

The structure and dynamics of organised crime on the Cape Flats

The aim of this chapter is to provide a perspective on the structure and dynamics of organised crime on the Cape Flats. The resulting picture differs in some important ways from that preferred by officials in Cape Town. This is partly because the aim is not simply to describe how organised crime is criminally threatening, but rather to show that a fundamental characteristic of it is exploitation and insecurity. This dimension to organised crime becomes obvious when it is more closely inspected and viewed through the experiences of individuals engaged in criminal structures.

The theoretical questions set up in the previous chapter are considered here. The first relates to the notion that street gangs have gone through a process of corporatisation, largely due to increased drug markets and assistance from foreign partners. Comparative evidence suggests this is potentially contentious; street gangs may not have gone through this process, even though law enforcement agencies and others claim they have. Likewise, it is possible that there has been a change in street gangs caused by an increase in illegal market revenue, but that this has created tensions between them.

A second, more theoretical issue relates to how and why crime is organised the way that it is. Orthodox analysis tends to depict organised crime as a unitary phenomenon, either hierarchically organised, or more loosely organised along the lines of a fluid network. By considering rival views of criminal organisation it was argued that orthodox analysis tends to be simplistic. We need to approach the issue of organised crime through a more comprehensive theory of social coordination. The four models of criminal organisation – bureaucratic, network, market and clan – offer such a framework. However, it was stressed that actual examples of organised crime may not conform to one 'ideal type', but rather contain elements of each. With these models as a theoretical basis, we should therefore attempt to understand how and why crime is coordinated the way it is on the Cape Flats and what tensions exist between individuals and groups.

The same discussion on criminal organisation pointed out that we can approach the subject of organised crime from several different viewpoints. We can look at individual groups, if they exist, we can study market dynamics or we can look at the relationships between different actors and organisations. Because of these different viewpoints, a failure to make clear the approach used may create conceptual confusion.

The approach of this chapter is to conceptualise what I refer to as the *criminal economy* of the Cape Flats, or more specifically, those coloured regions of the Cape Flats that are infamous for their street gangs. As will become evident, this criminal economy is complex and involves collusion and competition between gangs, drug merchants and corrupt police. The analysis is therefore restricted to a specific locality. With more time and resources, it would be possible to analyse this region in a broader context. The local criminal economy is integrated into a wider system of production, distribution and consumption.

The final element of this chapter deals with a further contentious issue that was raised in chapter two. This relates to corruption and organised crime. It was suggested that the parasitic model is based on the assumption that corruption tends to be a tactic of organised crime; that organised crime penetrates the state in order to seek protection. However, a critique of this view suggests the potential for a more collusive relationship between the state and organised crime, one wherein the state takes an active role and is therefore an embedded feature. This certainly seems to be the case on the Cape Flats and the issue of corruption must therefore form part of our understanding of the criminal economy.

The chapter is divided into four parts.

- I. The first part provides a description of how the main players and organisations in the criminal economy relate to each other – in essence, this is about describing the relationships between drug merchants, street gangs and intergang alliances and also describing how market dynamics have influenced a change in these relationships.
- II. The second part focuses on the internal nature of street gangs and explores whether or not they can be considered drug-dealing businesses. The answer leads to a discussion on the function of street gangs in the organisation of crime. Here I put forward the argument that gangs are not only more complex than rational economic organisations, but are also as much about consumption as they are about production.
- III. The third part considers the exploitative nature of organised crime and discusses the resultant tensions within the criminal economy and how these are managed.
- IV. The final part considers the importance of corruption in the criminal economy and suggests the parasitic model of organised crime is insufficient in explaining the relationship between the state and career criminals.

PART I: DRUG MERCHANTS AND STREET GANGS

It is plausible that the idea of the Cape Flats gangs undergoing a process of corporatisation is bound up with two phenomena: the growth in larger gang structures that have turfs in several areas and the rise of wealthy career criminals involved in the selling of prohibited drugs and other contraband. When these aspects are combined, it is understandable that some will reach the conclusion that there are indeed large, well-organised groups operating in the region. The popular theory used to explain these developments has stressed the opportunities that were created through the collapse of the apartheid state and the ensuing political transition, which, as described above, led to a temporary paralysis of the police. These factors, among others, may well have had a bearing on the nature of organised crime, but what is often overlooked is a more obvious development, which happened some years before the end of apartheid. Here we find the importance of the market model in explaining the organisation of crime.

At the time Pinnock wrote *The Brotherhoods*, the beginnings of the trade in Mandrax was noted. Alongside that, the most profitable illegal trades on the Cape Flats involved the selling of alcohol, dagga (marijuana) and stolen goods. If the main income available to career criminals had only been selling commodities such as alcohol, dagga and stolen goods it is extremely unlikely that rich Cape gangsters would have appeared on the scene or that the Cape would have experienced the emergence of large gang structures and allegiances. Access to supplies of alcohol, for instance, was restricted under apartheid so that only those with some capital and transport could gain entry to that illicit market. But enough people had these resources to mean that many people could operate shebeens, meaning there was little chance for a small number to gain a monopoly on alcohol sales and thus become well off, at least not in terms that would elevate them financially far beyond the vast majority of coloured people.

There were no doubt plenty of attempts by shebeen owners to expand their businesses through nefarious tactics and successful shebeen owners carved out increasingly large markets, typically facilitated by engaging bands of thugs who would protect their shebeens and help remove competitors from their vicinity.¹ But ultimately, shebeen owners, even the most successful and ruthless, could capture a market comprising only a small neighbourhood. Due to alcohol sales being largely tolerated by the state (a policy encouraged by the large breweries, which made profits from the informal market in the low grade wine that was the drink of choice on the Flats), dealing in illicit alcohol was, and still is, seen as a relatively safe illicit activity. This again means many people will be drawn into the trade; a high-risk environment limits the number of willing entrants.

A similar situation relates to the selling of dagga. Marijuana is plentiful in South Africa, mainly being grown in the Eastern Cape. It is bulky, the profits are not enormous and many people can gain access to a ready supply. There are, therefore, few restrictive barriers to entry in the dagga market, a monopoly of supply is not possible and individual operators do not make much profit. So, if alcohol and dagga had remained the main illicit commodities for organised crime, their characteristics and the nature of the market makes it likely that the criminal economy would be characterised by numerous players, few of whom would be making high profits; criminal organisations would remain small and localised.

The rise of Mandrax as a popular consumer good and later, to a lesser extent, cocaine, heroin and Ecstasy, changed this situation. This was an outcome of the properties of these drugs and the way in which they are produced. Mandrax is a small drug and access to a regular supply requires money, some expertise and risk. The production of Mandrax occurs either in Asia or in clandestine factories in Southern Africa, most situated in or near Johannesburg. To get access to Mandrax pills coming from outside the continent requires considerable expenditure on travel and possibly access to corrupt state officials.

To make this exercise worthwhile a large quantity of the drug would be involved. We can speculate that if someone was going to the risk of importing Mandrax pills then they would more than likely stock up on a sizeable amount – several thousand pills can fit into a small box. Consider, for instance, that in 1992 two men were arrested for delivering about a million Mandrax tablets from Johannesburg to the Cape Flats. In other words, few people will have the ability to import Mandrax but if they can, they will be dealing in large quantities that could make them very rich. Likewise, producing Mandrax in Southern Africa requires access to chemicals, a pill press and an understanding of chemistry and pill manufacturing. Once such a set up is created, swift production of many thousands of pills becomes easy.

So, the prohibition of Mandrax and the rise in its popularity on the Cape Flats created the opportunity for a few individuals to become very wealthy. The Mandrax market may be characterised by many thousands of people selling small quantities to end users but there are only a few suppliers, who have an opportunity to make a considerable amount of money and thus become quite powerful. Furthermore, with a small number supplying a large market there is reason for more regional coordination; one shebeen owner can only supply one neighbourhood with alcohol, whereas the market for a high-level Mandrax dealer is much larger and more spread out.² An explanation of the development of the so-called supergangs of the Cape Flats cannot overlook this dynamic and suggests that gang structures need to be viewed in relation to distribution *and* consumption. More on this below.

To some extent, while it can be said that organised crime controls the markets in prohibited goods and services, it is the characteristics of these prohibited goods

and services that dictate the organisation of the criminal economy. Organised crime is not simply the outcome of rational business brains. Thus, the change in organised crime on the Cape Flats, characterised as it was by the emergence of extremely rich career criminals and larger affiliations of street gangs, was an outcome of (illegal) market dynamics – a product of human actions, but not of human design.

Recently, a new drug has emerged on the scene which highlights well how the nature of the underlying commodity partly dictates the way in which it is sold. The drug in question is known locally as 'tic' and is a methamphetamine similar to speed in its effect. Tic is easily made from chemicals available through pharmaceutical shops. It is a fine powder mainly sold in small straws and smoked in a glass pipe. A gram has a street value of about R400 and each straw is sold for about R40. The colloquial name of the glass pipe is a 'lolly', which confirms the status of tic as popular among the youth. As tic is so easy to produce, large numbers of people are involved in this new market and prices have been falling.

There are no reliable statistics on tic but it appears that the trade is characterised by a chaos of competing sellers and producers. One source in Atlantis involved in the trade said that there were "hundreds of people selling tic" and that no individual monopolises tic selling in the area. In contrast, there are rumoured to be only five main Mandrax suppliers. We can speculate that while tic is lucrative, it is a commodity that will never produce wealthy drug merchants on the same scale as Mandrax. A subject for further research is how the selling and distribution of Mandrax and tic relate to each other. It is possible that the popularity of tic will eventually undermine the Mandrax industry and erode the concentration of criminal wealth. However, according to people in Atlantis this is unlikely. Mandrax and tic have different effects, tic being described as an 'upper', Mandrax as a 'downer'. Indeed, after binges on tic it is considered pleasurable to end by smoking Mandrax. Tic may thus exist alongside the established Mandrax industry and not threaten its overall profitability.

DRUG MERCHANTS AND THE DRUG TRADE

From the early 1980s the Cape Flats witnessed the emergence of several rich 'gangsters', men who I will refer to as the 'drug merchants'. The state departments may prefer the name 'high flyers' but this term has been abused and is often attributed to career criminals who are not particularly wealthy or powerful. The number of drug merchants is difficult to establish, but members of the OCU and the local SAPS suggest there may be 10 to 15 men at any one time who can be considered to have risen to a prominent position in the local drug trade. Although in reality there are no rules to distinguish drug merchants from other successful career criminals, there are characteristics that most share that elevate them above

others in the area and in particular, distinguish these drug merchants from the majority of gang members.

To understand the drug merchants it is necessary to understand the workings of the drug trade. If we ignore the relevance of gang affiliations, this is not a complex industry and most sources agree on the principles. Although drugs are produced locally, most sold on the Cape Flats come from Johannesburg, which seems to be the main hub for drug distribution, although intelligence reports suggest that large quantities of drugs come to South Africa through Durban's seaport as well. As most drug distribution is controlled in Johannesburg, it is rumoured that some of the wealthiest drug merchants are based there and in comparison, the main drug merchants in the Cape are not as affluent.

Drugs are driven to the Cape by couriers employed by the main merchants, distributed through a multi-tier system and eventually sold to end users through shebeens and drug-dealing outlets. There may be several hundred places that sell drugs to end users and many are also local hubs of other illegal and semi-legal activities, including selling stolen goods and alcohol. It was noted in the introduction that shebeens became focal points for social and economic activity given the dire state of community infrastructure on the Cape Flats. As with all drug markets, profits are greater the higher up the chain one goes; the people involved in selling to end users make less than the people selling drugs to outlets, who make less than the drug merchants supplying larger quantities to regions.

This system relies on the extensive use of credit. At each point in the chain it is usual that drugs are sold in advance of payment. Drugs flow into the Cape and money flows out afterwards, since few have the capital to buy quantities of drugs outright. Herein lies a source of conflict – given the lack of formal insurance, the credit system is precarious. If drugs are confiscated or stolen or if a person is arrested or has money taken from him, those higher up the distribution chain will not receive their money, which means they will be unable to return money to the suppliers. Violence, or its threat, is an important way of enforcing these contracts. But this system of distribution also relies heavily on trust and familiarity between business partners – to receive credit one must be considered reliable.

WEALTH, MYTHS AND POWER

The drug merchants are thus the wholesalers of lucrative drugs including Mandrax and cocaine and they monopolise the distribution of these commodities within specific boundaries, which we can call their 'economic domains'. But these men typically have a wide portfolio of interests, including the sale of weapons (some stolen from households, others shipped into the Cape from military sources), protection rackets, diamond smuggling, prostitution and abalone smuggling. Most

also own prominent shebeens and have investments in legal businesses and properties. Some of the authorities claim that their investments in the legitimate economy can be explained as money-laundering activities. This conforms to a view expressed by many leading organised crime experts who argue that the only reason why criminals have legal businesses is to provide a cover for their illegal activity.³ Although difficult to show categorically, it seems that successful drug merchants are shrewd businessmen and the distinction between legal and illegal businesses may not be as important to them as it is to the state or to criminologists (a theme explored further in chapter four).

'Paul' – a drug merchant from Hanover Park interviewed for this study – claimed he owned fishing boats and properties in many areas of the Cape and was part owner of a construction firm working on the site of one of the Cape's largest prisons. Whether drug dealing brings in the majority of his wealth is not clear, but that is the assumption by the authorities. When the notorious drug merchant, Colin Stanfield, faced allegations of tax fraud, his attempt to explain his considerable assets as his profits from selling vegetables and lending money seemed unconvincing and it is reported that it caused a ripple of laughter in the courtroom. However, a source close to Stanfield claimed he and his family had numerous legal businesses, including shops, hotels, nightclubs and laundrettes – for clothes, not money. Other drug merchants are reported to have similar diverse businesses, including owning taxis and second-hand car dealerships. The criminal economy therefore blurs into the formal economy and it is not certain whether one helps capitalise the other.

It is this wide portfolio that makes it hard to link organised crime with unemployment. Although the drug merchants originate from impoverished communities with high rates of joblessness, these men are shrewd businessmen who succeed in both legal and illegal ventures. Their involvement in organised crime is not about economic survival but about greed and a desire for wealth and power.

The wealth of these criminal elites sets them apart from their communities, although there is no way of knowing how much they are worth. Although this is probably an overestimate, a famous gang leader and drug merchant was rumoured in the press to be earning as much as R30,000 a day. The wealth of Colin Stanfield, perhaps the most successful Cape gangster in recent years, was glimpsed by the public when he was caught twice with large sums of unexplained cash in one of his many homes – on the first occasion a sum of R500,000 in used notes was confiscated and on the second, R2.7million was found piled up in boxes in a corridor. Stanfield owned several properties on the Cape Flats, a large house in one of the more expensive, formerly white suburbs and properties in Johannesburg. He had several expensive cars and his family was well looked after, his sons attending one of Cape Town's oldest private schools.

The ability to accumulate capital differentiates drug merchants from most gang members who depend on opportunistic and predatory income-generating activities. In contrast, drug merchants have reached a point where they 'earn in their sleep'. This distinction is highlighted vividly in prison; when a typical gang member serves time he earns nothing, while in a similar predicament the drug merchants and their families continue to receive large incomes. It is not the case that the wealth of these drug merchants makes them extraordinary in Cape Town. This is a city containing many of the super-rich. But the drug merchants' wealth is in stark contrast with the community from which they originate and of which they remain active members. While their wealth makes them famous throughout Cape Town, it is astonishing only in the context of their ghetto origins. Almost all are men whose origins are working class and whose 'criminal empires' started from nothing. Moreover, almost all the main coloured drug dealers who have risen to prominence in the Cape in the last 10 years are reportedly illiterate. This was the case with 'Paul', interviewed for this study, and was also allegedly the case with Stanfield.

Their conspicuous wealth sets the drug merchants apart from others on the Cape Flats. It is perhaps most evident to community residents when they see these men driving convertible cars or 4x4s – again, not an uncommon sight in affluent areas, but a rarity in the ghettos. Their wealth also places them in a unique position. Many of the most successful dealers own property outside the Cape Flats, often in desirable areas that were formerly white owned. Yet while they may live there most remain local men on the Flats, familiar to those in their economic domains, which is important when understanding their social power and influence in the region.

The wealth of the drug merchants is one aspect that gives them an almost mythical status. Another is their reputation for violence and power: most residents of the Cape Flats know who the top 'gangsters' are and many will relay shocking stories about them. For instance, it is rumoured that one of the most notorious dealers has built an underground chamber in one of his drug-dealing properties that is used for raping and torturing those who cross him; the torture is gruesome – it is claimed that victims are subject to a drill being inserted into their bones. There is no way of knowing if many of the stories are true and it is perhaps deemed beneficial by drug merchants to keep such rumours alive, even if they are false.

As shown in chapter five, the power and wealth of drug merchants means that they develop a controversial image in their domains. Despite being well known as dealers and as violent men, many engage in philanthropic activities, investing in local churches, sponsoring local football teams and giving cash handouts during festivities. Indeed, several people in positions of authority complain that because drug merchants are not visibly involved in selling drugs it is easy for impoverished

residents to forget their illegal dealings and see them simply as rich local benefactors. What is surprising for outsiders is that these positive feelings towards the drug merchants coexist with their image as violent and dangerous men. However, their relationship to violence is different from most gang members.

The drug merchants' threat to residents is not random and is instrumental to their business. The 'ideal type' image that comes from speaking to community residents is of someone who is reasonable and well liked, but who should never be insulted or cheated. In contrast, street gang members tend to be despised by locals who see them as contributing only negatively to township life. Their violence is seen as haphazard, indiscriminate and either predatory or related to arbitrary gang fights. Police estimate that most intragang conflict stems from arguments over women or turf, the two being closely connected in the male-dominated world of street gangsters.

GANGS, SUPERGANGS AND INTRAGANG ALLIANCES

Many street gang members are involved in some way or another in selling drugs to end users although, as argued later, it may be a mistake to view gangs as a drug dealing enterprises – it is not the case that all gang members are involved in selling drugs and nor does it seem that drug dealing is the main reason why individual gangs exist and new ones emerge.

According to police estimates, there are about 130 gangs operating on the Cape Flats. This number is not to be relied on, however, as the way in which gangs are counted is not methodologically rigorous; SAPS experts admit that the figure is a rough estimate. Of these 130 or so gangs, a few are much larger than the rest and have existed for longer. They can be distinguished not only by their size but also by their presence in several territories. They also outlive their leaders and can be considered institutions. Some policemen call them the 'supergangs'. The most infamous are the Americans, the Hard Livings, the Mongrels, the Sexy Boys, the Fancy Boys, the Dixie Boys and the Junior Mafia.

In comparison to the supergangs, many others form and die out on a regular basis. Some can be very small and their turf is nothing more than a block of flats. An example is the Puma Boys of Atlantis – a group of unemployed teenagers who formed a gang inspired by the multi-national clothing company; Puma shoes are 'must have' items, although their price tag of R1,000 a pair puts them beyond the reach of most township residents. The Puma Boys make do by forging the puma sign on their t-shirts.

There is no single way in which these smaller gangs develop. Some last only as long as their core members are active or alive and remain interested. Others may

recruit sufficient numbers to give the gang a momentum that might see it develop into a more enduring gang and perhaps eventually obtain the status of a supergang, with turfs in several areas. Alternatively, a smaller gang may develop relationships and agreements with a larger gang and be absorbed into it.

Whereas the small gangs may have as few as 10 members, supergangs are believed to have memberships running into the thousands. The Americans are said to have between 5,000 and 10,000 members, although it is not possible to provide a more reliable estimate of the size of any of the major gangs for this study. This is partly because membership is not as precise as many local experts presume. There are those who exist on the fringe of the gang, some who represent unambiguous 'hard-core' members and others who may be in the process of drifting away from the gang as they become older and less motivated.

To outsiders it is not always clear who is a 'real gangster' and who is not. This was illustrated to me several times in Atlantis. A woman who assisted with the research often pointed out 'gangsters' from regions of Atlantis where she was not known. She identified such people based largely on the way they dressed, the size of the group they were in and simply by the fact that some were of school age: "Only gangsters hang out here on a Tuesday afternoon when the other kids are in school". She may well have identified true gang members. However, when observing a group of young, unemployed men (wearing baggy trousers, caps, hoop earrings) drinking in a shebeen near to where she has lived for 20 years, she dismissed the idea that these were gangsters. These were 'local boys'; not the real gangsters from the neighbouring block of flats. It seems possible that the real gangsters are always found in unfamiliar areas, meaning there is a degree of subjectivity in understanding who is a gangster and who is not.

Another woman in Atlantis, the partner of a leading Americans drug dealer, explained that the young, aspiring members of the Americans are those who often over-identify with American paraphernalia, giving the impression that they are 'hard-core members'. Those who are established members of the gang know who is who; outsiders find it more difficult. In other words, membership is contested, meaning it would be virtually impossible to conduct a census of gang members. Likewise, proving gang membership in a court of law may not be straightforward.

INTRAGANG AFFILIATIONS

Although most of the Cape's street gangs can be defined by the turf they protect from other gangs, few exist as independent entities. Most are linked through intragang affiliations and these are important in the organisation of the criminal economy – gangs have their mutual enemies and their allies. Affiliations can be understood as trading blocks or fighting alliances. A group such as the Puma

gang relies on the Americans for access to drugs and weapons and in return the Pumas are expected to join them in any gang fight. These affiliations may contribute to the escalation of gang fights as, when gangs enter into a conflict, allies from both sides may be expected to lend their support.

An important aspect of these intragang affiliations is the influence of the prison Numbers. It will be recalled from chapter one that for much of the Numbers' history there was no formal relationship between them and street gangs. This is no longer the case. The two most important trading blocs now are the 26s-affiliated gangs (including the Americans, the Mongrels and the Fancy Boys) and the 28s-affiliated gangs (including the Hard Livings and the Sexy Boys). Almost all significant gangs on the Cape Flats are now aligned to one of these two groupings.

The association of street gangs affiliated to the 28s is made more complex by the Firm. It is common for the Firm to be called a gang but this is misleading. It is in fact a drug-dealing syndicate comprising many leaders of the 28s-aligned gangs. Although it represents one of the most powerful criminal organisations in the Western Cape, its origin remains open to different accounts. All agree that Colin Stanfield was its original leader and architect. Some stress that the Firm came about in order to compete with the Americans. Others have confused the timing of the Firm as coinciding with the emergence of PAGAD and it is assumed that the Firm represented a move towards greater organisation in a bid to counter the crisis caused by PAGAD's more militant splinter groups. However, the Firm was established several years before PAGAD was conceived.

Most accounts of the Firm's genesis are contradicted by information provided by a source in the National Intelligence Agency (NIA). According to this source, the Firm was not created by Stanfield at all – it was a name given to Stanfield's business network by the intelligence community. Taped telephone conversations by the NIA revealed that Stanfield was perplexed about the origin of the name but it stuck with the press and Stanfield and his associates then began using it themselves. Whether this alternative story is correct or not is difficult to establish.

If the Firm was a name given by the intelligence community then this might lend weight to the theory that organised crime operates as a loose network rather than as a well-organised conspiracy. It would also show how the state can play an active role in shaping organised crime through a labelling process; what was a loosely organised network took on a more consolidated image because the police and media portrayed it as such. To what extent career criminals in the Firm went on to emulate this image is intriguing. Perhaps the cliché of organised crime becomes a lived reality; most gangsters have seen films such as *The Godfather* and it is likely that they attempt to emulate Hollywood's image of the true Mafia.

HOW THE NUMBERS CAME BACK OUT OF PRISON

Although the history of the Numbers can be traced to bandit groups that operated in the area surrounding Johannesburg, according to longstanding members of the prison Numbers – the so-called traditionalists – the Numbers have no relevance to society outside the prison. The Numbers system controls prison life and was created in part to oppose the prison authorities. However, there has always been a relationship between the Numbers and street gangs on the Cape Flats. While the Numbers are meant to be kept a secret, confined to the ‘four walls’ of the prison, they are well known among coloured working-class communities. Prisoners who had a rank in the Number are infamous when released back into the community; stories of their power and toughness give them a special status, making them demi-gods among gang members. It is therefore unsurprising that some former Numbers members have gone on to assume leadership roles in some of the larger gangs on the outside after leaving prison. Of course, finding their way into street gangs and groups of career criminals after prison was to be expected – former Numbers were highly unlikely to find formal employment, tarnished as they were with distinctive tattoos, using a strange language and bearing the scars of prison violence. Some seemed to bring elements of the Numbers’ culture and organisational skills with them when they joined street gangs. Thus many street gangs began to use militaristic ranking systems and some developed their own mythical history, which symbolised their nature and guided particular rituals.

The links between street gangs and the Numbers were also established when people went to prison for the first time. Because prison is so influential on the Cape Flats, many young people know about the Numbers from an early age – they know if they will have to negotiate the Numbers and that they will be watched from early on. The Numbers claim that street gang affiliations should have no influence on membership of a particular Number inside. New inmates are selected for a particular Number purely on observations made by active members inside. However, in reality it seems that gang affiliations on the outside are indeed influential on the inside and members of some street gangs tend to join a particular prison gang when incarcerated. For example, members of the Cape Town Scorpions usually became members of the 28s while Americans and Mongrels usually became members of the 26s. This was not always the case and there are stories of people belonging to the wrong prison Number for their street gang.

However, despite these relations between street gangs and the Numbers, for decades the latter existed only inside prison. The traditionalists in the Numbers say that it is impossible to be a Number outside prison; the Numbers can only exist within the brutal world of South African jails. In addition, to become a senior Number takes years of schooling and sacrifice – one has to take blood in

prison, pass through several drawn-out rituals and learn both the history of the Number and its language.

Yet, by all accounts, this division between the Numbers and street gangs changed in the late 1980s when the Numbers – originating as they did from bandit groups situated in the hills of Johannesburg – reappeared on the outside of prison. Several of the largest street gangs declared that they were now the 26s or the 28s. Most important were the street gangs that formed the Firm, which became the 28s, and the Americans, which became the 26s. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, new members of these gangs were given ranks in the Numbers when they were on the outside and they were taught the very basics of the Numbers' history. No longer was recruitment into the Numbers only conducted inside prison by specially appointed senior members following complex rituals, but membership was dished out on a far more ad-hoc basis. Moreover, prominent drug merchants and gang leaders were fast-tracked into the senior ranks of either the 26s or the 28s. This included some famous gang members who had yet to serve prison sentences. The Numbers still exist in prison and they continue to function in similar ways as they have done for several decades but most new recruits now have little understanding of the oral history. They have been given ranks in the Numbers without knowing its language or past in any detail. According to embittered traditionalists, this new breed of recruits do not understand why the prison Numbers exist nor how they are meant to relate to each other. A senior leader of the 27s described this situation during an interview:

The Number don't exist anymore. I am not a member of this 27s now. These people don't know what the Number is. They do not know about Killikijan and Nongoloza. They don't know how to salute me when I enter their cell. If I ask them about something they will not know the answer but then they tell me they are a 26 or a 28 and they have their tattoos. No, the Number does not exist anymore. Yes, the 26s and the 28s exist, but it is not the real thing. All that has changed.⁴

The reasons for the transformation of the Numbers are contested. Some people believe the influence of the Numbers outside prison is part of a grand conspiracy whereby the Numbers became powerful from within their cells and seized control of the region's criminal market. In this view organised crime is controlled from behind bars; places such as Pollsmoor prison represent the real heart of criminal power in the Cape.

However, the most persuasive account of how the Numbers appeared on the street involves the influence of leading drug merchants in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the old timers came into contact with a new type of career criminal,

men who had accumulated wealth and notoriety in the Cape through selling large quantities of drugs. It is alleged that some wealthy drug merchants were fast-tracked into the higher ranks of the Numbers during short stays in prison. This contradicts the lore of the Numbers that requires members to suffer violent rituals, to endure hardship and spend years learning the oral history. According to the disapproving old timers, the corruption of the Numbers was partly a matter of obtaining access to a steady supply of drugs in prison. But the motivation was also borne out of insecurity. Some drug merchants were leading figures in increasingly powerful street gangs and it was feared that they may set up what was known as 'fourth camps' in prison, separate from and competing with the Numbers. By giving these dealers senior ranks in the Numbers it was hoped to avert the rise of the fourth camps. According to a 27s general interviewed in Malmesbury prison, the Numbers 'sold out' to protect their hegemony. It is also possible that there were personal benefits for the drug merchants being fast-tracked into the Numbers. It provided them with protection and privileges in prison and added to their kudos on the outside – to be a powerful general in the Numbers is no small matter.

While the reasons for the drug merchants being allowed into senior ranks of the Numbers remain murky, the importance of the transition is that the Numbers were corrupted and then exported outside the prison walls. With a new breed of senior Numbers – men who are accused of not fully understanding or respecting the Numbers' history – giving membership of the Numbers to people on the outside became a frequent occurrence. The motivation behind this is complex.

Most significantly, exporting the Numbers was a convenient means of forging alliances. Gangs associated with the 26s should buy drugs from leaders of the 26s, those associated with the 28s should buy from leaders of the 28s. These alliances place certain drug merchants in a commanding position, becoming leading figures in significant intragang formations with a wide geographical scope. As explained later, this is not just about expanding networks of drug distribution, but is also about enlarging control over consumer markets – the thousands of people who are supposedly loyal members of the Numbers and their allied gangs represent major consumers of drugs and other illegal commodities.

ALLIANCES IN REALITY

It is tempting to imagine that these intragang alliances, based on the prison Numbers, are adhered to categorically. Yet what needs to be considered is the extent that individual gangs in fact treat these coalitions as serious. Some give the impression that there is a strong loyalty to the Numbers, which transcends loyalties to individuals' street gangs. As one former member of the Americans put it: "Every gang member will go to prison and if they have wronged the Number then it is

there that that they will be disciplined...the Number is more powerful than the gangs".⁵ Others, however, argue that loyalty among gang members is primarily to their individual gang and only secondly to the Number with which it is associated. Gang coalitions based on sharing the same Number are more fragile and easily broken. An episode that reveals the complexity of this relationship occurred in Atlantis in 2003, involving the murder of the local Americans' head by members of the Mongrels, both of which gangs are aligned to the 26s. A source in the SAPS gave his understanding of the events, which seemed in line with the views of other sources in Atlantis.⁶

Q: What happened when the old leadership of the Americans got killed? What was the chain of events?

A: Well, basically, it stemmed from a conflict between the leader of the Mongrels and the leader of the Americans. And they arranged a meeting and at the meeting the leader of the Mongrels killed the leader of the Americans. It was a midnight meeting, December last year. There were three Americans and four Mongrels. It was just, you know, a case of the one guy thought that the other guy was, how can I say, planning on him and then he just launched a pre-emptive strike and got rid of the problem. Three of the Americans were shot that night, two died. The one guy that didn't die, he identified the suspects and stuff and that's when they were arrested.

So it was basically just a matter of the gangsters didn't trust each other. The Americans and the Mongrels were never in direct fighting with each other. They used to talk to each other because they're both affiliated to the 26s, the prison gangs. But on this specific occasion, you know, there was just a break in trust and the one guy decided, okay, here's it's either me or it's either you and I decide it's going to be you and I'm gonna make a plan with you.

Q: And what happened after that? Did the Americans retaliate?

A: No, not really. The top guy was killed and his one guy who was left controlling the area, he left Atlantis immediately, you know, because he was scared about reprisal attacks or further elimination of the leadership. I think he just came to the decision that if he continues with this life he's also going to end up dead. So he packed his bags and he left Atlantis. And he comes here to visit his family and stuff, he might still be involved in a way, but he's not directly involved any more.

So, the Americans never retaliated at all. Now I think it's partly because the guy who's now in charge is confined to a wheelchair, so he's not as

mobile so he didn't have much options because he's an easy target. You know, he can't move as freely. Another factor was that their firearms – you know, they never had direct access to the firearms because the leader and one other guy knew where the firearms were. So the Americans couldn't just go out and do exactly what they wanted to do. And I don't think they were ready for out-and-out gang war at that stage. They decided to rather sit back and wait and see what the police is going to do. So I think they decided, okay, the suspects are arrested, they're going to court now, we'll see what happens from there. So we never had any retaliation attacks.

Q: So what will the Numbers do? Surely the leader of the Mongrels will be vulnerable in prison now because he killed an American?

A: As I understand, the leader of the Mongrels, he had set his case in jail after the events and he had explained why he did what he did and it was decided his actions were justified and that there was not going to be any more fighting. Because the Mongrels are 26, the Americans are 26, they actually don't fight each other that much. I don't think they ever fight each other. You know, they have arguments and stuff, but it was sorted out in jail because a 26 killed a 26. That was the problem. It was sorted out there and they left it there.

As this event suggests, bonds between gangs aligned to the 26s are fragile, but they do exist. It would be a mistake to believe membership of the 26s creates total loyalty to other 26s, but it would also be wrong to dismiss the power of the Numbers as a regulating factor. The Numbers function to provide some sort of governance among gangs, although to what extent this regulatory aspect is successful is open to question and, according to some sources, there is the feeling that the rule of the Numbers will not be prolonged.

DRUG MERCHANTS AND INTRAGANG AFFILIATIONS

The relationship between the drug merchants and gang structures is ambiguous and often not well understood. It is assumed that all drug merchants are 'gangsters' and active members of the region's infamous street gangs. This is a simplification. The confusion stems in part from use of the term 'gangster' – all drug merchants are described as gangsters but being a gangster does not necessarily mean that one belongs to a street gang. There are two types of drug merchants – those who are active members of both the Numbers and leading street gangs, and those who operate as individual 'businessmen'. The latter have dealings with street gangs, but will not claim membership of any of them and may seek to distance themselves from the label of gang members. In Atlantis there are thought to be five key drug

merchants who import drugs from outside the town, but only two are described as members of street gangs by knowledgeable locals.

An intriguing question is why some drug merchants operate outside gang alliances. As with so many aspects of the criminal economy there is no easy answer. In research for this study I attempted to understand the situation of two drug merchants who seemed to conform to the status of being non-gang members. In discussions with people close to these men or knowledgeable about their operations, what seemed the most important factor was that they had not been heavily involved in delinquent crime as youths and therefore did not spend long periods in reformatories and prison. This means they were not brought up within those institutions that encourage gang membership. But, it was also explained, staying out of the gang structures is to do with the perceived 'gang culture'. As noted above, joining a clan formation, such as the ideal street gang, involves a status contract, which requires a serious, often life-long commitment to the gang. This may not be very appealing. As one source put it:

He didn't want to join the 26s because he didn't want to get caught up in all that gang shit...you know, it is very difficult to get out of the gang once you are in, these guys operate differently, they are fucking psychopaths and they will take over your life. You can't just walk away from that life once you are in.⁷

In effect, the status contract, which we have seen is a defining feature of clan-like organisations, is just too demanding and there is a preference for independence. This independence is a feature of organisation, which we may refer to as conforming to a network model. Another source made a similar point – that these men were middle-aged and aspiring to be seen as middle-class, 'respectable' businessmen. Put simply, joining a gang at this point in their lives is considered beneath them and contrary to their self-image: "Why does he want to go round calling himself a fucking American!?"⁸

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DRUG MERCHANTS

The relationship between drug merchants is also a complex matter. It seems that many people believe they are in direct competition with each other – in this view the drug merchants are naturally monopolistic and will always attempt to 'do away' with their opposition to increase their market share. There is no doubt an element of truth to this understanding and there are many stories of rival drug merchants continually trying to murder each other. As seen above, rivalries also exist among supposed leading figures of allied gangs. However, there is also evidence to suggest that many drug merchants also cooperate with each other, enter into individual deals and trade between themselves. This interaction occurs even between members

of rival gang alliances. A confidential report by the NIA on organised crime networks in the Western Cape claimed that senior members of the Firm and the Americans were frequently involved in joint ventures. The authors concluded:

The interaction between gang leaders, Firm leaders and organised crime leaders must never be underestimated. It became very evident that members and leaders interact with one another...Due to this situation opposing leaders and gang members e.g. 26s versus 28s might and will work together...[for example] Current information shows that especially within the drug networks members of the 26s are being utilised and accepted by members and leaders of the 28s. The latter being in control of the Firm.⁹

Where there is rivalry is in relation to the areas drug merchants supply. For example, the Americans control drug sales in certain communities while members of the Firm control it in others. At this level, competition is more clear-cut and there is little cooperation. Yet merchants may collaborate in sourcing drugs and other commodities. This suggests that loyalties at the lower level of street gangs are far more relevant than they are at the higher levels of drug dealing – the clan form of organised crime is more relevant at the more localised level of drug dealing while the network model captures the essence of higher-level drug dealing. We need to return to this point when considering the notion of ‘tribal consumerism’.

The reality of organised crime does not seem to correspond to the notion of individual businesses conducting planned activities. There is a capricious network between operators that combines elements of cooperation and competition. There is organisation to these activities, but perhaps it is more difficult to identify ‘the organisation’. Describing gangs and organised crime in Chicago in the 1920s, Thrasher provided a neat summary that seems apt for the Cape Flats and possibly common to many urban criminal economies:

While there is considerable definite organization, largely of the feudal type, there is no hard and fast structure of a permanent character. The ease of new alliances and alignments is surprising. Certain persons of certain groups may combine for some criminal exploit or business, but shortly they may be bitter enemies and killing each other. One gang may stick closely together for a long period under favourable conditions; yet if cause for real dissention arises, it may readily split into two or more bitter factions, each of which may eventually become a separate gang. Members may desert to the enemy on occasion. Leaders come and go easily; sometimes with more or less violence, but without much disturbance to the usual activities of the gangs. There is always a new crop coming on – of younger fellows from whom emerge men to fill the shoes of the old ‘barons’ when they are slain or ‘put away’.¹⁰

PART II: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STREET GANGS AND ORGANISED CRIME

We can begin to see the complexity surrounding the criminal economy, particularly the role that the region's street gangs and intragang affiliations play. But let us consider a critical question: Are the street gangs organised businesses? Have they gone through a process of corporatisation, as the state often suggests? Or are most street gangs better understood as social organisations tenuously linked to drug sales, as some scholars have argued is the reality in American cities?

First of all we can leave out many of the smaller street gangs from this enquiry. Gangs such as the Puma Boys in Atlantis may deal in drugs and stolen property from time to time but their involvement in market-based crime can only be considered petty, bringing in amounts of money that are not substantial. So let us concentrate on the supergangs, such as the Americans and the Hard Livings. It is these, with memberships running into the thousands, which seem primary candidates for the description 'criminal empires'.

The notion that the supergangs are neat criminal organisations is undermined by the analysis so far. We can see there is a complex interaction between active members of organised crime and this frequently cuts across or contradicts gang alliances. There is organisation to criminal transactions, but not just a series of clearly defined organisations. As the following pages explain, if we start with the traditional argument about whether or not gangs are drug-dealing organisations, we can say that the situation on the Cape Flats supports neither view. A more perceptive answer lies with the idea that gangs are internally contradictory and that the growth in the drug trade has exacerbated these contradictions.

As long as the environment is conducive to gang formation, they will be important to the organisation of market-based crime and will be used as a functional aspect of the criminal economy, as at present. However, it is likely that if the situation on the Cape Flats changes in a way that undermines the sustainability of gangs (through, say, the reduction of community violence, changes in the labour market, urban renewal etc.), organised crime could continue to flourish. The factors that support street gang formation are not necessarily the same as those that support the growth of organised crime, although they may overlap. Many areas in which illegal markets flourish are devoid of street gangs. This suggests that removing gangs may simply change the way organised crime operates.

HIERARCHY AND DECENTRALISATION IN THE SUPERGANGS

What may seem a trivial point is that these supergangs are not run on the same basis that a legal corporation would be and few observers would argue that is the case. In this respect the language used to describe organised crime on the Cape Flats by some leading commentators may be misleading. If one imagines the extent

of bureaucracy and planning that would be involved in a legal corporation with as many employees as the Americans, we can see that it is unlikely that the supergangs operate in this way. There are no contracts, no job descriptions, no internal systems of communication among members (intranet, telephone network, etc.) and little evidence of annual or biannual 'company meetings'. If there is some internal organisation, then we can say that at best it will be primitive and haphazard. As pointed out by some organised crime scholars, a well-organised establishment would be too vulnerable to police investigations and it is unlikely that 'gangsters' would want to exist in a highly organised and bureaucratic organisation anyway – a point made by Patricia Adler in her classic study of drug dealers, when she argued that it was precisely an aversion to working in bureaucratic businesses that made drug dealing an attractive alternative lifestyle.¹¹

Information on how supergangs operate is difficult to obtain. What is irrefutable is that some members are involved on an ongoing basis in market-based crimes. Typically it is the senior or leading figures in the larger street gangs who are involved in this way. Within gangs there is also some specialisation. According to a police expert, this division of labour can be quite regimented:

They've got people under their control, certain people there do certain tasks, like robbing people, selling drugs: That guy's task is to rob people, that guy's task is to sell drugs, that guy's task is to shoot if necessary. His specific task within the gang is a hit man. That's basically how they're structured. You know, it's not a free for all, everybody does what they want to. They're structured in a way that they've got control and command over their members, or usually they have.¹²

As we will see, the fact that there are specific jobs in the gang does not mean all members are employed. Many, if not most, are not and are involved only sporadically in market-based crime. But given this structure one can see that the supergangs may easily be mistaken for complex hierarchical organisations, coordinated by generals and leaders. Yet a feature of these supergangs is the extent of coordination and control between the various area cells. If it were the case that all cells of the gangs fell under a central command, we would be justified in seeing these supergangs as impressively organised businesses. However, it seems there is a tendency for supergangs to operate along the lines of a franchise, rather than as a strict, inclusive hierarchy. For example, the area cells of the Americans operate with considerable autonomy. It is not clear at this level whether each pays money to the leadership; police intelligence say they do not:

Basically the Americans in Atlantis get their drugs from the Americans on the Cape Flats. But these people are independent drug dealers here, but they deal

only with the Americans there, you see. They go fetch their drugs from them, they come sell it here and their profit is their profit, but they buy their drugs only from the Americans. It's a big chain, you know, like, 7/11 franchises. The main franchise supplies all the shops, but each shop is owned individually. That's basically what it comes down to.¹³

So, while there are these large gang structures – supergangs and intragang alliances – there is no central command issuing orders or controlling profits and the day-to-day running of business operations. The organisation is decentralised. The supergangs operate as a conglomerate of affiliated smaller businesses and the relationship between each area cell is distant. Sitting at the apex are those drug merchants who supply the individual gang cells and one merchant may supply many of the smaller turfs including those areas run by different gangs. In theory, the super gang provides each cell with mutual protection – if Americans are attacked in one area, help will arrive from another. However, as the story of the conflict between the Mongrels and the Americans in Atlantis shows, this is not always the case; area cells may be left to sort out their own conflicts.

Although drug dealing may be decentralised, we should not lose sight of the fact that many gangs retain a sense of loyalty to the group. This was illustrated vividly in an interview with a partner of a drug merchant in Atlantis who belonged to the Americans. She described how the merchant had been instructed to kill his own brother because he had double-crossed the gang. His brother died in a car crash a week later, although the interviewee did not believe her partner was directly responsible. A similar situation occurred, also in Atlantis, when a new recruit of the 28s was instructed to kill his own son, the son's mother and her neighbour, who had all witnessed a murder involving another 28s member. In this case the murders were carried out. As both these tragic stories suggest, street gangs do have a strong sense of group loyalty, which is expected to transcend all other loyalties including that to family. This is an interesting observation, for although illicit income generating activities may be decentralised and fragmented, the gang structures remain coherent due to an overarching group identity. Because there is this sense among members of belonging to a clan, outsiders may mistakenly view the clan as a well-structured economic entity when in fact it is not.

PROFITS AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN THE GANG

How, then, can we tell that street gangs are not only drug-dealing businesses? First, we can look at the ways that profits and jobs are allocated and can see that gang membership does not guarantee employment, nor does it offer career development. Second, we can explore the reasons for people joining gangs. This will show that while making money is important, there are other motivations at

play. When these are combined it appears that the street gangs represent something more than rational businesses.

Without substantial quantitative data on the money that gang members receive from illegal activities it is exceptionally difficult to be sure of gangs' economic dynamics and it is important to stress that the 100 or so gangs that exist on the Cape Flats are highly varied in form. Within this complex of gangs, individual experience differs again. This makes generalisations precarious. However, it seems uncontroversial to point out that most gang members are not wealthy and the vast majority never achieve wealth that can be considered extraordinary, even if some tell you otherwise. Membership does not guarantee a wealthy existence, even though recruits may hope that it will. Thus, in interviews with gang members in prison about their experiences in street gangs, I was told of times when there was 'lots of money'. What 'lots' means to young people on the Cape Flats may not correspond to what others in the city think it means. Hence, a prison warder who had been present during some of these interviews later urged me not to take the interviews too literally:

Look, don't believe these guys when they tell you they were rich before they came in here, they were poor as hell, look at them and you will see undernourished kids, they didn't come in with anything and I doubt they have anything waiting for them on the outside. They like to think they're big shots and they love telling people like you that they are, but they're not.¹⁴

From interviews with gang members it was unclear in what way the gang provided them with money through crime. One theme that came through strongly was that few members of the larger gangs sold drugs. Some claimed they were given drugs by the gang as payment for activities and one said that he was used by the gang to smuggle Mandrax pills from one area to another. He described how he was chosen to do this because he was the smallest of the gang and so the least likely to be searched by the police. Of course, some gang members do sell drugs and for many of the larger gangs, this is their most lucrative activity. Yet, selling drugs seems to be the work of those who have a higher status in the gang, or alternatively, where drug selling does involve young members or smaller gangs, they are used primarily for selling small quantities to end users and are therefore used as workers for drug merchants.

Steffen Jensen made a similar observation and claimed that although many are not involved in drug dealing at all, for some gang members, "their involvement is mostly pushing drugs for a drug dealer on the street and this is rarely very lucrative".¹⁵ The situation on the Cape Flats may therefore conform to the operation of drug markets elsewhere. For instance, Vincenzo Ruggiero observed in Italy

that “many who worked in the drug economy were trapped in a highly productive system, the profits of which they never shared”.¹⁶

Police experts suggest drug-selling establishments increasingly prefer not to use young men, which may further diminish the employment of male gang members in the drug trade. Young girls are preferred as they are less likely to be searched by the police and if they are, the predominantly male police force is supposedly restricted in carrying out body searches. It has also been speculated that girls are less prone to stealing and to developing problematic drug habits. For these reasons, there is a feminisation of menial labour in the drug trade. Elaine Salo-Miller noted during her research in Manenberg that young women were being used as both sex workers and crack sellers by the Hard Livings gang. In one instance she reported that a girl was paid R800 a week working for a leader of the Hard Livings gang in a crack house in Sea Point.¹⁷

As membership does not regularly provide full-time employment in illicit markets, many gang members talk of being involved sporadically in other illicit income-generating activities. While some described how they were asked to act as lookouts near shebeens or other places where drugs were being sold, others relayed stories of being used by other members to carry out specific tasks, including robberies and thefts, or to carry out hits on rival gangs or people who owed money for drug purchases. Consider the following case:

Ben is a 17-year-old boy who has been in prison since he was 15. He is being prosecuted for an armed robbery at a shop where he was implicated in the theft of approximately R2,000. Ben described how this robbery was set up by an elder member of the gang. The shop owner was shot in the process although Ben denies he shot him and said he is taking the blame for the other's crime. He said this was not the only time he had been involved in a violent robbery and alluded to have been involved in several similar violent crimes. I asked Ben if he was involved in selling drugs for his gang and how he received money for the crimes he committed for the gang. Ben answered that he was not involved in selling drugs at all but was given drugs and alcohol by some of the elder gang members. The elders had also supplied him with a gun when he went out to commit the crime; he didn't own his own gun. For the armed robbery he carried out he was paid R100 and gave the rest of the money to the gang leaders. He said he didn't like the gang anymore as he felt he was being used and he wanted to get a job when he gets out of prison.¹⁸

Complicating the situation further is the way in which profits from crime are managed. If gangs were structured business organisations we would expect to find instances where membership was rewarded with a wage or that there would be

some sharing of the profits. Here the evidence points again to the varied nature of gangs. In my interviews with gang members, few talked of receiving payments that would approximate a wage, in the sense that employment provides a monthly salary. Some alluded to an unstructured system of payment related to specific instances of project crimes (as in Ben's experience above) and other gang members described a general system of welfare, where members are provided with basic needs. As one put it: "There is no food at my house so I must go to the gang to get food".¹⁹ The following extract from an interview with a gang member is an example where money was apparently distributed, although it also suggests a pecking order in which the leadership claims the lion's share of the profits:

With the money [from robberies] they go and buy drugs to sell. We get about R10,000 to R15,000 from the robberies. They [the gang's leadership] use this to buy food, cars and clothing. They don't spend all the money 'cause they must buy food for everyone.²⁰

In interviews with members of the Hard Livings gang in Manenberg, organised by Ted Leggett, some members claimed to be paid a monthly wage but this was found to be not entirely truthful:

Gang members [of the Hard Livings] initially referred to gang membership as a job and claimed to be paid R1,000 a month as a salary. More detailed probing revealed that this 'salary' was only paid during times when there was specific gang work to be done on a daily basis, such as during a gang conflict. While higher-up gang leaders are notorious for their wealth, the foot soldiers do not seem to benefit in the same way, particularly if they are not involved in an income-generating activity, like drug sales.²¹

Where payment is not in cash, it is a common practice to pay in drugs. One may think this is a destructive business practice as it makes gang members drug dependent and unpredictable. But it also is an easy way to pay people cheaply and keep them dependent. The parallel in the legal economy can be seen on the wine farms, which have a tradition of 'supplementing' the income of their workers in low-grade alcohol – the *dop* (tot) system, as it is known locally.

Although some gang members described being managed by their leaders, others said there was some autonomy. This suggests another dimension to gang membership: income-generating crime is not always centrally planned and idle members will seek to generate their own income, which may be spontaneous and opportunistic. In an interview with a member of the Dixie Boys it was explained:

A: I only saw the leader occasionally. Our leader is at present in Helderstroom.

Q: *Does the leader tell you what crimes to do?*

A: No, not actually. The group decide what to do like rob or hijack. It depends on the group where the money goes.²²

A social workers was keen for me to understand the opportunistic and predatory nature of gangs:

It is interesting to see their eye for an opportunity. I was at my mum-in-law's the other day and she's staying in Lentegeur in Mitchell's Plain and we were sitting in the lounge and watching out of the window and there were two foreign guys – one was robbing the other at gunpoint, he took cash from his wallet. The local gangsters saw this and they then robbed the guy who was doing the robbing, took his gun, shot him and then shot at the other guy, took all the money from both of them and they moved on. *[laugh]* You know, that gives you some idea the level of, what's the word? It's like a hungry animal prowling, waiting for something, you know *[laugh]* and sure, it's happening all the time there. These guys are fucking desperate, they sit around and they are constantly on the look out for a way to earn a quick buck.²³

The image that emerges from such stories is that many gang members are not employed in a formal business organisation. Rather, they form a pool of loyal labour used on occasion by leaders or other drug merchants. The gang is an unequal organisation where some are provided with the means and opportunities to make money, whereas others are used only occasionally. It is not a structured existence. The gang may not leave everybody to fend for themselves otherwise it would quickly disintegrate and the evidence strongly suggests that some gangs provide some material security, even if this amounts to basic functions such as making food available or providing access to drugs and alcohol. These restricted opportunities provided by illicit-income-generating activities means that many gangs appear to be undynamic organisations offering limited upward mobility. In an interview with a police officer an oft-heard view was made clear:

You know, as I see it, the only way you can go through the ranks is if the next guy's not there any more and that's usually when he gets killed. You know, that would never inspire me to stay in an organisation. If the police told me tomorrow I can only become a superintendent once someone gets killed, then, you know, why stay around waiting for someone to die so that I can go up in life. It does occur that the boys work themselves up in gangs by doing stuff. You know, a

guy that shoots has a higher status within the gang than the guy that stands on the corner as a look-out or sells *dagga*, but typically, the only way you can basically promote within a gang, as I see it, is through someone else's pain and suffering – the death of someone; the death of one of their own. That's what it comes down to.²⁴

When talking, young gang members may exaggerate the importance of their position or the degree of organisation that the gang provides, but most who work closely with gang members agree that the daily existence of many low-level gang members is excruciatingly dull and unstructured. Many members exist both outside the formal economy and on the peripheries of the criminal one.

UPWARD MOBILITY VS RESTRICTED MOBILITY

We can speculate on the factors that limit the earning potential of gang members. First, the markets for commodities and services associated with gangs may not be as vast as is sometimes assumed. The areas in which gangs are most entrenched are often the most poverty-stricken and are not characterised by large numbers of people with surplus cash. Coupled with this, the fact that such large profits are taken by prominent drug merchants on the Cape Flats suggests that available profits from market-based crimes are channelled to a small minority and not shared out among thousands of individuals. It would be remarkable if a lucrative market existing without state intervention would operate in any other way.

Second, individual gang turfs are both small and often surrounded by those of rival gangs. This provides some gang members with a captive market for selling drugs or dealing in stolen goods, but typically the size of this market is limiting. What is more, the peculiar existence of so many gang turfs has limited their spatial mobility. Members remain in their turf both as a means to protect it from outsiders as well as to keep safe from their adversaries. Therefore, even from a cursory visit to gang hotspots such as Tafelsig, Manenberg and Atlantis, one can see areas demarcated by graffiti within which are young gang members passing an idle existence. Gang turfs are not hotbeds of entrepreneurial activity. As one social worker in Tafelsig described it, "Gangsters are like frustrated dogs tied up to a fence in a yard".²⁵ This claustrophobic existence, coupled with drug dependency and alcoholism, may contribute to interpersonal violence within the gang turf as well as between gangs. Here mobility distinguishes the drug merchants from the rank and file; mobility is an unequally distributed asset and is a key stratifying factor in the criminal economy, as it is in the formal economy.²⁶

Limited spatial mobility plays itself out in several ways. In particular it reduces the opportunity to look for work and it also restricts the pursuit of romance. Several gang members claim that women from their turfs must only date the gang members from the same area. Thus those who meet women who fall outside their

catchment area can be frustrated. Consider the following excerpt from a conversation with a gang member from Hanover Park:

Q: Why did you become involved in the gang?

A: It was my own choice, I became a member of that gang because they lived so close to me.

Q: What do you like about being in the gang?

A: I can have a gun and I can shoot, but I can also go to jail...if you are not part of the gang you can walk anywhere, if you are you can't. For example, I've got a girlfriend but she lives in that gang's turf, they'll kill me if I go there. You can't walk anywhere and you can't trust anyone.²⁷

It is important to take note of the point made here that "you can't trust anyone". We will return to this theme when considering the exploitative nature of the gang.

JOINING GANGS: A RATIONAL CAREER MOVE?

Gang life in the poverty-stricken townships start as early as four or five years old. You walk the streets as a *laaitie* [youngster] and you get beaten up so often that you've got no choice but to join a gang for protection.²⁸

If gangs were organised businesses we would expect people to join them largely for reasons linked to making money and possibly advancing through a career structure. Indeed, the financial allure of being a gangster is acknowledged by many on the Cape Flats and this has been stressed by the authorities – "The bottom line," as Ramatlakane put it in a speech at an anti-gang workshop, "is money". Thus, it is common even among those who detest gangs to hear a somewhat sympathetic analysis explaining gangsterism as providing an alternative career path for people structurally excluded from the formal economy. The term 'gangsterism' denotes someone who gains an income from crime, often from violent crime.

In Don Pinnock's study in the mid 1980s, it was shown that gangs are a confusing phenomenon as they exist for many reasons. The evidence some 20 years later continues to support this view. People join street gangs or form new ones for many reasons, some of which are beyond their control. Within these reasons rational decisions to make money are prevalent but not always central. The gang therefore functions on several levels and at times these can give it an ambiguous and even contradictory nature. Here is not the place to grapple with a theory on why gangs form, rather it is important to illustrate that they are not simply rational economic organisations.

Continuing with the interview data gleaned from speaking with prison inmates who were gang members, it was apparent that for many, joining a gang was a decision based on an expectation to make money. Often it was stated that this meant they could buy drugs and afford nice *takkies* (sports shoes, important status symbols in South Africa as in many countries). This element of gang formation would suggest that Merton's classic strain theory may be relevant. The gang represents an innovative way of achieving material success, which is encouraged through mainstream consumer culture. As Jock Young would put it, coloured gangsters are turning to crime to deal with the contradiction of "cultural inclusion and structural exclusion".²⁹

But the strain theory of crime can only be viewed as a partial explanation for gang formation. Moreover, a simple understanding of the strain theory fails to explain why those who succeed in the criminal economy often also do well in the legal economy – it is the winners in the criminal economy who are some of the least affected by structural exclusion.

Recurring themes in my interviews and fieldwork also included the notion that the gang gave members protection from bullying or crime, including being attacked by other gangs in their neighbourhoods. People join gangs partly as a way of getting revenge or fighting adversaries. On the Cape Flats 'ganging' may be viewed as a response to personal insecurity, although the relationship between gangs and security is complex. Gangs are producers of insecurity for others and as we will see, life in a gang may not be so pleasant or safe.

It was also mentioned regularly that being a member of a gang gave a sense of status, which was exciting and attractive; in particular, to be a gangster was considered a way to attract female attention. Having a *chappie* [gang tattoo] confirmed this status and gave them the feeling that they were important and dangerous. "What does the gang mean to me? It means that the other people or gangs is afraid of you."³⁰ In this respect we may consider the similarities between gangs on the street and the prison Numbers. The Numbers seem to operate in part as a psychological response to feelings of frustration and worthlessness – prisoners are treated as powerless children by the authorities and the Numbers allow such people to live in another world while in prison, where they are descendents of warriors, rebels and 'fighting generals'. Perhaps the street gang culture offers the same existential solutions for some, giving disempowered men a sense of extreme masculinity, importance and even order.

In the following two interviews, the first with a member of the Dixie Boys and the second with a member of the Fancy Boys,³¹ some of these themes were alluded to:

My parents did not work and there was no food and no money. I joined the gang to get money for myself and for my parents....I had two guns and went with

friends to other gangs and shot them...As a gang member, people know you and are afraid of you and respect you. It is fun and you have money. The girls like you and the clothes you wear and of course, the money. In my area you don't get jobs 'cause of the tattoos. They think you will steal from them.

When did I become a member of a gang? Hmm, I just told this one boy, he was at the gameshop once...we were talking about gangs, guns, girls and that stuff. I told him that I also want to become a member of a gang. So he said come to my house tomorrow. So they chap me and I become a member of the Fancy Boys from that time on. I was 14 years old. They did not actually force me to do anything. It was actually my own feeling that it could be of use to go with the gang...(when I was joining) they showed me their houses and things and they told me about dangerous things they do like armed robbery, the stuff they steal and the lots of money.

As both of these interviewees revealed, access to drugs and guns is an allure of the gangs. Indeed, it was alarming to hear the subject of guns being repeated in almost every interview – often, when talking about the guns that gangs had, the interviewee's eyes widened and they became particularly animated. As one put it, "It was lekker to see all these different guns, some of them you've never seen before, big guns like you see in the movies, and grenades". It is noteworthy to see how many gang members have tattoos of guns and knives on their bodies. This may be further confirmation that a motive for being part of a gang lies with establishing a personal sense of power. One gang member described to me the psychological high he felt when walking with a gun for the first time; he was somebody and he felt "untouchable". This is possibly an addictive feeling and one that may become habitual, given the insecurity of living in a violent area.

While the gang members talked of joining the gang to gain access to drugs, money and guns, as well as to impress others or to protect themselves, several explained that they joined to escape home or to rebel against their parents. One member of the Sexy Boys expressed this through a tattoo that read: "My mother does not love me". He recounted the harrowing story of how and why he joined the gang:

You are not forced to become a gang member. The reason why I became a gang member was because my mother and father separated and I could not understand why. Because I was still small. I asked my mother but she told me it is something between them. Then I thought I rather go to the other people...It happened in primary school. I was 13 and in standard five. There were a few others, about six who were members of the Sexy Boys. I just started walking with them, talking with them. At that time I still

played cricket. They also played cricket for the primary school. So afterwards they tell me to come to their house. There were cars, *bakkies* [pick-up trucks]. They picked me up at home. My mother asked me, 'Who is that people?', so I told her it is only school friends of mine. The more I were with them, the others saw me and asked them, 'Who is that boy?' and afterwards they once gave me a gun so we were driving in a BMW. So I never knew what it was for, they told me, 'Now come there and get out of the car and kill a 28 gang member'. They call the mobster and I got out of the car and start shooting everybody. I shot one in the leg and stomach.

Q: So what is it you like about being in the gang?

*A: Women. Going out with the gang. You can be whatever you want to be. If I have a gun in my hand nobody can touch me.*³²

As such stories suggest, joining gangs is often not a straightforward process in which the recruit simply decides to join; becoming a member of the larger gangs may also be a process that the person does not have full control over, even if they later think they did. The opening statement from the above interview ("You are not forced to become a gang member") sits uncomfortably with the story of being sent out to kill a rival gang member, possibly as part of his initiation process.

Meanwhile, we cannot lose sight of the labelling process, which may push some people into seeing themselves as gangsters. It is a feature of being young, coloured and living in some areas of Cape Town that others will tend to view you as a potential gangster and this may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. During fieldwork in Atlantis, an example of how the labelling process plays itself out became evident through research at secondary schools. In an interview with a headmaster of one of these schools he told me: "You can tell who the gangsters will be".³³ Later in our conversation he described how children are told to "stop acting like gangsters" and he had arranged a series of lectures by the local police on the dangers of joining a gang. Tellingly, his school was locally infamous for having a problem with gangsterism. It was protected by barbed wire and security officials. His office was locked from the inside when I interviewed him. In contrast, a school merely half a mile away was considered virtually 'gang free'. The headmaster of this school explained that he does not allow members of staff to use the word 'gangster' as he fears this may encourage bullying and stigma among learners who are low achievers. He was also not in favour of the police lecturing the students on gangs and drug-taking as he realised this was likely to be counterproductive. This school has open gates with no barbed wire.

It is noteworthy that the head of a private detention centre in Cape Town (one of the 'places of safety') also described how one of their policies is to get young

men to see themselves as individuals, rather than as gangsters. This seemed to be a process of 'de-labelling'.

Considering the myriad reasons behind gang formation we may therefore conclude that the gang is a complex phenomenon that serves various social and cultural needs. The link between gangs and making money is a key theme but it is not the only one. Again, this suggests that choosing to be involved in a gang is not just a simple rational economic decision. This is further confirmed in the way a gang reproduces itself, as we will see in the next section.

The relationship between gangs and organised crime is difficult to generalise about. It is true that gangs are involved in many forms of income-generating crimes; the profits involved may be distributed but not in ways that are predictable and consistent. Gangs provide the opportunity to make money. But the gang is not in itself a creation for the purpose of engaging in market-based crimes. It is a phenomenon that exists independently of organised crime. In some ways it is an organisation which career criminals exploit but it seems incorrect to encourage the perception that gangs are the organisers of crime – they are not business organisations and they have certainly not evolved into criminal empires.

TRIBAL CONSUMPTION AND THE FUNCTION OF GANG MEMBERSHIP

So, that the gang is not simply a drug-dealing business seems to be apparent. However, the emergence of the supergangs and the intragang alliances based on the Numbers play important functions in the criminal economy. This operates in at least three different ways.

FAMILIARITY AND SECURITY

It was noted above that a defining feature of the criminal economy is the inherent risks involved in financial transactions. Many people argue that without the ability to turn to the formal justice system, members of organised crime rely on violence or the threat of violence to enforce contracts and keep order. This seems uncontroversial and is no doubt the case – too many of the drug merchants are surrounded by stories of being ruthless and violent men and it is for these reasons that many are successful. However, the gang is a useful mechanism to govern illicit markets. The notion of organic solidarity is bound up with the idea that there is a shared loyalty to the group, an element of trust between so-called brothers. The gang may serve to help develop security among career criminals in the same way as ethnicity does elsewhere. To be a member of the same clan may mean there is familiarity and mutual confidence in conducting business deals. At the same time, belonging to a clan means that each member is governed by the rules of the

larger structure – to wrong a Number is a risky move, for everyone usually ends up in prison.

ORGANIC SOLIDARITY AND FIGHTING FOR THE GANG

A distinguishing feature of the clan, as opposed to other forms of criminal organisation, is the notion that members are encouraged to develop a sense of camaraderie – one is not simply part of an individualistic network but rather a brother in a familial organisation. A cynical view of gang myths and initiation is that it helps foster this group bond as a convenient way of maintaining a loyal army and workforce. Being a leading member of a gang could be interpreted as a strategic choice. To the outsider, what is remarkable is that so many youths seem to fall for the allure of being part of street gangs and prison Numbers; it is an ambition for them. Some police have expressed dismay with youths who claim their goal in life is to be part of a Number:

I can tell you I had a *laaitie* of five years old who told me once that when he grows up he wants to be a 28. That's his life ambition. And he told it to me in this office. He's five years old, when he grows up he wants to be a 28. By the time these boys are 14, 15, 16, 17, they've been indoctrinated so much that they believe that it's their destiny to be a gang member. It is what their life is all about. They'll die and kill for the gang.³⁴

Such statements are clearly relevant when we come to discuss policy thinking. It suggests prison may not be the answer to 'gang-related problems'.

TRIBAL CONSUMERISM

This brings us to a controversial observation. It has been described that there are rival views on the dynamics of the Numbers. Some see them as sinister organisations controlled from within prison; others explain that they were exported by drug merchants in order to foster greater coordination between individual gangs. According to the second view, which seems more plausible, the drug merchants have operated as shrewd and calculating businessmen for they now command a regional network of loyal street gangs. Those who are 28s should source drugs from 28s, while 26s should source theirs from other 26s. It was argued that the emergence of larger gang structures was in part inevitable, given the characteristics of the market in Mandrax and other drugs. If alcohol and dagga were the only illegal commodities this situation would not have occurred.

It may be assumed that if the Americans appear in greater numbers in a particular area of the Cape Flats, this is because they are busy selling and distributing illegal

commodities there. However, in addition, street gangs are important players in a network of consumption. The growing numbers of gang members and those with whom they socialise represent major consumers of drugs, alcohol and other commodities supplied by leaders of organised crime on the Cape Flats. Their gang loyalty means they buy these commodities only from their gang, which is reinforced by the fact that much of the work done for the gang is rewarded with free drugs.

Therefore, we may consider to what extent the growth of some of the larger gang formations, particularly those that are franchised drug dealers, represents a form of *tribal consumerism*. In other words, those who profit from being leading members of ever-larger street gangs and intragang alliances may be encouraging the growth of such alliances as a way of increasing a population of devoted consumers, who are also available for petty labour. This was observed by Jonny Steinberg when he wrote about the careers of some leading Cape drug merchants:

Men like these were the first in the history of the Western Cape crime who needed to build and maintain province-wide allegiances. They required the allegiance, not only of foot soldiers, merchants and street dealers but above all, of consumers. A large portion of Western Cape drug consumers had always bought their drugs according to their gang allegiance. Now, the allegiance would have to be a large, abstract, province-wide entity. In other words, the imagination of the consumers became a vital resource on which to work.³⁵

The myth of the Numbers, developed through decades of story telling based on the life of a group of black African bandits, has been used to create a form of brand loyalty in the illegal economy. The networks of high-level drug dealers, which seem to transcend gang loyalties, exist simultaneously with fierce gang loyalties at the lower levels of drug distribution. It therefore seems that those at the base of this economy – the consumers and petty workforce – idolise the brand more than those at the top.

PART III: EXPLOITATION AND TENSIONS IN THE CRIMINAL ECONOMY

For the authorities, gangs and organised crime tend to be viewed as monolithic organisations, which, unless removed, will grow in power and sophistication. For the sociologist, a defining feature of the criminal economy on the Cape Flats is its exploitative character, in which internal victimisation implies that the gangs are anything but monolithic.

On one level, exploitation is based on the fact that the workers – street dealers and helpers, hangers on – earn a pittance compared with the drug merchants. The winners in this system take most of the profits while the losers make do with very little. Yet what makes the criminal economy particularly unsavoury is the sinister

way in which those at lower levels are abused by those above them. In many cases young and possibly gullible 'gang brothers' are used by the drug merchants and senior gang leaders to carry out the most risky and violent tasks.³⁶ This includes carrying out 'hits' on rival dealers or gang members. In other instances, fringe members of the gang are expected to take the blame for crimes they did not commit. The rewards may not be in cash; those carrying out orders successfully will be paid in drugs or the task will be deemed part of the initiation ceremony. Killing a rival gang member will be presented as a way of gaining entry to the Numbers' hierarchy. In short, many of the 'employed' in the criminal economy are conned, tricked and abused; they represent cheap, expendable labour power.

The last chapter described that the main function of the status contract in street gangs is to foster camaraderie. This is a way of governing people and helps to generate loyalty. In many instances gang members seem mesmerised by loyalty to the gang or Number and, as such, help to sustain a sense of organic solidarity. Yet support is not universal. During interviews with gang members some were acutely aware of the flaws of an existence in the gangs. Indeed, the exploitative situation was regularly described by gang members in prison. We may speculate that it is in prison, when they have a chance to reflect on their situation, that they realise that the image of the gang being an inclusive protective organisation is something of a lie. Thus, a desire to quit the gang to go back to school or get a job was often expressed:

Q: *Do you think you'll go back to the gang?*

A: *Nee, meneer*, I want to go back to school because no-one of the gang did come and visit me.³⁷

It is possible that interviewees were deriding their gangs in a bid to show someone who might report to the authorities that they were reformed and ready to be given early release. But this may be a cynical interpretation of the interviews. The stories offered were believable. Consider the following from a member of the Americans gang, when asked why he became a gang member:

I used to walk with one of the guys and they told me, 'Here is some money. Go and buy yourself an *entjie*' [cigarette]. And I went to buy one. And then they start to use me. I had to keep drugs for them and stuff like that. I had to keep their guns if the police come to look for them. They use me. Then, you must gang fight. When the 8 Shells and the Americans fight, they tell you to go shoot that one. Then you go shoot him. Then they say, 'Ha, this *laaitie* is great'. You feel strong and say, 'Ha, *die guy sal saam met my doodgaan*' [this guy will die with me]. But if you get shot the guys run away from you. They won't die for you.

They say they will die for you, but they don't. When the other guys get caught you take the blame and go to prison. Now that I am here they do not come here or bring me something. They forget about me.³⁸

Others told similar stories. The exploitative nature of the relationships within gangs is given further credibility by the fact that accounts of gang conflicts suggest that much violence is perpetrated between members of the same gang. This reason further complicates the notion that gangs cause crime (analysed further in chapter six). Above it was noted that one gang member claimed, "you can trust no-one". Indeed, few people who have spent time in or near gangs offer a romanticised depiction of how gang members relate to each other – internal order and politics are not only dealt with through myths and rituals, but also through violence and fear. That conclusion has been reached by gang research elsewhere. American academic Greg Scott put it well:

[T]he men in this study claim universally that the person most likely to hurt you is not a rival gang member but rather a 'brother', one of your own, a fellow gang member. None of the men in this study truly believes the ideology of loyalty and brotherhood that many gang members espouse publicly. The myth of communal habitus is a ruse, a conceit held by new recruits if anyone and most gang members find this out the hard way.³⁹

This leads us to a point that regrettably can only be touched on briefly, namely the psychological damage to many who slide into the criminal economy. Gangs on the Cape Flats are not always 'magical solutions' to environmental and social contradictions. We have seen that gangs do not always provide their members with security or well-paid jobs. While reasons for joining gangs vary, including wanting status, protection, friendship and excitement, those who see joining gangs as a career move will more than likely be disappointed and disillusioned – gangs will lead most often to a prison sentence or perhaps death. Many of the tasks the gangs encourage are exceptionally violent and psychologically ruinous for both victim and perpetrator. And when serving time in prison, exploitation and physical abuse often continue. The dire state of South African prisons has been well documented, as has the fact that often juvenile offenders are locked up in harrowing, unhealthy environments where rape and violence are commonplace. That these institutions are far from acting as effective places of rehabilitation should be universally accepted.

A common image of 'gangsters' may be one of hardened criminals who have lost all sense of decency in the pursuit of money, men who glorify violence, rape and theft. Yet when meeting these so-called gangsters in prison one is more often than not forced to re-evaluate this mental stereotype. It is clear that they have

been subject to a maddening set of common circumstances and the resulting emotional and physical harm is obvious. An insight into the psychological damage caused by years spent in Cape Flats gangs can be observed among those who are sent to 'places of safety' – private youth detention centres that offer better care and resources than that on offer at the state's main prisons. A social worker at one centre explained:

The first thing we have to do is to de-stress them, you know, show them that they can relax here and that they are safe. We also have to give them a thorough medical exam because the state they arrive can be shocking, you know. Lice and infections they get in prison can be really bad, we get instances of TB and we've lost some of the guys because we just don't have access to the right medical resources quick enough. We make a big thing about not letting them use gang names here – our philosophy is that we don't want to give credibility to the gangs and the Numbers... [after a while] it is interesting to see how some of the really tough guys, guys who are here for murder, they actually start playing with kid's toys, cars, building bricks those sort of things. You know, you think perhaps these guys have never really learnt to play. They don't have normal lives. They're shooting guns at 12, taking drugs and learning always to be tough. So it is interesting to see them playing, they can't do that outside.⁴⁰

Psychologists and psychiatrists who work with offenders who have been active members of gangs report high levels of trauma and mental illness, including depression and psychosis. According to Kerstin Stellermann, who is preparing a long-term project to provide training for social workers in these matters, it is common to find gang members suffering from debilitating recurring nightmares, which involve playing back acts of extreme violence: "He sees the person begging for their lives as he pulled the trigger and it's an image that haunts him".⁴¹ We may wonder how these disorders play themselves out in the lives of gang members. Instances of drug dependency and violence may be a result of years of mental trauma from being exposed to gang cruelty, insecurity and prison abuse. As an interesting aside, a prison warden in Malmesbury prison claimed that those who fail to cope in this world are often shunned by the gang altogether; so-called self-harmers are excluded from the prison Numbers, which puts them in a position vulnerable to more abuse and physical danger. The prison is rarely able to provide such people with mental care and therapy.

The damage inflicted on gang members by their time spent in the criminal economy and then in prison is a subject needing more research, carried out not by criminologists but by those who are better equipped at talking to traumatised people in ways that could aid them in coping with their state of mind. This is

sensitive research and simply asking people to recount their stories, as has regrettably been the case for my research, is ethically problematic.⁴²

TENSIONS

The criminal economy and use of gangs as a way to regulate drug-dealing markets is divisive for the townships. Young unemployed men are encouraged to despise other gang members, or the 'consumer bases' for other drug merchants. Yet, to what extent this method of governing the criminal economy on the Cape Flats will last remains to be seen. All systems of production have their internal tensions. We suspect that the wealth and mobility of those who are successful may increasingly become a polarising factor – one that puts strain on the credibility of their tribal loyalty to their consumer bases and petty workforce. The uneven profits undermine organic solidarity, which is a key requirement for a clan. We may also predict that the brazen exploitation of many gang members would lead to some form of revolt. Perhaps this will happen, but for the time being there seem to be too many gang members who are willing to play their active role in what seems a flawed organisation.

Nowhere is this potential for internal tension greater than in Atlantis. Here the most populous street gang is the Americans and they control small pockets of the town. Police estimate there are approximately 80 members in total. Most are young unemployed men who pass a limited and claustrophobic daily existence, typically hanging out at one of the town's shebeens. In contrast, no less than a mile from Atlantis is the heavily guarded, large farmhouse of one of the main leaders of the Americans gang, who I will call Cassiem. He moved to this property in the late 1990s as he felt vulnerable on the Cape Flats from attacks by the vigilante group PAGAD. Cassiem's wealth is regarded by those in Atlantis as almost limitless and he is rumoured to be financing the building of a mosque in town. I spoke to several residents about Cassiem and one summed up his relationship with the rest of the Americans:

You never see him in town. Why would he come in to Atlantis? He's too rich to hang out with the Americans, you won't find him in a shebeen on a Saturday night!⁴³

The reasons why some successful drug merchants may prefer to keep a distance between themselves and the main street gang organisations have already been noted. But one also hears the view that the leaders of gangs are also increasingly distancing themselves from the rank and file members. The poverty and seemingly random violence of many gangs' members can be socially stigmatising and multi-millionaire drug merchants are considered more at home among those with similar spending power. A detective from the OCU put it as follows:

Some of these men [the drug merchants] no longer want to be seen as common gangsters. They wear nice clothes, cover up their tattoos. In fact, some don't even have tattoos any more. They've moved out of the Flats and have bought big houses in well-to-do areas. They like to think of themselves as businessmen now, not common gangsters.⁴⁴

What may hasten their decision to distance themselves from gang members is the continued pressure put on gangs by the state, a result mostly of the public violence between street gangs that provokes fervent condemnation from community residents and the media. In other words, the move by those in law enforcement to criminalise gangs and pursue their members with added vigour may serve to convince ambitious drug dealers that distancing themselves from gang members is a good idea for business purposes.

However, one should not exaggerate the tendency of gang leaders and drug merchants to distance themselves from the ghetto. This is merely noted as a tendency which may become more pronounced. As we will see in chapter five, there are also reasons for rich drug merchants enjoying the company of the poor.

REPRODUCING THE GANG

What factors enable gangs to reproduce themselves in the face of such extreme flaws?

Even though gangs are exploitative, those working in prison with the gang members I interviewed expected almost all of them to return to their gangs upon release, even those who acknowledged that their gang had used them and in some cases made them take responsibility for crimes others had committed. The reasons for the longevity of gang membership, and what seems to outsiders a sad dependence on gangs, are complex and personalised. Two themes stand out.

MEMBERSHIP FOR LIFE

I asked the head of one of the Cape's places of safety to explain how gang members can leave the gang:

It's difficult for them. There's one, the one you spoke to with the two guns tattooed lying like that on his chest [*two guns overlapping*], he's living in Manenberg now. I ran into him the other day. I asked him, 'How are you?' and all of the rest and he said, 'Very good'. He said, 'I'm only doing armed robberies now. I've left all the other stuff off'. [*Laughter*] 'Oh, that's nice', I said. You know, he said he wanted to give it all up when he was here, but obviously, he's got deeply into the gang world and it's his only job, it's his career and he's going to die very soon. But, whereas others, you know, I got a call the other day out of the blue, from

Cecil. This one youngster was also deeply involved, but now he's an apprentice electrician. He said, 'Oh, I just thought I'd give you a call and say hi and let you know I'm not dead and I'm doing alright and I've got a job and I'm clean, I'm not using drugs'. 'Okay, that's nice,' you know. And another youngster now works for the bakeries and then one other phoned me the other day and he's working with one of our After Care guys who is involved with helping street children. So you know, there's a lot of lekker stories. But there are sad stories. You've got one of the local lads living in Kleinvlei. He gave up gangsterism completely while he was here and by some miracle, he went out and he learnt good skills here and he became a shop fitter and one Saturday morning he was taking his Mum to the shops and one of his friends walked up to him and blew him away. End of the story. Another youngster, also in Elsie's River was a deputy leader of the 28s gang, which is, you know, a very rough area and also, he was, *[pause, sigh]* he went, well, he gave up gangsterism and he went on radio to talk about the problems of gangs. The next day they went to his house, they came to the house and shot him. So those are some of the sad stories as well.⁴⁵

Indeed, a popular explanation for members staying in the gang is that leaving is fiercely prohibited by leaders and can be punished by death, a story that adds to the image of gangs being ruthless and exploitative organisations. However, as explained above it is misleading to say that all gangs prohibit exit in this way. Gang membership on the Cape Flats can be short-lived. For some, being part of a gang is a passing phase in their lives; membership is not permanent. In his ethnography of the Homeboys – a small gang made up of friends from a football team in Heideveld – this was documented by Steffen Jensen:

When I left the township in 1999, it was altogether unsettled whether the Homeboys were gangsters or just soccer players. It had grieved me to see how fast they descended towards apparent doom, stabilised – and increasingly acting – as gangsters. It was with the greatest relief that I returned three years later to find that the Homeboys had ceased to exist as a group. Several had married and moved away. Two had become police officers! The rest either worked or studied.⁴⁶

But the stories of gang members being murdered when trying to leave the gang are also plentiful and, as a result, it is common to hear gang members saying they will not leave the gang, even when they say they would like to. Consider the following excerpt from an interview with a gang member in Malmesbury prison:

You can't leave the gang. You have their stamp. If you try to leave they will shoot you. You can give them money and say you want to leave the gang, but it's difficult. But I like to go to home and get a job and stay with my mum.⁴⁷

A member of the Americans had this to say:

It is not possible to leave the gang. Because you have shot so many gang members dead, the people remember you and come after you. Even if you go to church they still remember. The only way to get out of a gang is by moving away and change your life there.⁴⁸

Alluded to here is the popular misconception that gangs allow members to leave if they declare themselves converted to religion. This notion may have been encouraged by certain famous gang leaders who have re-invented themselves as religious leaders. The reality is that few gangs respect the church to such an extent that they freely allow most members to leave the gang in this way. One gang member I spoke to remained defiant: "I don't care if they don't want to let me go, I will put my mind on the person who is up there".⁴⁹

WHAT ELSE IS THERE?

In considering the reasons why gang members seem dependent and loyal to such exploitative entities, perhaps as significant as the idea that gangs prohibit exit is the realisation that alternative options are scarce. This is evident when gang members, many of whom will spend time incarcerated, are released from prison. After-prison care is woefully lacking on the Cape Flats and employment prospects are dreadful for those with the double stigma of a criminal record and gang membership, particularly as their allegiances tend to be visibly tattooed on their bodies. Moreover, re-entry into communities and family life for young ex-prisoners is rarely one paved with forgiveness and patience. In this situation, the gang operates as the only institution, albeit an extremely flawed one, that offers some form of security and provision of basic needs. As one social worker employed in a youth detention centre explained:

When young boys leave prison, the street gangs are the only option they have. Other gang members are the only ones who know what they have experienced in prison and they can relate to each other. They are not going to go back to Manenberg or Hanover Park and walk straight into a job or back to education. They will go back to where they have lived all their life, go to the shebeen and carry on with the gang. What do you expect? We do quite a lot with them in [the detention centre] but then we let them go and it is difficult to keep ties with them. Yes, unfortunately it can be true, the good work we do with them here can all come undone when they leave.⁵⁰

During an interview with a former member of the Americans gang the situation for young members was put in rather depressing terms:

...the gang is their family. Their fathers are either in the gang or in prison or are not there. Their mothers have to work long hours and often have many other children to worry about...These are the 'latch-key' kids...The gang becomes their surrogate family. It's where they hang out, make friends and it is who they go to when they get in trouble.⁵¹

The strategic role gangs play in the process of recidivism reinforces the idea that the career paths of gang members cannot simply be viewed as a series of rational economic choices. The official denunciation of gang life demands that gangsters choose another option, the message being that they face an easy choice – life in the gang or in 'civilised society'. However, wandering into the gang and remaining an entrenched member can be seen as an unavoidable consequence of the social and economic contradictions of life on the Flats. Once tarnished with the label of a gangster (or even potential gangster) the small opportunities for meaningful wage labour in the legal economy evaporate.

So, the gang is socially contradictory. It may provide status and protection, probably also much friendship, but it shows tendencies towards gross exploitation and internal victimisation. It may lure people into imagining they can secure upward mobility through crime, but in reality this works only for a small minority.

PART IV: THE CRIMINAL ECONOMY AND THE STATE: CORRUPTION AND COLLUSION.

Thus far the analysis has focused on activities of drug merchants and street gangs. These are the most obvious participants, benefactors and customers. However, this is only part of the story. State officials, particularly those tasked with enforcing the law, play a contributing role. It is common for this to be subsumed under the heading of 'corruption,' but, as we will see, this concept needs clarification. How significant the state's role is, particularly that of the police, is considered in the final part of this chapter. It is of paramount importance to stress the methodological difficulties in understanding this subject – information on corruption is hard to come by and frequently unreliable. Even where people have provided detailed information of corrupt practices, publishing this information becomes difficult given the potential consequences of exposing individuals. As with other elements of this study, the aim is to provide a theoretical understanding rather than a descriptive one based heavily on individual stories.

Before focusing on ways in which the state assists and contributes to the criminal economy on the Cape Flats, it is useful to step back and take a wider perspective. In particular it is important to analyse the importance of the country's transition in promoting organised crime.

THE STATE AND ORGANISED CRIME IN SOUTH AFRICA

Telling the history of organised crime in South Africa depends on one's definition of the problem. One could argue that the creation of the South African state has been one long process of organised crime (see chapter four for further discussion). However, even by following a contemporary view of what organised crime is, it is clear that in South Africa the state has been more than simply a passive victim.

The recent history of state-sanctioned organised crime in South Africa has much in common with the development of Soviet organised crime described by Rawlinson. In the later years of the Soviet Union, the state relied on organised crime to deflect attention from – and manage the consequences of – recurring crises in the economy. Similarly, in South Africa it was the political and economic crises of the late 1970s that prompted the apartheid state to sanction large-scale organised criminal activity in the face of the threat posed both by the economic shocks of the early 1970s and the political fallout from the Soweto uprisings of 1976. As lucidly described by Stephen Ellis,⁵² the period from the late 1970s onwards was one in which the ruling NP faced growing hostility at home and abroad. In 1978, the new Prime Minister, P W Botha, declared that the country was under 'total onslaught' from Soviet-backed revolutionaries operating inside the country and from the neighbouring 'frontline' states. In response to this threat, a corresponding 'total strategy' was devised. A key element was the growing involvement of the South African Defence Force (SADF) and the South African Police (SAP) in escalating what the government saw as counter-revolutionary struggles inside South Africa and beyond its borders. The new strategy marked a change in the nature of the state apparatus for it was in this period that the police and ultimately the government as a whole became increasingly militarised, paranoid and aggressive and, as a result, began to turn to organised crime as a means of sustaining itself in power.

A core element of the total strategy was the establishment of an extensive covert state that ignored South African laws as well as those of other countries. Not only were secret units involved in gross human rights violations, including torture and assassinations, both at home and abroad,⁵³ but the apartheid regime also relied on state-approved smuggling through front companies to fund its military operations and bypass international sanctions on essential commodities such as oil and arms.⁵⁴ Infamously, the SADF created a large international trade in illegal ivory from elephants poached throughout Southern Africa, the profits of which may have funded military operations in Angola and Mozambique as well as swelling the fortunes of high-ranking officials.⁵⁵ As a consequence of involvement in these activities, members of the apartheid state's many secret units became skilled not only in violence and terror, but also in the foundation and management of illicit businesses. With the help of opportunistic entrepreneurs, security officials opened up clandestine trade routes, thus contributing, in the longer term, to the fact that

South Africa is now regarded as a transit state in the international movement of several illicit commodities.

In the mid 1980s, economic and political pressures encouraged the SAP and SADF to strengthen their effort to defend apartheid. Of particular importance was the strategy of 'low-intensity conflict' that involved apartheid officials enlisting the services of auxiliary forces drawn from among the black majority. This led to an escalation in the activities of armed right-wing vigilante groups who were responsible for the deaths of thousands opposed to the apartheid regime.⁵⁶ In this era stories spread suggesting that the SAP had become adept at 'sub-contracting' policing functions to various groups and organisations, including street gangs across the Cape Flats. As Schärf argued, the illicit nature of their activities made the gangs vulnerable to pressure from the police and willing to "trade information and services for the 'right' to continue operating," while their dominance of the 'coloured' townships, particularly at night, acted as a curb on political activity.⁵⁷ It is as yet an unproven allegation that security agents acting on behalf of the government during the dying days of apartheid also helped supply certain gangs with large quantities of cheap Mandrax and cocaine. For some, the available evidence is compelling and the political motive was clear: encouraging drug trade in the townships was part of the wider strategy to undermine political mobilisation.

Since the end of apartheid, evidence has begun to emerge of more direct and active involvement of individual gangsters in attacks on opponents of apartheid. One example is the testimony given at a hearing before the Amnesty Committee of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) by a former operative of the Civil Cooperation Bureau, Abram 'Slang' van Zyl, about his part in plots to assassinate opposition leaders and undermine political mobilisation. Van Zyl and his colleagues paid a gang member named Ishak Hardien to help plant a bomb at the Athlone Centre where members of the Kewtown Youth Movement were known to meet. The same group of security officials also hired a gangster known as 'Peaches' to assassinate Dullah Omar, chairperson of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and later Minister of Justice. But Peaches was murdered under suspicious circumstances. The SAPS accused the leader of the Americans gang, Jackie Lonte, but many locals believe that Peaches was 'exterminated' by state agents. This was the view expressed by one of Lonte's legal representatives.⁵⁸

While state agents probably relied more heavily on clandestine strategies involving cooperation with organised crime, TRC investigations have also uncovered evidence that opponents of apartheid may not have been averse to working with gangsters either, and may even have smuggled arms from Mozambique into the Western Cape to supply their auxiliary forces, such as gangs thought to want an ANC government. While evidence is lacking, it is also alleged that the military operations of the ANC-South African Communist Party (SACP)

coalition during the civil conflict was partly funded by crime, including vehicle theft and drug smuggling. Evidence is weak, partly because the TRC had no mandate to investigate such activities.

POST-APARTHEID DEVELOPMENTS

How significant apartheid-era corruption was in promoting organised crime and gangs on the Cape Flats remains moot. On a national level, it is difficult to refute the view that organised crime conducted by both sides of the civil conflict has continued and has contributed to the high level of organised criminal activity in South Africa since 1994. Some hidden operations that were previously sanctioned from above were quietly closed down, while the motivations, objectives and income-sources of some leading figures in the security apparatus became murkier. In retrospect it is unsurprising that, in this environment, some individuals, long operating in a world where they were above the law, exploited both their skills in clandestine business activities and their corrupt contacts to conduct freelance crime operations. South Africa in this regard does not seem unique. Charles Tilly makes a general historical observation:

In times of war, the managers of fully-fledged states commissioned privateers, hired sometime bandits to raid their enemies and encouraged their regular troops to take booty. In royal service, soldiers and sailors were often expected to provide for themselves by preying on the civilian population: commandeering, raping, looting, taking prizes. When demobilized, they commonly continued the same practices, but without the same royal protection; demobilized ships became pirate vessels, demobilized troops bandits.⁵⁹

According to Ellis, precious stones, ivory, arms, luxury cars and drugs are among the commodities that former members of the apartheid regime continue to smuggle and trade.⁶⁰ At the trial of Wouter Basson, a leading military chemist under apartheid, evidence was led suggesting that, in the dying days of the regime, substantial quantities of high-quality Mandrax and ecstasy were produced, only to disappear in mysterious circumstances. Basson claimed to have dumped the drugs at sea, although he was caught by an undercover agent trying to sell Mandrax in Pretoria and a large drug seizure of ecstasy in Northern Ireland was eventually traced to his laboratory in South Africa.⁶¹ Evidence collected by TRC investigators also strongly suggests that syndicates containing senior military and police officials had been smuggling arms and drugs from Mozambique on a large scale throughout the 1990s. A feature of these syndicates is that they rely on the services of illegal immigrants who are arrested, imprisoned and then used to purchase and smuggle

weapons and drugs back into South Africa. According to TRC investigations many Mozambicans used in this way have been executed by their employers; in one case approximately 60 people were shot and dumped in a lake near the South Africa and Mozambique border.⁶²

Much of the illegal trade conducted by former security officials since 1994 was probably conducted for material self-interest. However, it is possible that dealing in arms and drugs may have served more sinister purposes, including helping to fund operations designed to undermine the transition to democracy.⁶³ Various people, including senior ANC leaders, believed that a right-wing 'third force' was active for many years, fanning conflict through organised crime.

Although such crime involving former and current security officials and police has gained the most interest, a relatively untold story involves the significance in post-apartheid organised crime of former members of the militarised organisations of the struggle movement. Many well-trained soldiers who became unemployed after the democratic transition were absorbed into the burgeoning private security industry. Others have been implicated in various forms of organised crime, notably in stolen-vehicle syndicates, cash-in-transit heists and the 'taxi wars'. One former MK agent interviewed for this study argued, "The ANC helped create the monster they now can't control".⁶⁴ This may be a simplification, but it is possibly more important than many people in power are willing to admit.

From this overview of organised crime and the state before, during and after political transition, it should be clear that during apartheid organised crime was already rampant and involved both sides of the conflict. Post-apartheid organised crime shows a continuation of these networks and it is possible that people have continued with criminal activities that were previously rationalised through ideology and politics. It is hard to quantify these activities, but the claim that organised crime exploded after 1994 is open to question. What is abundantly clear is that organised crime is not, and never has been, simply the preserve of a distinct class of career criminals and there has been active and instrumental involvement by political elites, police and other state agencies. In this analysis the parasitic model of organised crime has limited analytical worth. It is an embedded feature of politics and society.

CONCEPTUALISING CORRUPTION AND ORGANISED CRIME ON THE CAPE FLATS

Although the relationship between organised crime, the state and political elites is remarkable in South Africa, this should not obscure the fact that police corruption in areas such as the Cape Flats is normal in comparison with many other countries. The genesis of this corruption may lie in the propensity for police to seek additional

income and to extend their local power; and for organised crime, on the other hand, to find ways of managing insecurity.

Before speculating on how significant corruption is in the criminal economy on the Cape Flats, it is essential to try to understand the ways in which corruption plays itself out. To conceptualise this it is useful to consider several scenarios which depict the relationship between police and career criminals in different stages of collusion. Each of these is fluid and it is difficult to say which dominates at any given time. It will also be apparent that differentiating between those instances in which police corruption is active or passive is no easy task.

The first scenario can be considered a state of *conflict*, as a traditional state of affairs. The police scheme to find ways of arresting career criminals and in return, career criminals find ways to evade capture, achieved through various strategies including employing a network of lookouts who raise the alarm when a police patrol is in the vicinity of a shebeen or drug-dealing location, through intimidating or buying off witnesses and even through physically threatening the police. In this scenario there is no corrupt relationship between the police and career criminals; the relationship is antagonistic. Corruption may occur if law enforcement push the boundaries of acceptable police work to arrest criminals, i.e. fabricating evidence, intimidating witnesses, achieving confessions through violent means and planting drugs on people they know are dealers.

The second scenario represents a partial breakdown of that conflict. It arises chiefly through pressures put on law enforcement to succeed at their job, particularly to make sufficient successful arrests. This is a problem in areas such as the Cape Flats as the police face a legitimacy crisis characterised by limited flows of information from the public, ironically partly caused by the widespread notion that the police are corrupt. Under this scenario, *mutual dependence* can develop between law enforcement and career criminals, constituting a form of collusion. This is a subtle way in which power is shared between criminals and police and it is a theme to which we will return in chapter five. Mutual dependence arises in two ways. The first is informal and the second is based on a more formalised relationship. With regard to the former, a publication by Wilfried Schärf in the mid 1980s provides a good example. Schärf described the ambiguous association between police on the Cape Flats and a shebeen owner he called 'Joker', whose importance in the community meant he was a useful source of information for the police. By supplying information on an ad-hoc basis, Joker's power was increased; in other words, he fostered a congenial, mutually beneficial relationship with the police:

One significant aspect of the shebeen's private policing methods was its widespread network of contacts and alliances. Joker's ability to extract any

information he desired from the community was a vital asset in his relationship with the police. The latter frequently approached him for clues and leads in the course of routine crime detection, often using his pointers as the only information for making their decisions...Indeed, in this respect the official police force could be said to have worked for him, as their mutual interests coincided.⁶⁵

Implied in this is the idea that by relying on Joker for information, the police gave him the means to undermine rivals and promote his interests, while the police could become more efficient. The police may have been aware of this but it was not of primary importance to their daily task of investigating traditional forms of street crime and deviancy. A similar observation was made by Steffen Jensen in his research on policing in one area of the Cape Flats. He described that those police conducting regular patrols depended on a number of "safe bases".⁶⁶ Some of these were drug merchants' houses or prominent shebeens. He noted that this practice provided benefits to both parties. The police were able to gain access to community information and the drug dealers or shebeen owners were able to trade information for favours. A classic example would involve a policeman visiting the shebeen to get information on a crime, in return for which the shebeen owner may avoid future hassles. In addition, Jensen also speculated that the visible relationship between the local police and the drug merchant may help sustain the latter's image of being a locally powerful person, which has incidental benefits (more on this later).

So, there is an informal mutual dependence that results from the realities of daily policing. However, this can become more structured and formalised through police using paid informants. It is an anomaly that many shebeen owners and drug merchants are used in this way. Although the police claim it is essential for developing intelligence on drug merchants, some sources argue that this strategy easily blurs into corruption, which, again, is mutually beneficial to both police and drug merchants. Corruption occurs in several ways. The informer system is poorly regulated and therefore fraud is common. Police strike a bargain with someone they have arrested to provide information, for which they offer an inviting sum of money. The expense claim for this may be far more than what is given to the criminal; the police pocket the rest. A similar scheme existed among security officials during apartheid, who were eligible for monetary rewards for capturing and destroying caches of weapons. According to TRC investigations, fraudulent claims were made virtually every day by Vlakplaas members as a means of fundraising.⁶⁷

Where close relationships develop between police and their network of paid informers, there is the potential for informers to manipulate information for their own benefit. The prime example seems to be informants supplying information on their rivals. Alternatively, I have been told of a drug merchant who supplied

information to the police on the movement of drugs on the Cape Flats, including vehicles containing his own drugs. The information was supplied merely as a means to provide a decoy for much larger consignments of drugs being driven at the same time but in other areas of the Flats.

Because of the fractured nature of the SAPS, several police units independently investigate the crimes of gang leaders and drug merchants on the Cape Flats, each having their network of different paid informers. A national body has been set up to better coordinate this system but it is common to hear that competition between units is rife. According to some sources this internal competition produces the scenario where the careers of successful detectives and of successful drug merchants may be closely correlated.⁶⁸

The informer system of policing creates problems of corruption within drug dealing networks also. There is a paranoia among career criminals, fearing that their associates may be paid informants conspiring against them. A leading stenographer in Cape Town was even contacted by the Hard Livings gang, which wanted to hire him to interview several of their members whom they suspected of working with the police. When informants are exposed in communities the consequences can be disastrous. This was highlighted in the trial of Rashied Staggie, who oversaw the gang rape of a young woman who was a paid police informer in Manenberg. Less well known is a story relayed to me in Atlantis, where a gang member mistakenly assassinated the brother of a police informer who was exposed by a policeman on the gang's payroll. Such stories highlight the 'ethical' dilemmas of the informant system, a subject made all the more contentious given the numerous trials where prosecutions have fallen apart because evidence supplied by criminal informers – known as 'section 204 witnesses' – carries little weight. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore the merits and pitfalls of the informant system in achieving a reduction in crime. A hypothesis worthy of research is that the informant system does more harm than good, particularly where organised crime is rife and so, too, is police corruption of various types.

The third scenario of police collusion with career criminals represents a more overt form of corruption and it is what many people regard as being the most problematic. This involves police trading information and assets with drug merchants to provide them with immunity from arrest or prosecution. Where the power lies in these relations would be hard to detect. In some cases, the police seem to engage in rent-seeking behaviour; in others, the drug merchants are the instigators. Two elements seem most problematic. The first relates to the selling and buying of police docket. Every investigation depends on an initial paper trail, which is stored in various locations, often in the police stations close to or within the economic domains of drug merchants. It is common knowledge that drug merchants acquire their own dockets as a means of disrupting police

investigations against them. So, for example, during a raid on a merchant in Atlantis police found two dockets relating to separate murder cases from failed investigations, which have now been reopened. Similarly, it is alleged that several police in Manenberg established a racket through which they would quite literally auction dockets to gang members. This practice was confirmed during interviews with gang members in prison, many of whom were open about the fact that their leaders buy their dockets from the police.

The second element to this scenario relates to police simply accepting money to supply information on future raids or to scupper investigations, either by spoiling evidence or by dragging investigations out over such a long time that momentum is lost and witnesses tire or can be intimidated or killed. It is a feature of these payments that they can be sustained over a long period. According to a source close to a drug merchant in Atlantis, he deposited money in an investigator's account for several years. So as not to raise suspicion, the account was kept roughly at R5,000 at all times, the monthly salary of an investigator being about this amount. In return, the investigator was able to supply information on planned raids on him or his business associates and he provided several dockets, some of which the gang member sold to other gang members.

Illustrative of the scale of this problem is that increasingly, police involved in raids on drug merchants are not told of the location and target until just before the raid. In addition, some of those heading such raids have banned cell phones so that corrupt police cannot warn their clients.⁶⁹

The final scenario is one where the police become actively engaged in illicit markets, selling drugs, weapons and other contraband. A well-publicised case in 2000 involved police assisting the Hard Livings gang to steal weapons and ammunition from the police base in Faure. The police may also be involved in what we can call 'skimming' – taking a proportion of seized drugs or alcohol and selling it to other drug merchants. This is another practice that many residents of the Cape Flats, some close to drug merchants, claim occurs regularly. Drugs are confiscated, no case is opened and the drugs reappear soon after in another drug-dealing location. Indeed, it was revealing that, according to two defence lawyers who work with many leading drug merchants in Cape Town, their clients often claim that the amount of drugs or money the police report they have taken in raids is much less than was there.⁷⁰ So, for example, Andre van der Walt, an inspector at the OCU, was arrested in 2005 for his part in a drug-dealing operation that implicated so-called Mr Big. According to the state prosecutor, Van der Walt was one of several policemen who stole drugs from Mr Big's rivals in order to re-sell them to him for a lower price. In one such incident, the state prosecutor alleged that Van der Walt helped to steal 10,000 Mandrax tablets.⁷¹

As this example shows, skimming may develop into a more active role in illicit markets. Police in this case became the organisers of economic crime and the chief benefactors. This occurs elsewhere in South Africa, particularly regarding gun smuggling and the taxi wars.⁷² It is not certain that this occurs regularly on the Cape Flats. However, during my fieldwork persistent reference was made by interviewees linking prominent gangland figures with syndicates containing senior police and former apartheid security and military personnel. A potential corroboration of these stories surfaced during an interview between TRC investigators and an elderly white man in Pollsmoor Prison, who claimed he had been an active member of this syndicate from 1985 to 1996. While the investigators suggest this evidence has been corroborated by other interviews, it was not possible to be sure the sources of information were correct. According to the interviewee, one gang in particular was being used by a group of senior police to steal vehicles, smuggle weapons and sell drugs. The following is an excerpt from the unpublished transcript of the interview conducted by the TRC investigators. The names of the policeman and the gang have been changed:

I don't know who runs the operation here in Cape Town but, what I do know is that a Mr. Mark was very much the one who had all the say here. For a fact I do know that the stolen cars went to his house first before being sent up-country. This Mark was also making use of a gang by the name of the Cape Gang. This gang was known to be used and under the orders of a police officer, Mr Smith. Last mentioned was also closely linked to the syndicate where firearms and drugs were concerned in the Cape...Drivers from the Cape will only take the [stolen] vehicles to Bloemfontein where they leave them...for others to fetch them...Someone in the police, maybe Smith, give them the routes over which these vehicles must be taken and which will be safe, before leaving Cape Town.⁷³

In another section of the transcript it was described how he delivered firearms to Mr Smith at Green Point Stadium in Cape Town:

Twice in the past I have left cars with firearms at this stadium. I recognised Mr Smith this night as a person pointed [him] out to me in Durban...as a 'pig' from the police in Cape Town...The Greenpoint stadium is a place where arms and ammunition are delivered in the Cape. I don't know how long these weapons etc. stay there but, what I do know is that Smith uses the Cape Gang to distribute weapons and drugs in the Cape.⁷⁴

I have received more evidence on the relationship between the senior police mentioned by this source and the same gang members. In a confidential report on organised crime by the NIA, both the Cape Gang and Mr Smith and Mr Mark

were represented in a complex flow chart that illustrated organised crime networks in the Western Cape. Other businessmen, gang members and police were also in the chart. Likewise, in an interview conducted in Malmesbury prison with a former hit man of the Cape Gang, he confirmed this relationship and alleged that the senior policemen gave the gang leader an expensive pair of handguns as a present.⁷⁵ Members of PAGAD claim they made a recording of a meeting that took place between the policeman and the Cape Gang leader at a café in a shopping mall in the centre of Cape Town.

During an interview, a former leading member of PAGAD told me about the night he was arrested for the murder of the leader of the Cape Gang.⁷⁶ The police who arrived at his house included some of those mentioned to the TRC investigators. It was revealing that after being arrested, this member of PAGAD was driven to the headquarters of the Cape Gang, a considerable detour, and the police made a point of showing him to the new leader of the gang. He said he believed he was being 'shown off' to the gangs as a symbolic gesture.

Evidence for these links between gangs and police is not conclusive and it is possible that misinformation is recycled, meaning that several seemingly independent sources corroborate on issues that may be untrue. It is also possible that what appears as collaboration may be part of sting operations or intelligence gathering. However, if it is the case that at certain times senior police have been actively involved in crime, then the Cape Flats will not be a unique case study.

QUANTIFYING CORRUPTION

The above illustrates diverse relationships between career criminals and the police. These can be understood as part of a continuum. At one end is a state of conflict whereby the relationship between police and organised crime is purely antagonistic. At the other extreme, the police assume leading positions in organised crime and employ career criminals as part of their syndicates. Lying in between these extremes are forms of mutual dependence and collusion based on rent-seeking behaviour and collaboration in disrupting investigations, arrests and prosecutions. These forms of corruption represent an important way in which organised crime is sustained and illustrate how certain individuals consolidate their position in the criminal economy.

The evidence so far may suggest that police corruption on the Cape Flats is endemic. Indeed, it is a challenge to find someone living there who does not feel the police are corrupt and that the police have corrupt relationships with street gangs. Yet what people understand by the concept of corruption can be radically different – as with notions such as organised crime, even experts on corruption fail to agree on a common definition. In Atlantis, for example, several community

residents I spoke to complained about corruption in the local police station. When I asked one woman to explain what she meant by saying “The police are corrupt,” she told me, “The police are corrupt because they are lazy, they don’t help you and they are often drinking in the shebeens with the gangsters”.⁷⁷ Her notion of corruption was different from those who understand it as active involvement in illegal activities; for her, police corruption seemed a broader concept related to the extent that police do their work well – they are corrupt because they do not care.

The sheer scale of corruption, however, came through in interviews with several sources, most revealingly in a group interview with three police station commanders of notorious gang-controlled areas.⁷⁸ I was reticent on the issue of corruption, believing that this would be a controversial and insulting question. However, when the subject was broached the response was alarming. All agreed that corruption represented the greatest problem confronting their efforts to combat gangs and organised crime. As one put it: “Corruption is our biggest enemy. If it wasn’t for corrupt police then we would have sorted these gangsters out years ago”.⁷⁹ Several sources I have spoken to suggested corruption has been the main cause of inefficiencies in investigating gang crime. Allegedly, an internal audit in the SAPS found that 1,500 murder and attempted murder dockets handled by the gang investigation unit between 1994 and 2001 were undermined by suspiciously bad policing methods that could not be described simply as careless. However, following up on this allegation a reporter unearthed a confidential note from a top Western Cape police officer claiming it would “not be in the interest of the South African Police Services to act against the members of the gang investigation unit because of potential bad publicity”.⁸⁰

A similar scathing view on police corruption was expressed during an interview with a former leading figure in the PAGAD. For him, the name of PAGAD was misleading as from the outset it was a movement that not only targeted drug dealers and gangsters, but was also aimed at corrupt police officers who worked with them. In the early days of PAGAD, numerous investigations were conducted into police corruption. The most famous resulted in an audio recording of a meeting at the Waterfront between a senior policeman and the then leader of one of the largest gangs on the Cape Flats. Similarly, a member of PAGAD has apparently filmed police in Manenberg selling police dockets to gang members. It is one of the ironic aspects of PAGAD that allegations were made against the police that corruption between police and militant groups within PAGAD allowed the latter to elude arrest and then escape from a well-guarded prison cell.

Almost all gang members interviewed for this study claim that police conspire with gang leaders and drug merchants. Two defence lawyers who worked closely with gang members told me that all the top drug merchants had well-established

links within the police, which was a major factor in the extremely low levels of successful arrests and prosecutions. Hence, one reason for the police and prosecuting authorities developing specialised teams to investigate and prosecute gang members is because local police are corrupt. Wilfried Schärf, who studied gangs and organised crime on the Cape Flats during the 1980s and 1990s, claimed in a consultancy report on improving the methods to tackle gangs that no gang could survive without police corruption.⁸¹

Despite all these sources suggesting corruption is rife, there is no way of quantifying it. The 'bad apple' syndrome is not sufficient. Nor is the view that career criminals simply penetrate the state and corrupt law enforcement officials. But it is easy to take the analysis too far and tarnish the entire SAPS as inherently corrupt. What is clear is that police corruption is inadequately 'policed'. Established in 1995, the SAPS internal anti-corruption unit was downgraded in 2003 and integrated into the OCU. The reason for this remains unclear as the anti-corruption unit managed to increase the number of successful prosecutions against police officers by 600%.⁸²

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter has been to provide a structural understanding of the criminal economy on the Cape Flats, including the role of street gangs. This understanding has differed in some important respects from the view provided by mainstream analysis, which was summarised in chapter two.

The picture that has emerged in this chapter is complex and it is no easy task to reduce the reality of organised crime to being the work of neat criminal entities. Mainstream accounts have tended to simplify the nature of organised crime and often there is little in the way of detailed evidence on how active members relate to each other and what mechanisms of organisation are occurring. Complexity in describing organised crime may seem unsatisfying. However, this is the challenge for those who study the subject – to move beyond the simple and to begin to explore the multifaceted dimensions of the phenomenon. Much writing on organised crime remains superficial, which is partly caused by methodological challenges.

The first section of this chapter drew on the market model and argued that the way crime has been organised is partly due to the properties of the commodities being traded. It is not simply the case that organised crime developed on the Cape Flats due to opportunities inadvertently provided by political transition. Mandrax has played a very important role in producing wealthy drug merchants and it has created the need for greater regional coordination between career criminals. The

influence of the prison Numbers on the street gangs may have been less likely to have happened if Mandrax had not been criminalised in the late 1970s.

Clearly the clan model of criminal organisation is highly relevant on the Cape Flats. Many of the street gangs conform to this form of organisation. Membership of street gangs is based to a certain extent on group loyalty and status, although we have also seen that there are tensions within gangs caused by exploitation and internal victimisation. Few of the street gangs represent ideal types, which may be a reason why the authorities struggle to develop suitable definitions for them.

Gangs cannot be considered the only form of criminal organisation operating on the Cape Flats, nor do they operate simply as drug-dealing businesses. There are high-level drug dealers who are networked with each other, some of whom are not members of street gangs. These men are not just successful in the criminal economy but are also often entrepreneurs with a wide portfolio of interests. Moreover, evidence suggests the active and passive role of the police in assisting and controlling illegal trade. In this respect organised crime blurs with the state and the formal economy. It is important not to imagine organised crime as representing an 'under' world containing those simply rejected from the 'upper' world. In fact, those most likely to be excluded from the formal economy are those who may fair particularly badly in the criminal economy – the ones who are exploited in street gangs or left to fend for themselves. It is possible that some of these unfortunate people die young, through suicide, or that they take to the streets as so-called homeless people. Likewise, the shrewd businessman who succeeds as a drug dealer may also have the skills and aptitude to do well in many legitimate businesses.

Here we can see that the orthodox perspective fails to give enough attention to the division of labour within the criminal economy. Just as the formal economy is characterised by class stratification, so, too, is the criminal one. Those at the base of the labour market differ markedly from those at the top, not only in their wealth, but also in mobility, use of violence, exposure to risk and 'brand loyalty'. Because many gang members are structurally excluded from the legal economy and they appear on the peripheries of the criminal economy, they suffer a double dose of exclusion.

Despite the exclusion of many gang members from illicit market activities, street gangs are integral to the organisation of crime. Gangs and intragang alliances organise distribution networks and help to overcome risks and insecurities for gang members involved in dealing in illegal goods and services. But the gangs cannot simply be viewed as organisations of production; too few members are employed in the illegal markets. What this suggests is that gangs are both social phenomena (providing security, friendship, excitement, etc.) and they are also

organisations of *consumption*. This means that gangs and gang affiliations may signify what can be termed 'tribal consumerism' as much as they do organisation of criminal production and distribution, if not more so.

If there is one theme that characterises the criminal economy above all others, it is its violent and exploitative nature. I have tried to explain how this exploitation works and how, despite serious tensions, the criminal economy manages to reproduce and sustain itself. There are several similarities between the criminal economy and the legal economy and this subject is continued in the following chapter.

NOTES

- 1 W Schärf, Shebeens in the Cape Peninsula, in D Davis & M Slabbert (eds), *Crime and power in South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1985.
- 2 Although it is unlikely that one supplier in alcohol can capture a large market, this only applies to the informal market in alcohol. South African Breweries (SAB) has a virtual monopoly on the distribution of beer and spirits – almost all alcohol being sold in shebeens on the Cape Flats originates from SAB. The interface between SAB and the illegal sale of alcohol in the townships is a matter for further research.
- 3 For example, P Arlacchi, The dynamics of illegal markets, in P Williams & D Vlassis (eds), *Combatting transnational crime: Concepts, activities and responses*, Frank Cass, London, 2001, p 8.
- 4 Notes from interview, Malmesbury prison, May 2004.
- 5 Interview, Atlantis, May 2004.
- 6 Interview, Atlantis, April 2004.
- 7 Interview, Atlantis, May 2004.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 NIA 2004, confidential report, a copy of which the author was given by a source who requested anonymity.
- 10 M Thrasher, *The gang* (abridged version), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1966, p 414.
- 11 P Adler, 1985, *Wheeling and dealing: An ethnography of an upper-level drug dealing and smuggling community*, Appleton-Century Crofts, New York, p 148.
- 12 Interview, SAPS, Cape Town, May 2004.
- 13 Interview, SAPS, Atlantis, March 2004.
- 14 Interview, Malmesbury prison, March 2004.
- 15 S Jensen, Of drug dealers and street gangs: Power, mobility and violence on the Cape Flats, *Focaal*, 36, 2000, pp 105–116, p 111.
- 16 V Ruggiero, *Crime and markets*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p 25.
- 17 E Salo-Miller, Negotiating gender and personhood in the new South Africa: Adolescent women and gangsters in Manenberg township on the Cape Flats, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(3), 2003, pp 345–365.
- 18 Notes from interview, May 2004. The interview was conducted at a youth detention centre, known as a 'place of safety', which will not be named here.
- 19 Interview, inmate, place of safety, May 2004.

- 20 Ibid.
- 21 T Leggett, *Ganglands: A victim survey of Manenberg*, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, forthcoming, p 22.
- 22 Interview, inmate, place of safety, May 2004.
- 23 Interview, anon., Cape Town, April 2004.
- 24 Interview, SAPS, Atlantis, May 2004.
- 25 Interview, anon., January 2004, Tafelsig.
- 26 As Zygmunt Bauman remarks: "...the freedom to move, perpetually a scarce and unequally distributed commodity, fast becomes the main stratifying factor of our late modern or post modern times". Z Bauman, *Community*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001, p 2.
- 27 Interview, inmate, place of safety, May 2004.
- 28 *Cape Times*, Gangster world of Desmond Meyer, 10 September 1988.
- 29 J Young, *The exclusive society*, London, Sage, 1999, p 88.
- 30 Interview, inmate, place of safety, May 2004.
- 31 Interviews, inmates, place of safety, May 2004.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Interview, anon, Atlantis, May 2004.
- 34 Interview, SAPS, Atlantis, May 2004.
- 35 J Steinberg, *Nongoloza's children: Western Cape prison gangs during and after apartheid*, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Cape Town, 2004b (page number unknown).
- 36 Perhaps the most vile aspect of the criminal economy is the brutal exploitation of women in the criminalised sex industry. I have not been able to provide primary research on this but the key issues are raised in *Molo Songolo*, The trafficking of children for purposes of sexual exploitation, Molo Songololo, Cape Town, 2000.
- 37 Interview, inmate, place of safety, May 2004.
- 38 Interview, Malmesbury prison, June 2004.
- 39 G Scott, It's a sucker's outfit: How urban gangs enable and impede the reintegration of ex-convicts, *Ethnography*, 5(1), 2004, pp 107–140, p 129.
- 40 Interview, anon., March 2004.
- 41 Interview, November 2005.
- 42 During interviews with gang members in prison I took the decision to end the research prematurely. One interview that hastened this decision involved a 17-year-old who started describing how he had been raped in Pollsmoor prison and showed signs of distress in recounting the story. Many of these interviews require a great deal of prompting for otherwise they provide accounts lacking in detail and clarity. However, it seemed irresponsible to push interviewees for more information on such subjects. I hope that this study makes a contribution, but I am not under the illusion that the research is so important as to justify causing upset to those providing primary data.
- 43 Interview, anon., Atlantis, May 2004.
- 44 Interview, Cape Town, January 2004.
- 45 Interview, anon., March 2004.
- 46 S Jensen, *The rise and fall of New York: Understanding gangs on the Cape Flats*, forthcoming.
- 47 Interview, inmate, Malmesbury prison, June 2004.
- 48 Interview, inmate, place of safety, May 2004.

- 49 Interview, inmate, Malmesbury prison, June 2004.
- 50 Interview, anon., April 2004.
- 51 From field notes, Atlantis, June 2004.
- 52 S Ellis, The historical significance of South Africa's Third Force, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24(2), 1998, pp 261–299; and S Ellis, The new frontiers of crime in South Africa, in J Bayart, S Ellis & B Hibou, *The criminalization of the state in Africa*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1999.
- 53 T Bell & D Ntsebeza, *Unfinished business: South Africa, apartheid and truth*, Redworks, Cape Town, 2001.
- 54 The second volume of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (see chapter 3, Volume 2) contains evidence of these illicit economic activities. For further details on oil sanctions-busting, see C Sholtz, Drive now and pay forever – The apartheid way, in Anon., *The oil embargo 1989–1991: Secrecy still rules*, Shipping Research Bureau, Amsterdam, 1992.
- 55 D Potgieter, *Contraband, South Africa and the international trade in ivory and rhino horn*, Queillerie, London, 1993; and S Ellis, Of elephants and men: Politics and nature conservation in South Africa, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20(1), 1994, pp 53–69.
- 56 N Haysom, *Mabangalala: The rise of the right wing vigilantes in South Africa*, Centre for Applied Legal Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1986; and N Haysom, Vigilantism and the policing of African townships: Manufacturing violent stability, in D Hansson & D van Zyl Smit (eds), *Towards justice? Crime and state control in South Africa*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1990.
- 57 W Schärf, Community policing in South Africa, *Acta Juridica*, 1989, pp 206–33. Schärf also noted that, though less well established than their equivalents in the 'coloured' areas, street gangs performed a similar function in the 'African' townships by, among other things, terrorising the populace, sustaining images of disunity, 'inhibiting political mobilisation' and helping to legitimise the police as a line of defence against internecine 'black-on-black' violence.
- 58 Interview, anon., January 2005.
- 59 C Tilly, War making and state making as organized crime, in P Evans, D Rueschemeyer & T Skocpol (eds), *Bringing the state back in*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p 173.
- 60 Ellis, op cit, pp 61–62.
- 61 M Burger & C Gould, *Secrets and lies: Wouter Basson and South Africa's chemical and biological warfare programme*, Zebra, Johannesburg, 2002, pp 78–90.
- 62 The gun running report referred to here is a confidential report written for the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. A copy was supplied for the purpose of this research. The date it was written is unknown, possibly 1999.
- 63 Such violent operations were seen by some as the work of a well-organised conspiracy involving senior officials in the apartheid regime and were carried out by a so-called 'third force'. See S Ellis, The historical significance of South Africa's Third Force, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24(2), 1998, pp 261–299.
- 64 Interview, anon., Cape Town, September 2005.
- 65 Schärf, 1985, op cit, pp 103–104
- 66 Jensen, forthcoming, pp 109–10.
- 67 TRC gun running report, supra note 62.

- 68 See also W Schärf, Bombs, bungles and police transformation: When is the SAPS going to get smarter?, in J Steinberg (ed), *Crime wave: The South African underworld and its foes*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 2001, pp 57–59.
- 69 Interview with SAPS, January 2004, confirmed in an interview with SAPS Criminal Intelligence in January 2005.
- 70 Interview, anon., January 2005.
- 71 Information obtained from an attorney working on the case. This was also reported in the press; see *Cape Argus*, Corrupt cops sold Mr Big drugs, court told, 22 December 2004.
- 72 J Dugard, Drive on? Taxi wars in South Africa, in Steinberg, op cit. The issue of taxi violence is discussed further in chapter five.
- 73 This transcript forms part of a confidential report for the TRC committee, and was compiled alongside the report on gun running.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Interview, Malmesbury prison, January 2004.
- 76 This is a well-known event in Cape Town. It was described to me in detail during an interview conducted in May 2004.
- 77 Interview, Atlantis, April 2004.
- 78 Interview, Cape Town, May 2004.
- 79 Interview, SAPS, Cape Town, April 2004.
- 80 This information was published in the *Mail & Guardian*, Brotherhood sealed in blood, 2 August 2002. Several other sources have confirmed this, including members of the SAPS in private conversations.
- 81 W Schärf, Recommendations relating to the investigation of organised crime, unpublished report, Institute for Criminology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 1998.
- 82 H van Vuuren, *National integrity systems; Country study report, South Africa 2005*, Transparency International, Berlin, 2005, pp 57–64.