of the Dixies?" I asked. "Because I wear the mark (tattoo)" he shot back.

It quickly became clear that the policing and maintenance of local boundaries were gendered through the tattoos on men's bodies. Unlike women, the elderly and children, who were allowed access to any local community, during gang conflict local boundaries became impermeable to men who resided outside the community. These were particular types of men, namely those who had been made into "'n jong" (a lad), a member of a gang.

In the next section I indicate that gang practices not only operated to define the boundaries of local communities, but also provided a rite of passage into manhood for adolescent youths who like Boy, find themselves in a liminal state, between the local markers of childhood and adulthood. These youth are usually high school drop-outs, having rejected the dependency status that is associated with the role of a student, but without the resources such as jobs that, within the dominant ideology of masculinity, would define them as men.

## **Making a 'jong' - gangs' rites of passage**

Once Boy had told me about the "tjappie" (the tattoo) that marked gang membership, I asked the other young men about their tattoos and how they had acquired it. However, when I did so, during my usual afternoon visit in March 1998, Zahir, Ziempie and the other young men met my request with smirks and expressions of outright contempt. "No, we can't tell Elaine. Elaine's not a member of the Dixies!" Ziempie growled. Clearly, only the exclusive group of gang members, the



brotherhood, in Pinnock's (1980) phrase, could have rightful access to this exclusive knowledge. I felt peeved that I could not obtain any forthright answers. Knowledge meant for the exclusive group of men, the initiated gang members, and secrecy were the hallmarks of the brotherhood. I had to look elsewhere for an explanation.

At the time a fellow researcher, William Ellis and I were also attending counselling sessions for adolescents at the Community Counselling and Training Centre (CCATC) nearby. Whilst the group consisted of both genders, young men constituted the majority of the membership. Their schoolteachers and parents had referred them to the counsellor as a last attempt to save them from expulsion from school. These youth were considered to be at risk of joining local gangs and dropping out of the education system. During these counselling sessions, Geraldine, the counsellor would begin by sketching a scenario that incorporated all the elements of the dilemmas that these young people faced on a daily basis in the township. The group members would then express their own opinions about the situation and the choices that the protagonists made. At this particular time, the group discussion focused on the current inter- gang conflict.

It was during one such session, that we befriended 15 year old Ashley who had been a member of the JFK\$. That day, Geraldine had told of a case where a young man had been shot and killed by a rival gang. His teenaged friend had discovered his body and was faced with the dilemma of avenging his friend's death by taking the life of one of the rival gang's members, or to report the murder to the police and let justice take its course. Most of the young men argued vociferously for avenging the death, whilst a minority, that included a few males and all the women, argued that the matter should be left to the police and the justice system. The debate became quite heated, and Ashley, in particular, angrily led the case for vengeance. As the noise level rose, and the debate became disorderly, he stood up and repeated the phrase "That is his blood brother! He has to (show that) he has strong bones! It is his duty; he must stand by his brother! "At this point he defiantly rolled up his sleeve and displayed a tattoo on his biceps. His tattoo was different to the one Boy displayed.

Later, we asked him about the tattoo. He became defensive and told us that his mother had warned him constantly about the dangers of gang membership. In 1998 he had entered his first year at the local high school, where he had befriended the members of the Junky Funky Kids. They had enthralled him with tales of their gang activities and then invited him to join them. When he agreed, he was invited to meet all the members at "The Greens", the only soccer field in Manenberg, one Sunday evening where he would be initiated into the gang. At this time the field would be deserted and they would not be disturbed as they carried out the initiation ceremony. He said that the members were armed with leather belts, wooden clubs and planks. They stood in two parallel lines, facing each other. The leader then instructed him to run through the gauntlet of gang members who beat him with their assorted weapons. He had to do this because "You must demonstrate that you have strong bones. You have to display your ability to stand by your man. When your brother is in trouble (in a gang war) you must be able to assist him." He said that after his initiation, he and the gang would confront commuters at the Athlone train station and demand their wallets and jewellery. They would also harass young women outside their gang turf. "We never stole from Manenberg residents." he said.

He quit school and hanging out in the hok (cage) that the JFK\$ frequented. The school authorities informed his parents of his absence from school. His mother then confronted him about his activities and demanded that he undress so that she could inspect his body for the telltale tattoo. When her fears were confirmed, she demanded that he leaves the gang or leaves home. His mother demanded that he accompany her to school to meet with the school principal. The principal indicated that he would allow Ashley back to school if he agreed to attend the counselling sessions at CATCC.

William and I later met with Ashley's mother, Auntie Charlotte. We informed her of our discussion with Ashley and asked her about her opinion about Ashley's actions. She spoke about her fear that Ashley's gang membership would lead him to prison. She said "I know that they (the young men) are mischievous. Often the rumours that people spread about them are not true. When the school principal called me about his absence from school, as a mother, I had to accompany him to the school to meet with the authorities. I told the principal that Ashley comes from a good home and that I did not want him to find himself in trouble."

The making of men in the township through gangs' rites of passage, like elsewhere, is a process that marks the start of the journey into the wider world of gendered adulthood. Like other rites of passage men are encouraged to take on the values and responsibilities which signify manhood within their communities. In Manenberg, toughness and display of loyalty to local men first, and then to other members of the local community are the quintessential values of masculinity. Individuals, who want to be recognised as men, are expected to display their ability to withstand emotional and physical privation that will mark their lives. More than that, they have to display their potential loyalty to the gang, measured in their ability to withstand the severe beating and the painful tattooing without flinching. For the gang has to ensure that in future conflicts, a gangster would display enormous courage and the ability to defend his brother's life even under the most difficult circumstances.

The process of making a gangster reflects not only a local rite of passage into manhood but also signify these men's embodiment of the contradictory meanings of race, class and gender. During the apartheid period men were at once members of the dominant gender yet of a subject race and class. However subtle changes in ganging practice also indicate the shifting meanings of masculinity in the contemporary period.

## **Ganging in the post-apartheid era**

In the post-apartheid period young Manenberg men are the newly created citizens of a recent democracy, and members of a dominant gender. How are the new national persons being imagined and how do these persons compare to the impoverished reality of the Manenberg youth?

The images of the 'new' South African youth depicted in the local soap operas such as *Backstage* as well as in the image of the continuity announcers on the trendy Channel One. Manenberg youth are avid fans of both programmes. In an effort to emphasise the work of nation building that its programmes wish to communicate, Channel One is also known by its isi-Xhosa label, *Simunye* which translates into "we are one". These

continuity announcers tend to be young adults, who work in multi-racial pairs. They are usually dressed in designer clothes that display the Nike swatch, Fubu or Levis label. *Backstage* is a soap opera about young people attending a local drama school and the nightly episodes usually focus on these young peoples' efforts to break into acting, dancing or broadcasting careers. Whereas dramas of the past era consisted mainly of all white casts, the *Backstage* cast is carefully composed of actors from all racial groups. The democratic racial representation send a powerful message to all South African youth that the racial segregation of the past is gone and that they too could be part of this prosperous, new trendy nation. All these TV personalities display the accoutrements of the economically prosperous middle class, as evidenced by their fashionable clothes, ubiquitous cellphones their seemingly, leisurely, independent lifestyles. These programmes appear to communicate the message that in the new South Africa, all young people are able to acquire the style and image that make them equal. All one needs are the access to the financial resources that enable one to purchase the exorbitantly expensive designer labels.

Yet despite this promise of the post-apartheid era, the implementation of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR) in 1996 has seen increased privatisation of state services (Bond 2000). This programme together with the increasing trend in casualisation of labour in the textile and other industries (ibid, 2000) have led to increased economic marginality of the working poor of all races. Through the process of democratisation, coloureds and by extension, women no longer have privileged access to social security and housing. Bond (2000) indicates that the gap between the rich and poor South Africans has widened and that township residents have become increasingly impoverished. The poor populations such as coloured youth in Manenberg, who reside in the old apartheid townships seem to be trapped in a web of deepening poverty.

The adult women in the area cannot ensure the physical survival of these youths, any longer – and the acquisition of the style of the new South Africans can only be imagined. At the same time, gangs are now able to increase their income as they are incorporated into the global drug trade. (Cape Times 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2000). The globalisation of local gangs has shifted the meanings of the gangs the local communities such as Grande Street. In the past, the gangsters demarcated the boundaries of the local communities in which an individual's personhood was identified. In addition they performed a policing function within these communities. In the contemporary period, the gangs are being redefined primarily as economic units, whose core business is illegal drug trafficking and smuggling scarce marine resources. These men are now able to access substantial economic resources without the assistance of the adult women. Consequently the gendered and generational relationships have been reconfigured within these local communities.

## **Conflict and change in the local context**

The expansion of the local gangs within the Cape Town metropolis and within the international context has been made possible through their access to more sophisticated communications technology such as the cellphone and the burgeoning taxi industry. Irvin Kinnes, a conflict mediator in Manenberg, indicates that gang leaders are now able to access drug networks as far afield as Venezuela on cellphones (interview, August 1999). Consequently, local gang leaders such as Rashied Staggie,

leader of the Hard Livings gang have become wealthy druglords and own homes in the township as well as in the more sought-after areas such as Seapoint on the Atlantic coast. These ganglords now lure adolescent youths, both men and women, into joining the gangs with the promise of clothes sponsorships and housing in the more cosmopolitan areas of the city. In this manner young men as well as young women are able to access the resources that write them into the new images of national personhood – the designer label clothes and access to the wealthier, multi-racial suburbs.

Gang members find themselves increasingly at odds with the older generation as well as with the state authorities in the local context. In the past the gangster identity provided young men with a recognised role in the community, at the end of his school career. Now high school students are known to be gang members. When asked about this, Uncle Buks shook his head in contempt and said "This lot today...they're not gangsters. If you want to become a gangster you have to have wisdom and maturity. But them...they attend school in the mornings and in the afternoon they are gangsters. They shoot with guns...they hide behind the buildings and shoot that is why they kill innocent people." The characteristics of wisdom and courage that have been customarily associated with the gangster identity no longer seem to be the prerequisite for becoming a gang member. Ageing gangsters like uncle Buks indicate that the cultural meaning of the male gangs has changed and that the familiar path to maturity in the male life cycle in Manenburg has grown murkier. He perceives that violence in the area has increased as a result. He argued that in the past the old gangs carried out warfare in a more ritualised, carefully planned fashion. Gang leaders challenged each other to warfare at an appointed time at night on open fields beyond the residential perimeter, to prevent injury to innocent residents. He blames the killings of innocent people on the new gangsters' lack of wisdom and immaturity.

Here Buks also drew attention to the change in the technology of violence, which reduced the need for skill, wisdom and courage required when warfare was conducted with knives and clubs. He appeared bewildered by the youths' acquisition of seemingly conflicting identities, namely that of the immature student on the one hand and the mature gangster on the other, and blamed this change on the shift in weaponry.

The youths' acquisition of multiple, conflicting identities have also put state institutions such as the schools at odds with the gangs. Increasingly school authorities are asserting their control over the youths by cordoning off schoolyards with electric fencing and by labelling the student gangsters as 'youth at risk '. These youth are then expelled or referred to the special counselling programmes such as those offered by CATCC. The gangs' ability to control youth of both genders without the restraining effects of the adult women's moral authority have increased the gendered tensions between the women and the gang leaders. Whereas in the past, women did not recognise the police system's legitimate control over the gangs, and looked to the gang leaders for policing functions, these days, women stage marches to the police to request them to stop the gangs from operating in the area. In retaliation, local gangs are targeting attacks on more women residents within the local community.

## Conclusion and a note on violence

I have argued that the making of men in Manenberg through gangs' rites of passage is a process that marks a young working class coloured man's journey into the world of gendered adulthood. As in other rites of passage into manhood, male youth in Manenberg are encouraged to take on the dominant values and responsibilities that signify manhood within the local community. The values that define masculinity in Manenberg are at once opposite to, yet anchored in the dominant ideology of masculinity which held sway during the apartheid era and still reverberates in the contemporary period of transition.

During the ganging rite, violent beatings and the painful tattooing process mark men's bodies with the values of toughness, courage and loyalty. The initiates are also expected to display the stoicism with which they must confront the challenges of racial marginalisation, unemployment and impoverishment. The initiation rite not only epitomises the dominant definition of coloured, working class men as subaltern racial and economic masculinities. It also marks men's bodies as the physical boundaries of the local community, an alternative social and moral space in which apparently different notions of personhood, gender and style dominate.

These alternative notions of personhood are anchored in women's roles as the economic mainstays of the local community. Coloured women's important economic roles are reconfigured in the context of the local community through the 'moeder' identity, to epitomise the core characteristics of local personhood, namely morality and respectability. Whilst women identify the persons in the local contexts, men as gangsters define the boundaries of the local community within which persons are identified. Recent changes in ganging practices reflect the reconfiguring of national personhood in the new South Africa and the decline in coloured adult women's economic statuses. Local gangs have become incorporated into the global drug trade and have increased their economic resources as a result. The adult women's ability to ensure the physical survival of the local community is declining and so too, their power to identify or make persons in the local context. The meanings of the gangs in the local context has been reconfigured due to their access to greater economic resources, more efficient, sophisticated weaponry and the expansion of gang networks across the Cape Town metropolis. Men's identities as gangsters have flourished in the local community and they are now key to the making of local personhood.

The numerous anthropological studies of physical violence have shown that violence is not an arbitrary action, "devoid of historicity, meaning or reflexivity" (Schmidt and Schroder 2001:18). At the level of the local, violence has been shown to be an inherently social act, firstly expressing a relationship between the perpetrators, the victims as well as the witnesses or the observers and secondly conveying meaning to the actors involved. In Manenberg, gang violence is not a gratuitous, empty expression of male aggression: it not only symbolises these men's marginal position of masculinity within the social structure, but also creates and reproduces the meanings of personhood and community in the local context.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Men are like that.

<sup>2</sup> I use Black here in the inclusive sense to include state designated racial groups coloured, Indian and African.

<sup>3</sup> In terms of the Population Registration Act the people of South Africa were categorized into different racial groups, viz. White Indian, African and coloured. Coloureds and Africans were further sub-divided into sub-groups. In the case of Africans ethnic sub-divisions were based upon linguistic differences. The Coloured category was sub-divided into seven sub-categories, despite the fact that 'coloured' was defined negatively as "those who cannot be defined as either white or African" (Wilson and Ramphele 1989; Western 1996).

<sup>4</sup> The Group Areas Act legislated race-based residential segregation in 1950 and caused the forced removal of approximately 750 000 people in urban areas between the 1960s and 1980s.

<sup>5</sup> The Coloured Labour Preference Policy legislated that coloured labour be given work preference over Africans in the Western Cape. In this way Africans were denied residence in the Western Cape and the urbanisation of Africans was contained (Goldin 1987) until 1985, when the pass laws were removed from the statute books.

<sup>6</sup> See Alexander, 1984. Alexander quotes Dr. Verwoerd's speech to parliament as Min of Education, in the early 1960s in which the latter described the African population as children who were fit to become nothing but hewers of wood and drawers of water.

<sup>7</sup> *Skollie* is Afrikaans slang, derivative from the Old Dutch term, *Schoelje* meaning scavenger. Dutch sailors shouted *schoelje* at seagulls, which snatched ships' offal from the waters of Table Bay. Later the word was used to describe vagrants who survived from pickings off dumpsites or from begging on the streets (Pinnock 1980:24).

<sup>8</sup> Long term imprisonment, ranging from 8 to fifteen years.

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