

Narrative
& the politics of hope
in the post-apartheid
prison

Kathleen Hope Rawlings

March 2018

Student Name Kathleen Hope Rawlings

Course MA in Anthropology, University of the Witwatersrand

Supervisor Julia Hornberger with help from Kelly Gillespie

Word Count 28 306

Student Number 734756

Due March 2018

Plagiarism Declaration

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and pretend it is one's own
2. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in this thesis, has been attributed, and has been referenced and cited
3. I have used the Harvard system for citation and referencing
4. This is my own work and I have not copied any other text
5. I have not allowed, and wont allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work

Signed

Date

Abstract

Discourses on penal reform and rehabilitation in post-apartheid South Africa have given rise to a widespread disavowal of the structural determinants of crime in the country. Rooted in moralising ideas of individual accountability, the ‘rehabilitative prison’ functions ideologically to warp collective understandings about criminality, and to foreclose more radical forms of intervention into the social and economic conditions that track vulnerable people into prison. In this thesis, using the historical constitution of penal reform as a backdrop, I argue that cycles of complicity exist not only in political and mass-mediated spheres, but at the level of ‘the everyday’ as well. Tracing the narrative biographies of two inmates from prisons in Johannesburg, I make the case for penetrating more critically the stories that people tell about their redemption in prison. The tendency by many inmates and ex-convicts to absorb and enact the redemptive script, I argue, is the product of a profound misrecognition of structural forms of violence, and plays into the persistence of these denials in a broader sense. I show that inhabiting the role of the ‘reformed prisoner’ establishes inclusion and produces hope, but that it ultimately obstructs more radical forms of resistance. In this way, the prisoners’ attachments to ‘betterment’ narratives can be read as state processes in miniature: on every level, investing in ahistoricising conceptions of individual improvement reflects the perceived impossibility of overcoming wider, more structural forms of violence that impede post-apartheid South Africa’s dream of democracy. I conclude by sketching an exceptional moment of ‘narrative intervention’ in which the state’s script becomes disrupted, and consider the way that hope, rooted in radical critique and action, might be reclaimed in a project of prison abolition in South Africa.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter One – “Setting the Scene”	11
Interlude – “A Blessing in Disguise? Ethical grey zones and methodological challenges”	29
Chapter Two – “Place of Hope”	34
Interlude – “A blessing in disguise, or disguised as a blessing?”	55
Chapter Three – “Unsettling the Script”	60
Conclusion	72
Post Script	75
Bibliography	76

Introduction

It's been a slow day. Lawyers and policemen stream intermittently in and out of the wooden doors that lead into the court from the unkempt front lawn at the Newland Magistrate's Court in Johannesburg, chatting quietly and carrying brown folders bursting with case files under their arms. Security guards at the front desk talk and laugh, stopping occasionally to let visitors in and to carry out routine but half-hearted bag checks in the absence of a working security scanner. Stamping, stapling and filing sounds echo out of the small offices, creating a bureaucratic rhythm along the otherwise uninteresting beige corridor. Limp, browning pot plants and tatty government posters about workers' rights litter the scene, adding to the desperately outdated appearance of the building's interior. The only thing that breaks the sheer sameness of the court's inside is the selection of motivational posters that hang in the court's waiting room, in lawyers' offices, and along the corridors. One poster reads, "Motivation – Never Give Up. It is often the last key in the bunch that opens the lock," accompanied by a sepia picture of a bunch of keys set against a vivid desert scene. Another, depicting a few goldfish jumping to a big bowl from a smaller one, suggests, "The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential ... these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence". Above the receptionist's desk, a poster exclaims, "Teamwork is the ability to work together towards a common vision". Below this aphorism, a team of rowers paddles into a pink sunset. There is a wide selection of posters like this strewn across the court's walls, and I've seen similar ones inside other courts in Johannesburg. The constant mention of locks and keys either seems fitting or inappropriate, depending on which way you're looking at it. The one that is etched most clearly in my memory instructs, simply, to, "Believe in yourself. The rest will follow". An eagle soars, wings spread wide, across a clear blue sky.

I look at this poster every time I visit the court. The poster itself has fallen out of the mounting designed to hold it up, so it's a little skew. The gold frame is scuffed, but the confidence of the poster's message seems intact. "Believe in yourself. The rest will follow". It's nailed into the wall directly opposite the wooden bench I usually sit on, that's positioned next to the office of a loud, gossiping filing clerk on whom I eavesdrop for the best stories about lawyers and policemen. The irony of these posters in a place like this is stark. The principles of bureaucracy resist individuality and self-determination – belief doesn't need to

feature in a context blanketed by rules and regulations. However motivational notions about autonomy and self-determination break with the bleakness that defines South Africa's system of criminal justice, and these posters reflect this marketability. Yet in a context designed around the administration of criminal justice, and in a country plagued by endemic structural inequality, these adages seem inappropriately simple. 'Motivation' alone will not provide any sort of 'key' to 'unlock' anything. These posters are of course metaphorical, and I doubt their presence was given more than two minutes' thought by whoever decided to put them there. Government buildings are not renowned for their impressive interior decoration, and these posters carry generic, inspirational messages that look good in a place like this. But in their simple, silly optimism they reflect a larger problem that lies at the heart of criminal justice in post-apartheid South Africa – the philosophical individualism that transforms structurally conditioned action into rational self-possession, or, put crudely, poverty into crime.¹

The end of apartheid in the 1990s brought with it the promise of many things, including an end to punitive incarceration. Yet, for a set of complex historical reasons, the prison has become further embedded in South Africa's system of criminal justice. Underlying this unprecedented phenomenon has been the liberal use of penal reform to attempt to refashion the prison into a benign institution capable of providing rehabilitation to its inhabitants, extricating the image of the prison from its fraught historical relationship with the violent regime of apartheid. Justifications for the continued use of the prison have hinged upon the trope of rehabilitation and ideologies of 'betterment' that render prisons as part of a benevolent transformative project, invested in producing moral subjects out of criminal offenders. This has produced insidious effects. Penal reform, and its promotion of rehabilitation, obstructs structurally oriented readings of crime that bring into focus the wider forces that shape and condition criminal behaviour, in favour of individualising and pathologising rhetoric about moral change. Criminal acts are rendered the product of individual volition, and not a symptom of structural forces of entrenched inequality, vulnerability, and precariousness. This discursive environment has been characterised by

¹ Loïc Wacquant's book 'Prisons of Poverty' (1999, 2009) and explicatory articles 'The New Peculiar Institution: On the prison as surrogate ghetto' (2000) and 'The Penalisation of Poverty and the Rise of Neoliberalism' (2001) make convincing arguments about this phenomenon. See also: Christie (2000); Garland (2001); Davis (2003); Gillespie (2008)

“ahistoricising notions of morality” and values, in turn producing “thoroughly depoliticised understandings about crime” (Gillespie 2008: 83).

This thesis aims to build upon existing global arguments about the limits of rehabilitation and reform², specifically in contexts such as post-apartheid South Africa that, marked by endemic inequality and structural violence, demand a more critical approach to crime and the prison. The research presented in this thesis seeks to confront and demystify some of the paradoxes and complexities of the presence of the prison – an inherently violent institution – in a supposedly democratic country like South Africa, taking as its subject (mis)representations of prison and related issues of crime that play into the pervasive uncoupling of criminality from context. It will show that complicity in the erroneous belief that prison can produce a suitable remedy for crime goes beyond explicit state discourse, extending into the world of NGOs, prison researchers, and even inmates themselves. The widespread and embodied investment in penal reform and related ideas of rehabilitation and betterment manifests in policy documents, prison practice, NGO-devised projects, and in the popular redemptive narratives of many of South Africa’s prisoners.

In this research, I will expand the scope and the boundaries of the reproduction of this dominant narrative by examining how ‘betterment’ plays out on the ground – to uncover the micropolitics that animate the production of specific narratives, while occluding others. Moving away from wider discursive critique in favour of anthropological methods of ethnography and narrative analysis, this thesis illuminates the social life of reform to show how ‘rehabilitation’ becomes interpolated, negotiated, and reproduced at the level of the everyday. I will argue that examining the grounded practices of those at the coalface of prison life, along with their interpretations and representations of incarceration, can reveal in miniature the politics that animate wider cycles of complicity by government and other stakeholders operating in South Africa’s penal sphere. The absorption into the potentiality of this particular narrative by the state, by the public, and by NGOs, is mirrored by the everyday absorption into the notion of rehabilitation and betterment – of moral transformation – by those who have become entailed in South Africa’s criminal justice system.

² Foucault (1975), Davis (2000, 2003), Gilmore (1999, 2007), Critical Resistance Collective (2001) and many more have made arguments about the impotence of prison reform

A thread on ‘narrative’ has been woven through this thesis, acting as a conceptual fulcrum between wider discourses (the metanarrative of ‘penal reform’ and its associated ideologies) and the self-conceptions and representations of prisoners in their individual stories of salvation, redemption, and moral transformation. I will argue that the powerful and persuasive ‘narrative template’ or blueprint that accompanies the betterment paradigm – that the prison can positively transform peoples’ lives – produces humanising and hopeful effects when internalised by inmates, but in its use, lends itself to the undeserved legitimacy of the prison. ‘Narrative’ – both in its epistemological and ontological dimensions – I will argue has a hand in the reproduction of superficially benign representations of the post-apartheid prison. At the heart of this research lies a simple question – why do these stories become so arresting? Unpicking the processes and conditions under which redemptive narratives are produced and used, this thesis will cast a critical light on the stories of change offered by inmates, and more broadly, the story of change offered by the state.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter One, I establish a picture of South Africa’s criminal justice system with particular attention to the prison after apartheid, when it came under discursive revision and became associated with the moral restoration of the country. I present a brief discourse analysis on crime and punishment from the early 1990s until the present, in order to survey the attitudes and ideologies that informed and sprung from the introduction of the rehabilitation model into criminal justice policy and prison practice. Situating a sharp rise in crime within the crafting of a constitutional post-apartheid state reveals the incommensurable set of tasks that eventually resulted in the compromise of penal reform. I locate shifting attitudes to crime within the political economy of change to show how ‘rehabilitation’ came to be embraced so uncritically by the state and by the wider public. I then present a review of existing literature on South African prisons, emphasising the need for critical carceral research that is geared less toward reform and more toward broader, more radical critiques of South Africa’s prison system. I make the case for close ethnographic methods in studying the prison, and consider the usefulness of narrative analysis as a crucial way of understanding the ideologies that undergird prison policy and practice.

In an interlude, I consider the methodological limits and ethical challenges of prison research rooted in narrative analysis. I argue that neither a purely objectivist nor a subjectivist approach would be sufficient for understanding the complex workings of prison in South Africa, and that an approach grounded in the dialectical relationship of agency to structure is required. The ethical challenges that accompany this approach, that ultimately requires both closeness and distance from my informants, are contemplated. These considerations are presented separately from Chapter One in order to emphasise not only the practical but also the ethical and philosophical significance of method in this research. An ongoing reflection on ‘what to do with the story’ therefore braids through the thesis.

In Chapter Two, I track the social life of reform by analysing two inmates’ stories of redemption. Both in explicit and in implicit ways, narratives of reform shape and transform the experience of incarceration. I argue that within the moral economy of change of the institution, redemption narratives become significant modes of adapting to prison life. Drawing upon research on narrative identity – of narrative not merely as a representational form but a form of social ontology – I show that the qualities of conversion narratives provide mechanisms for coping with the stigmatisation, trauma, and violence of imprisonment. The prison severs its inhabitants’ chances to establish a normative sense of belonging in any conventional way, rendering narrative a significant instrument in the construction of belonging and inclusion. I show that narratives are more than simple accounts of the past, but that they constitute experiences in the present and projections about the future, in turn producing action and transforming the nature of the carceral experience. The narration of past events and life histories reveal a negotiation between lived reality and aspiration, desire, and hope that manifests in prisoners’ stories of reform. Stories become important sites for negotiating existential questions of identity and purpose, and become meaningful devices for attaining cohesion and, importantly, for generating hope. Drawing from the self-representation of two inmates – Tshepho and Musa – I show that inhabiting the role of reformed inmate produces a number of significant effects. Despite their differences, their stories overlap in revealing ways: both point to the significance of the hope that is produced through redemptive stories. From this, I analyse the dual-effects of hope – both its positive and its pacifying dimensions – to begin to establish an understanding about how complicity on various scales operates.

In another interlude, I reflect on the adverse effects of the redemptive story on prospects for radical change when it leaks from within the closed institutional world of the prison into the political and cultural discursive environment that operates outside of it. I offer broader context both for Musa's and for Tshepho's stories, reflecting more critically on the ways that their narratives of salvation cloud and muddy their biographies, that reveal the precariousness, helplessness, and vulnerability that characterises life outside for most of South Africa's prisoners. I argue that the reform narrative is a powerful discursive disguise that reinforces inmates' misrecognitions of structural violence, foreclosing necessary representations both of crime and of the prison in its use.

In Chapter Three, I show how similar acts of complicity by NGOs and reformers are also embedded in the politics of hope, allowing reform efforts to obstruct more radical forms of critiquing and working within prisons. Using a theatre production performed by inmates from Pollsmoor as a case study, I show how the betterment ideology warps debates and discussions about crime and punishment. The catharsis produced by the play reflects the wider experience of relief that investing in reform produces – it offers an immediate sense of hopefulness about the prison, in turn obscuring critical perspectives about the structural determinations and consequences of imprisonment. I consider the wider implications of betterment stories, arguing that when narratives about redemption become the face of the DCS and NGOs, their use becomes less justifiable. How do stories of individual reform, and moments of creative expression, come up against real structures of entrenched inequality? I conclude the chapter by presenting an exceptional but important instance of critique during the play, in which a few ex-convicts 'broke the script' and initiated a meaningful and realistic conversation about the limits of the prison in effecting change. This shows that by resisting the institutional insistence on individual accountability, new forms of lived critique may arise. Cultural shifts around crime, however tectonic they may be, could develop from these 'grounded' insights and from inmate biographies unpolluted by moralising stories.

* * *

Setting the scene

The historical constitution of penal reform in post-apartheid South Africa

In 1992, the African National Congress said that, “our problems are not being solved by large scale imprisonment,” and that, “however much one condemns [criminal] deeds, the state response should show compassion for the perpetrator” (ANC 1992: 7). After the end of apartheid in the 1990s, the stage was set for an entire renewal of political and social life in South Africa. After being used for decades by the racist apartheid state as an instrument of violent oppression, torture, and warehousing, reconfiguration of the nature of prison practice was urgently needed. Desire to curtail the state’s use of the prison as a mechanism for administering criminal justice can be traced back to 1955, when the ANC and their allies adopted the Freedom Charter – a statement of collective political purpose in the fight against apartheid. It declares that, “Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people, and shall aim at re-education, not vengeance,”³ marking a departure from the violent and punitive uses of the prison by the apartheid government. But for complicated and interpenetrating social and political reasons, the prison has become further embedded in the material and ideological landscapes of post-apartheid South Africa.⁴ Rising reliance on penal reform has deepened the state’s dependence upon the prison as a tool for controlling crime, and has had a profound effect on cultural understandings about the causes of crime and the nature of punishment. The ‘crime wave’ that hit South Africa in the mid-1990s, set against a project of statecraft premised on democracy and constitutionalism, gave rise to a seemingly benevolent compromise to punitive imprisonment - penal reform.

South Africa is understood locally and globally to be ravaged by crime, that began, as the story goes, after the end of apartheid. In *The Truth About Crime* (2017), Jean and John Comaroff remind us that, “Political change has ushered in periods of moral ambiguity, legal uncertainty, and social disorder ... In South Africa, the transition from apartheid had all of these effects” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2017: 55). The ‘crime wave’ of the 1990s that has

³ The Freedom Charter (cited in Kotze and Greyling 1991: 34 and Gillespie 2008: 70)

⁴ Kelly Gillespie’s article ‘Moralising Security: Corrections and the post-apartheid prison’ (2008) provides a comprehensive history of this complex historical compromise.

stretched in the collective imagination into the present has been written into our national history, with mass-mediated accounts of violent crime woven into the everyday experience of life in South Africa. In the late 1990s, crime rates, along with public paranoia and anxiety, escalated to an all-time high, and the government did little to instil confidence in their people that enough was being done about it. Contrary to their initial declarations about decarcerating South African criminal justice, the post-apartheid government cracked down and approached a ‘tough on crime’ approach that has given rise to pervasive rhetoric on that renders criminals as threats. In the public imagination, criminals have been figured as crime carriers and as obstructions to realising true democracy, with populist politicians harnessing this threatening ‘other’ to reinforce Durkheimian formations of collective cohesion. Fikile Mbalula – South Africa’s Minister of Police – frequently invokes the ‘fight against crime’, referencing in a recent publication South Africa’s “stunningly high” crime rates - suggesting that we have, “no time to waste over these criminals that threaten our living spaces”.⁵

The ANC’s original vision has, since their radical declaration in 1992, become warped by the need to express a more populist punitiveness (Super 2016). “Even when states have accepted the vision of transformation,” Amanda Dissel has noted, “they have perhaps been consumed by more urgent concerns”. (Dissel 2008: 172). Comaroff and Comaroff argue that, “illegal acts offend the conscious collective, rupture the given order of things, conjure up a nightmare of chaos, and, consequently, call for punishment” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2017: 10) – but the nature of the punishment that the state could administer needed to be revised, at least superficially, in order to fall into alignment with South Africa’s wider project of moral transformation. Needing to suture the public’s desire for safety (and retribution) into the ‘new’ South Africa, the government, “situated the prison in the moral project of post-apartheid nation-building” (Gillespie 2008: 74) so that the once violent institution could become a part of, rather than a blemish on, the face of a new, democratic, and constitutional South Africa. The insolubility of South Africa’s democratic project and the rising use of the prison is captured well by Kelly Gillespie, whose argument in ‘Moralising Security: Corrections and the post-apartheid prison’ (2008) shows how the prison became so quickly

⁵ There are countless examples of populist politicians invoking the threat of criminality in their speeches. These quotes were taken from an opinion piece written by Mbalula for the Daily Maverick in August of 2017.

mainstreamed by post-apartheid government through an investment in penal reform. Gillespie's observations are instructive:

Steering a fine line between the developmentalist agenda of post-apartheid and the need to garner authority in the fight against the 'crime wave' that accompanied the fall of apartheid, the government has leaned heavily on the principle of penal reform, on the institutional flexibility of the prison, as a means of easing the tension between liberation and incarceration.

(Gillespie 2008: 70)

Paying particular attention to the state's use of Enlightenment philosophies of individual moral transformation as a strategy for justifying the use of the prison, Gillespie shows how the idealised model of rehabilitation and liberal ideologies of betterment have taken root in penal policy and practice. The linchpin of these ideas is the self-determining, responsible agent capable of undergoing moral transformations within the "benevolent moral institution" of the prison (Gillespie 2008: 71) – a notion that finds clear and elaborate expression in the 2005 White Paper on Corrections. Pregnant with rhetoric about change, the document is laden with the lexicon of transformation. 'New beginnings' and 'second chances' pepper the text. The document represents, according to then-Minister of Correctional Services Ngconde Belfour, a:

Fundamental break with a past archaic penal system and ushers in a start to our second decade of freedom, where prisons become correctional centres of rehabilitation and offenders are given new hope and encouragement to adopt a lifestyle that will result in a second chance towards becoming the ideal South African citizen.

(Belfour 2005)

The document frames criminality as, "remediable through moral intervention" (Gillespie 2008: 74) by placing concepts of virtue and values at the centre of the rehabilitative project. The superficiality of this approach could not be starker in a setting like South Africa. Within this framework, "the social and structural determinations [of crime] are erased from the language of law-making and law-breaking" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2017: 26) creating deeply unrealistic expectations about the work that the prison can do to deal with social ills.

We know that prisons do not work to lower crime rates or to make people feel safer.⁶ The pervasiveness of vigilante justice in South African townships and the ubiquity of private security for the middle and upper classes is a testament to this, as are the country's recidivism rates.⁷ South Africa's investment in rehabilitation has been a superficial one, with piecemeal programmes being sparsely implemented across the country. Despite its failure, a lot of state and public resources are funnelled into the prison system. Over a decade after the release of the White Paper, in May 2017, South Africa's Minister of Justice and Correctional Services Michael Masutha gave a predictable speech. "As the Department of Correctional Services," he said, "we continue to work hard to turn prisons into correctional centres" (Masutha 2017). In his speech in 2017, and in the years before then, he has employed the same empty rhetoric about transformation while justifying the state's massive expenditure on the penal sector. The transformation of prisons into 'Correctional Centres' and 'Centres of Excellence' has been superficial, as endemic overcrowding, poor sanitation, health risks, gang violence, and wasted time continue to strip (Agamben 1995) and to mortify (Goffman 1961) the prisons' inhabitants. It is clear that despite the rhetorical renewal of the prison, there has not been as clean a break from apartheid-era penalty as the White Paper might suggest. As Fran Buntman has noted, South African prisons in the post-apartheid era, "share all too much in common with their apartheid precursors" (Buntman 2009: 407). In the United States, Angela Davis has argued that, "The persistence of the prison as the main form of punishment ... has created a historical continuity," that unsettles the 'ruptures' invoked by moments in history like the abolition of slavery, or the end of apartheid (Davis 2003: 37). Michelle Brown has similarly pointed to the historical continuum of race-based oppression that modern prisons signify (Brown 2009).

There is an undeniable relationship between race, class, and incarceration in South African prisons – they are, "filled with people who are almost exclusively black and overwhelmingly poor" (Buntman 2009: 407) – and are therefore complicit in the continued structural oppression of specific South African populations. Gillespie argues that, "The structural logic of punishment could hardly be clearer: prisoners who share the country's overcrowded

⁶ In 'Punishment and Deterrence: Don't expect prisons to lower crime rates' (2008) Lukas Muntingh argues that prisons serve political and economic, rather than rehabilitative, functions

⁷ While there is little accurate statistical data on recidivism, it is estimated that between 80% and 90% of criminals reoffend. See Amanda Dissel's 'Rehabilitation and Reintegration in South African Prisons' in *Human Rights in African Prisons* (2008)

prison cells come disproportionately from poor black communities underwritten by apartheid violation, communities to which they will return with even less chance of employment outside of the criminal economies that have already led them to incarceration” (Gillespie 2008: 83). This problem becomes consistently obscured by wider cultural fears and anxieties about crime and safety – of direct violence, rather than the structural kind that often underlies it. The misrecognition of this profound failure as a moral issue means that the structural causes and effects of imprisonment become further and further occluded. As Ruth Gilmore rightly said, “A conspiracy? Not likely. Systemic. Without a doubt” (Gilmore 2007: 24). Despite the social and political stakes of this continued historical failure, very little critical literature on South African prisons exists. The urgency of the problem has given way to reformist approaches to investigating and writing about the prison – that favour practical rather than philosophical or critical enquiries into South Africa’s carceral sphere - and I will now sketch a brief survey of this body of work.

Review of existing literature

In *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003), the famous prison abolitionist Angela Davis asked us to stop thinking of the prison as ‘inevitable’ (Davis 2003: 9). She puts forward a compelling argument about the permanence of the prison in our social and ideological landscape, asserting that a world without prison, “is simply unthinkable and implausible” (Davis 2009: 9) for most people. It is impossible, she says, “to envision a social order that does not rely on the threat of sequestering people in dreadful places designed to separate them from their communities and families. The prison is considered so “natural” that it is extremely hard to imagine life without it” (Davis 2003: 10). In scholarship and in other research on prisons, the, “emphasis is almost inevitably on generating the changes that will produce a better prison system” (Davis 2003: 20). Within the discursive environment of penal reform, and with the wider public, the media, and the state invested in the framework of rehabilitation, the logic follows that the better the prison is, the better the prisoner will be. There is a perceived chasm between the pragmatism of reform and the utopianism of critical, or abolitionist, approaches to thinking about the prison – with many scholars coming from the latter arguing that reformist approaches only bolster and naturalise the prison (Davis 2003: 20). Yet in many ways, reform offers itself as the only way to practically access prison spaces and improve the living conditions within them. Much of the research on South African prisons reflects this position.

Much of the research that has been conducted on the prison in South Africa takes shape as policy-oriented, applied literature written by individuals under organisations like the Institute of Security Studies and the Civil Society Protection Research Institute. Lukas Muntingh (2008; 2010) has explored extensively the topic of prisoners' rights, while Jean Redpath (2009; 2012) has worked to measure the impact and efficacy of policy and law in South African criminal justice. Teresa Dirsuweit (1999; 2005), Sasha Gear (2002; 2010), Catherine Albertyn (2005), Lisa Vetten (2014), Benita Moolman (2015) and Caroline Agboola (2016; 2016), to name a few, have all explored various dimensions of imprisonment, from sexual violence to rehabilitation programmes. Articles and papers authored by these and other researchers provide necessary, comprehensive, and thoroughly researched overviews of legislation and policy, prison conditions, and detention cycles. Information garnered through this research offers valuable and crucial insights into the way that South African prisons operate, illuminating the system's operational flaws. Yet, in doing so, their work lapses into reform talk – formulating knowledge about how the prison could be improved upon, rather than relied upon less. Much of the recommendations that emerge from this pool of research can be classified as 'positive reforms' – action that is situated firmly within the discursive formation of the system, so that changes that are made are done so within or against existing frameworks (Mathiesen 1974). This research and subsequent reforms seek to provide an antidote for, but not a radical critique of, the problem of mass incarceration in South Africa. Lukas Muntingh's research, for example, reveals the politics of this tension. Muntingh, a prison reform activist in South Africa, often asks questions like, "What should prisons in a constitutional democracy look like?" (Muntingh 2007: 5) even while acknowledging, passingly, that, "prisons are not in themselves democratic institutions" (Muntingh 2007: 5). His argument, in 'Prisons in the Constitutional Democracy' (2007), is:

Rooted in the belief that prisons will be better off if the values underpinning democracy find clear and tangible expression in the prison system: the rights of prisoners will be better protected, prisons will achieve better results, adherence to the rule of law will be maintained, and ultimately society will benefit through increased safety.

(Muntingh 2007: 5)

Muntingh concedes that, "imprisonment should be used as a measure of last resort," (Muntingh 2007: 7), however this point becomes diluted by his focus on making imprisonment more constitutional, rather than on ensuring that South Africa's heavy

dependence on the prison really does become curtailed. The pragmatism and immediacy of reform means that critical questions about the effectiveness of prison become occluded. Davis noted that, “As important as some reforms may be – the elimination of sexual abuse and medical neglect, for example – frameworks that rely exclusively on reforms help produce the stultifying idea that nothing lies beyond the prison. Debates about strategies of decarceration, which should be the focal point of our conversations on the prison crisis, tend to be marginalised when reform takes centre stage” (Davis 2003: 20). In reformist literature, the irony of the prison’s presence in democratic South Africa is almost always acknowledged, but more as a footnote. For example, Muntingh adds a small post-script in the introduction to his article that reads, “Lastly, there are theorists arguing for the abolition of the prison and credible arguments have been forwarded in pursuit of this objective. This article will not address this question; it is accepted that prisons will, for the medium-term at least, be part of the South African landscape” (Muntingh 2007: 6). I would argue that this resignation signifies a form of complicity in the continued power of the prison, and cuts short more radical approaches and interventions. Too much focus on reform can hide the wider structural effects of racially disproportionate imprisonment – exposing terrible prison conditions and recommending ways to make policy more efficient does not help to account for the fact that the prison is fundamentally ill equipped to deal with the problem of crime. As Davis has argued, incarceration “devours social wealth” and, “tends to reproduce the very conditions that lead people to prison” (Davis 2003: 17). Literature on this phenomenon in South Africa is scarce, and does not come near to forming a critical mass. I have positioned the argument in this thesis within wider global debates about the relationship between poverty, crime, and prison, to try to contribute to the small body of literature on the topic that has begun to grow in South Africa in the last decade.

Towards a critical approach to the prison

In *The Number*, Jonny Steinberg noted that, “South Africa incessantly talks about crime, but dares not think about it much. For all the gallons of ink devoted to gruesome tales, few have ever attempted to write a serious history of South African lawbreaking. Why not?” (Steinberg 2004: 9). Critical carceral scholars and prison abolitionists have long argued that the prison reflects a complex set of cultural, political, and institutional relationships that lie beyond the margins of the prison’s walls. This research is therefore a broader critique of society (Davis 2003) than merely an attack on the material sum of any

criminal justice system's parts, bringing into question the social, economic, political, and ideological relationships that comprise systems of criminal justice globally. The answer to Steinberg's question lies, I think, in the vastness and seeming intractability of the problem of mass incarceration in South Africa. Without confronting this crisis, criminality will be further abstracted from the historical and structural conditions from which it comes. Any redress, Gillespie argues, will continue to be, "divorced from any serious material interventions into the impoverished and violent conditions of social life that are the result of South Africa's colonial and apartheid history, and which animate much of post-apartheid criminality" (Gillespie 2008: 83). Critical scholars in the United States, responding to their own crisis of mass incarceration, offer useful insights that broaden the scope of activist research beyond the parameters of reform. This framework holds open ways to think more broadly about lessening the impact that imprisonment has on communities most affected by it, by formulating questions of 'justice', 'harm' and 'accountability' in broader and more critical terms, and situating the phenomenon of mass incarceration within history, politics, and culture.

In South Africa, Kelly Gillespie (2008) has tackled the ideological power of the prison by tracing the discursive constitution of penal reform. She also frequently contributes to local debates concerning criminal and social justice. Gail Super (2016) and Jean and John Comaroff (2017) have recently provided useful discourse analyses of punishment and crime in South Africa, locating criminal justice within the complex social and political worlds that surround it. The critical location of the prison in history and in ideological forms of statecraft, media, and social and cultural discourse is necessary in order to think more radically about criminal justice and its ties to race, class, and politics. South Africa's prison problem demands that more critical incisions into the ideologies that sustain it are made. Kelly Gillespie explains the importance of stepping out of a normative critique of the prison, not only for social justice, but for crime reduction as well:

A case must be made for a serious critical engagement with the misrecognition of moral order as both the cause of, and the solution to, the problem of crime. The parochialism of moral intervention places hope for social transformation in idealistic projects which, even as they demonstrate the good intentions of the state, mark the loss of the kind of radical social and political alternatives that would contribute so much more to the amelioration of criminality.

Over the course of this thesis, I will ethnographically locate this ‘misrecognition of moral order’ within the institutional and social environments that it unfolds in, to reveal the way that betterment retains its legitimacy despite wide and ever-growing evidence that controverts its purported benefits. Akhil Gupta and Aradhama Sharma, in their introduction to *The Anthropology of the State* (2006), have argued that strictly structural representations of the state and its apparatuses can lend it, “a veneer of consistency, systematicity, and centralised control [...] thus eliding the messiness, contradictions and tensions that states congeal” (Gupta and Sharma 2006: 19). Remaining at the level of meta-critique, they argue, may entrench the borders and the ‘vertical authority’ of the state, obscuring potentially revealing social processes. Ethnographic readings of the criminal justice system could, I will argue, point to the ‘arts of existence’ and the political stakes (Stewart 2011) that animate life in South Africa’s prisons, and further help to elucidate the structural processes that sustain it.

The ‘ethnographic lantern’

In prison research both locally and afar, there is a tendency to subordinate detailed, lived experiences of the prison to abstraction and statistics (Ellis 2009: 84). Loïc Wacquant famously noted that, “the ethnography of the prison went into eclipse at the very moment when it was most needed” (Wacquant 2002: 385), arguing in ‘The Curious Eclipse of Prison Ethnography in the Age of Mass Incarceration’ (2002) that discursive and structural critiques of the prison do not sufficiently reveal the contradictions and nuances of everyday prison life. He takes exception to the turn from fine grained research to meta-analyses of the prison that focus more on, “challenging the terms of the discourse that frames and supports prisons” (Wacquant 2002: 386, citing Rhodes 2001: 75) and less on, “getting inside and around penal facilities to carry out intensive, close-up observations of the myriad relations they contain and support” (Wacquant 2002: 386). He insists that it is essential to investigate the relationships of the prison to its inhabitants and surrounding institutions, “on the ground, as they actually exist and operate, rather than from afar and above, from a bird’s eye view unsuited to capturing process, nuance, and contradiction” (Wacquant 2002: 387), suggesting that remaining in the realm of broad critique can silence important human perspectives and social dynamics. Deborah Drake, Rodney Earle, and Jennifer Sloan (2015)

echo this argument: “Occupying the intellectual space between theory and politics, critical [scholars] sometimes appear curiously detached from the people most affected by the structural and systemic imbalances they are concerned with” (Drake, Earle and Sloan 2015: xi). Anthropological methods, they suggest, may shed light on criminal justice in ways that macro-level critiques cannot.

Ethnographic research offers a set of methods, conceptual orientations, and vantage points that other disciplines do not, helping to better account for life ‘on the ground’ in the otherwise fetishised space of the prison. In ‘What Ethnography Tells Us about Prisons and What Prisons Tell Us about Ethnography’, Drake, Earle and Sloan (2015) assert that, “in many countries, ethnographic studies are overshadowed by heavily quantitative approaches,” and that, “bald statistics can blind us to the realities beneath. Prison statistics run the risk of blinding or anaesthetising the observer” (Drake, Earle and Sloan 2015: x). “Penal history,” they say, “can be painted in very broad brushstrokes, and it befalls ethnographers to find detail, texture and nuance within the big picture” (Drake, Earle and Sloan 2015: xi). Ethnographic modes of analysis, making use of the optics of politics, power, performance and personal biography, “can illuminate the shadows of the prison” (Jewkes 2015: foreword). The abolitionist and prison anthropologist Ben Crewe says that ethnography can, “pierce the skin of an institution, penetrate official descriptions and show the interconnections between apparently discrete elements of the prison social structure” (Crewe 2009: 3), counterbalancing the certainties that are produced in other representations of the prison. This approach helps to shed light on what Clifford Geertz has termed, “the real worlding of the world” (Geertz 2007: 222) – and for this reason has been instrumental in my project of rendering intelligible the complex formation of penal reform in all of its social incarnations.

Using ethnography, everyday practices can be read as instantiations of wider problems, helping to demystify wider structural processes whose roots might otherwise be difficult to locate. Ethnographic shards, ‘fragments’ (Tsing 2005: 271) and ‘splinters’ (Geertz 2000: 221) can be productively used to examine wider problems in miniature, as Julie Livingston suggests (Livingston 2012: 181). In her book *Improvising Medicine* (2012) on African oncology in Botswana, Livingston asserts that within institutions and other social sites, broader moral, political and social questions frequently surface – and can be witnessed in, “a condensed fashion” (Livingston 2012: 25). Rather than relying upon official models for explanation,

ethnography makes room to examine how institutional designs become negotiated, transformed, or reproduced. Prisons, and the representational ecologies that form in and around them, can be read as graphic sites for contemplating broader meanings of crime, vulnerability, justice, and accountability in present-day South Africa. In this way, ethnography is an, “empirical lantern” (Biehl and Petryna 2013: 128) that illuminates how people interact with state institutions and dominant discourses inside particular cultural settings. Embodied encounters and first hand accounts can show how state structures become instantiated into peoples’ lives, resisting the uncritical tendency to take hegemonic formations for granted (Gupta and Sharma 2006: 11). These methods could therefore contribute to critical projects of resistance; examining idiosyncratic social forms and dynamics may disclose, “new truths and ways of living that appear, if only fleetingly, in the margins of political and economic rationality and established theory” (Gupta and Sharma 2006: 17). This is a useful insight, because it suggests that looking at the processes through which certain institutions and ideologies attain their hegemony and sustain their power might help locate where there may be further resistance.

Away from abstraction

As I have shown, ethnographic methods could play an enlightening role in a critical approach to South Africa’s penal sphere. Yet close ethnography alone can be insufficient in the broader intellectual project of prison critique. In this thesis, I have tried to incorporate both theoretical and empirical perspectives, to avoid both glossing over the complexity of the prison and fetishising it through ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973). Studying the prison offers up a gamut of theoretical perspectives, including classical models of punishment (Durkheim 1893; Benjamin 1921; Foucault 1975; Agamben 1998; Super 2016; Sexton 2014), structural violence (Galtung 1969; Bourdieu 2000); and the fallacy of the monolithic state (Mitchell 1990; Gupta and Sharma 2006). Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975) traces the genealogy of punishment from the spectacle of torture through to soul correction, and finally into discipline, positing that over the years, punishment has shifted significantly into extracorporeal realms like the mind. South African prisons complicate this history, with imprisonment serving mixed functions of retribution and rehabilitation. Further, his notion of ‘discipline’ functions largely through a Western conception of ‘biopower’ that might be unsuitable in the South African context. His argument that discursive forms (like narratives) systematically produce subjects has, however, been a useful one. Emile Durkheim, Walter

Benjamin, and Giorgio Agamben have analysed the role of the law and of punishment in preserving society's norms. Durkheim's famous functionalist approach renders punishment an integral part of social cohesion, that in many ways has resonances with the relationship of crime to statecraft in post-apartheid South Africa. Benjamin was one of the first thinkers to complicate the relationship between legality and justice, arguing in his 1921 essay 'Critique of Violence' that there is a widespread tendency to favour legality over justice in questions of punishment. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), Agamben offers a useful formulation of 'bare life' – of an individual that has been stripped of their rights – showing that in some contexts, extra-legal violence becomes legitimised by a distance from the law. All of these offer useful frameworks with which to consider penal reform in South Africa.

Sociological models for understanding structural and symbolic violence, offered first by Johan Galtung (1969) and extended by scholars like Philippe Bourgois (2004; 2009) and Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992; 2004), has been a particularly useful theoretical tool for navigating my way through South African criminal justice. Understood as the internalisation of a reduced social and economic status, this model sketches a complex process of embodiment that shapes behaviours, representations, and self-conceptions by marginalised populations (Bourdieu 2000). Galtung has argued that, "Structural violence is silent ... [and] may be seen as about as natural as the air around us" (Galtung 1969: 173). Scheper-Hughes has importantly noted that, "invisible" does not mean "secreted away and hidden from view, but quite the reverse ... things that are hardest to perceive are often those which are right before our eyes and therefore simply taken for granted" (Scheper-Hughes 1996: 889). To avoid letting theory 'reduce the noise of context' (Biehl and Petryna 2013) I have intentionally resisted devising my argument according to any major theoretical paradigm, choosing instead to draw from a range of more elastic concepts and methods that arose organically during the process of my research. In order to elucidate the often 'taken for granted' discourses and practices of prison reform and rehabilitation, I have explored a vast terrain of sites and concepts that attend to cultural issues of embodiment, performance, agency, and structure. In my research, I have used 'narrative' as a conceptual anchor because it attends both to broader issues of discourse and ideology, and to the negotiation and enactment of these structures in more intimate social realms. 'Narrative' can account both for larger epistemological processes and for more human-centred instances of representation 'on the ground'. Embodying the curious relationship between visibility and

invisibility, ‘narrative’ has become a productive analytical tool for studying the ideological formations that support and preserve South Africa’s vexed prison system. The concept acts as a connecting tissue between the macro and the micro, and may also be understood as the hinge between these two things in real life.

Narrative

As an organic link between structure and lived experience, ‘narrative’ emerged during my research both as a subject and as a useful analytical device. It became my conceptual point of entry into the confounding representative world that surrounds the prison in South Africa, and also became a literal point of entry into the field. Institutional barriers make accessing prison difficult, but examining various forms of representation around it – media, state discourse, and inmate biographies – became a way to bypass this difficulty, and falls usefully into the overall aim of this research, that is to interrogate the discursive constitution of penal reform. In this chapter, I have tried to delineate the broader ‘master narrative’ of reform that has arisen from South African prison discourse in the last 25 years. This narrative serves as a backdrop for the rest of my research, but my ethnographic analyses in the remainder of this thesis focus more on the social life of this story – how it becomes inculcated, contested, reproduced, and transformed. While theoretical approaches can produce a kind of myopia, conceptual devices like ‘narrative’ that are rooted in the social world have allowed me to step into the ambiguity and complexity of the prison. My research on narrative has broadly been devised through the lens of structural forces, however gives precedence to individual, everyday acts in order to illuminate the relationship between the two.

Inmate biographies – their own life histories and their narratives of incarceration – are significant sites for unravelling the overlaps, paradoxes, and the disjunctures between rhetoric and reality in South African criminal justice. In this research, I will show how official narratives of rehabilitation become operationalised and negotiated within the social and institutional setting of the prison, arguing that they are mutually constitutive and co-implicated. The analytic flexibility of ‘narrative’ means that I have been able to hold many different perspectives on reform against each other. As Gupta and Sharma have noted, “Cultural struggles are waged in the sphere of representation” (Gupta and Sharma 2006: 11). It is in this realm of representation that explicit discourse of the state is produced (Gupta

and Sharma 2006: 18), but in the shadows of this dominant discourse exist multiple and shifting negotiations of it. Narrative analysis enabled me to attune my research to the instances when ideologies become repeated, and helped make the somewhat abstract notion of ‘ideological reification’ come alive through seemingly mundane self-representations of inmates. This has created productive practical insights, and has cast a light on the confounding dialectical relationship of agency to structure.

Jerome Bruner noted that the possibility of narrative as a form of not only representing but of constituting reality first appeared in the social sciences in 1981, in an issue of *Critical Enquiry* entitled ‘On Narrative’ (Bruner 1991: 6). Since this paradigm shift, a number of writers across disciplines have considered the work that narratives do in the social, cultural, and political worlds, as well as how they structure experience cognitively. Narrative has been linked to anthropological questions of performance, identity, representation, and to wider, more political questions of discourse and ideology (Reisman 1993: 2). The latter understands narrative in terms of hegemony and structural constraint (Foucault 1975, Trouillot 1995, Althusser 1970), while the former privileges questions of social action and agency. Of the large pool on narrative that exists, a few key thinkers have significantly influenced this thesis. Michael Jackson, in his book *The Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hannah Arendt* (2002) takes as its starting point Arendt’s observation that narratives are bridges between private and public spheres (1958) and are thus interfaces and sites of contestation and negotiation. He makes many useful, and philosophical, arguments about the human compulsion to construct narratives and tell stories. Jackson’s approach falls onto the side of the abovementioned spectrum that favours the agency and freedom that stories can produce by looking at their social constitution and use. “To reconstitute events in a story,” he argues, “is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one’s own imagination” (Jackson 2002: 5). For Jackson and for many others before and since, stories are not merely accounts of things, but reflect attempts to gain symbolic control over the world. There is therefore an existential impulse – a ‘narrative imperative’ – to telling stories. Narratives are understood to be a fundamental, ontological part of human life (Ricoeur 1984; Bruner 1991; Somers 1994; Holstein and Gubrium 2000; Jackson 2001). They bestow order and meaning (Ochs and Capps 1996), generate a sense of control (Jackson 2002; Orbush 1997), and can be thought about as ‘cognitive filters’ that shape representation and action (Ewick and Silbey 2003). For Bruner, telling stories is a way of reconfiguring relations in ways that alter the

balance between actor and acted upon, allowing us to feel like agential participants in a world that seems to, “discount, demean, and disempower us” (Bruner 1976, 1990).

Some have argued that the agency that is produced through narrative extends from the purely existential into the political. In much postcolonial scholarship, language and storytelling have been linked with the politics and processes of mental and political liberation. Writers like Ben Okri, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, and George Lamming, to name a few, have all pointed to the creative and emancipatory agency that narratives can engender. Okri called stories, “the highest technologies of being” – “celestial pods, alchemic cauldrons, infinite seeds” of human possibility (Okri 2015). In his book *Sovereignty of the Imagination* (2004), Lamming makes the case for the power of language to define things, and thus to define freedom. Language and narratives are, “endless sources of control” (Lamming 2004: 17) – which can go both ways – but the writer asserts that this quality holds open a crucial space for liberation. For Lamming, narratives can counter, “toxic forms of hegemony [that] hope to bend us to their will and shape our very desires”. He argues that, “the sovereignty of the imagination becomes one foundation for the imagining and desire for freedom” (Lamming 2004: 4).

Scholars concerned with the dialectics between agency and constraint might trouble this radical assertion, arguing that there could never be true ‘sovereignty’ because agency is always bound up with social structures. There are always metanarratives (Alkon and Traugot 2003; Somers 1994) that reside above everyday practices. Conceptions of the dialectic between agency and constraint (Bourdieu 2000, Fleetwood 2016, Duguid 1991, Giddens 1982, Somers 1994, Polletta 2011) become a useful way to think about how these forms of agency might also be conditioned by context. Stories are derived from ‘narrative templates’ (Ewick and Silbey 2003) meaning that they are largely normative (Bruner 1991) - people use plot lines, metaphors, and rhetorical devices to craft their stories, which both engenders agency and reflects structural conditioning. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) has noted that stories are never individually authored, and Pierre Bourdieu (1999) has argued that there are both symbolic and material constraints in the creation of narratives. Sveinung Sandberg, citing Bourdieu, has argued that there is, “not an infinite pool of language and meaning” from which to pull, but rather pull from a shared pool that often reflects discourse and ideology (Sandberg 2010: 455). Individual narratives then have to be understood as being embedded in a wider pool of available templates, moral frameworks, and systems of

language that are normatively sustained, pointing to Foucauldian understandings of knowledge and power.

Whether microscopic or macrosocial, there is wide consensus that narratives constitute, and are constituted by, experience. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur argues in *Time and Narrative* (1984) that stories are not merely aesthetic objects detached from experience, but are woven into everyday existence and may have the capacity to reconfigure reality. Narrative discourse and life are, for Ricoeur, dialectically tied to one another. He explains how narrative modes give otherwise incomprehensible human experiences unity and order, and posits that experience is always acted upon as it has been storied. In this view, experience produces narrative, but narrative produces experience, too. Lois Presser has similarly argued that reality is always inhabited as it has been symbolically interpreted (Presser 2009: 184). Jennifer Fleetwood provides an echo, noting that, “narrative does not follow experience but is intrinsically intertwined with it” (2016: 47). In “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: a relational and network approach” (1994), Margaret Somers, invoking Ricoeur, has argued that stories are used to define who we are, and thus can be a precondition for action. This action in turn produces narratives – showing that the relationship between representation and ontology is reciprocally constitutive. The relationship between narrative and experience becomes sharpened during disempowering life events like imprisonment, and a growing body of researchers have begun to unearth this dialectic.

Narrative research in prisons

In *Narrative Criminology: Understanding Stories of Crime* (2015), Lois Sandberg and Sveinung Sandberg explain that granting primacy to narrative in human actions can provide a useful vantage point for thinking about crime and punishment (Sandberg and Presser 2015: 1). Sandberg (2009; 2010) has shown how street dealers in Oslo incorporate narratives that reflect institutions in their life histories, including conventions drawn both from the criminal justice system and from more ‘sub-cultural’ institutions like gangs. As he put it, “self presentation comes from things that prisoners have learned elsewhere” (Sandberg 2010: 455). Sammy Toyoki and Andrew Brown’s article ‘Identity Work and Legitimacy’ (2013) analyses Finnish prisoners’ narratives to show how identity becomes constructed through stories stemming from the institution: “The identities prisoners claimed or aspired to were culturally sanctioned. Preferred versions of themselves were, arguably, a

disciplinary mechanism which transformed them into self-disciplining subjects, indeed as objects that could be judged and improved” (Toyoki and Brown 2013: 15), importantly showing how institutional logics seep into personal autobiographies. In *Making Good* (2001), Shadd Maruna argues that desistance from crime is intricately linked to coherent identities constructed from narratives: “If such an enormous life transformation is to be believed, the person needs a coherent narrative to explain and justify this turnaround” (Maruna 2001: 85). In ‘Why God is Often Found Behind Bars: Prison Conversions and the Crisis of Self-Narrative’ (2011), Shadd Maruna, Louise Wilson, and Kathryn Curran trace prisoner conversion stories from the perspective of narrative psychology. Drawing from life story interviews, they argue that conversion narratives work as shame management and coping strategies, and show how narrative functions to create new identities that supplant ‘spoiled’ ones (Goffman 1963). Redemptive narratives imbue incarceration with meaning and purpose, empower otherwise powerless prisoners by making them agents of God, provide inmates with the language and framework of forgiveness, and produces a sense of control over the future.

Writing about his experience in Cape Town’s Pollsmoor prison in *The Number* (2004), the prolific South African author Johnny Steinberg says that, “Pollsmoor is a journalist’s paradise; it is an interminable labyrinth of pure story” (Steinberg 2004: 17) and, further, that “prison is a world nourished,” by narrative (Steinberg 2004: 18). Steinberg employs narrative as a device for presenting his material, and also weaves it into his book as a theme that reveals the social work that stories can do, especially for people trying to make sense of poverty, crime, and incarceration. While *The Number* attends specifically to numbers gangs in South Africa’s prisons, many of his observations about the power of narratives to generate structure have been useful for my own research. As Steinberg noted, it is not difficult to acquire inmates’ autobiographies, anecdotes about prison life, and the hopes and expectations of offenders for life after release. This is because stories appear to be a significant part of the experience of imprisonment. They are used in the construction and reconstruction of biographies, to interpret and make sense of the past, and act as vessels of hope and optimism for the future. Prisoners’ stories are, however, never straightforward reflections of reality – they contain traces of biography, desire, and dominant and subcultural plots and subject positions. The constitution of narratives within the prison therefore points to an important dialectic between individuals, experience, and institutions. The analysis of these processes is fraught with methodological and ethical challenges. In the

next section, before proceeding to Chapter Two, I will briefly consider the ethical grey zones and methodological double binds inherent in the study of individual narratives as they operate within wider institutions.

* * *

Interlude

A Blessing in Disguise? – Ethical grey zones and methodological
challenges

It was a stifling hot Sunday at Leeuwkop prison. I was there to visit Musa in Medium-C, but had taken the wrong bus and found myself waiting outside of Medium-B for another one. I watched a visibly bored little girl tug at her mother's dress; other visitors never have the same curiosity about the surroundings as me - for them, visiting the prison is the only way that they get to see their loved ones, so it has become a normal feature of their weekends. After what must have been 45 minutes, another bus arrived to take us on the route that would get me to Musa. After being searched, I waited for half an hour, growing more anxious that I'd let Musa down. Just a few days before he'd complained to me that his family had long stopped visiting regularly, often promising not to come but never showing up. I'd told him I'd be there at 10 and it must have been close to noon by the time I was finally called.

I entered the visitor's section – a crowded and humid room with a corrugated tin roof that only worsened the enveloping heat generated by all of the bodies in it. Wives, girlfriends, brothers, friends, and small children huddled close to their incarcerated loved ones.

“You only have an hour,” the warden said. There is something perverse about being so pressed for time in a place where there is such an abundance of it to kill.

I saw Musa and we found a space to sit next to a large, perspiring inmate who was being visited by a woman and a young boy in a Spiderman costume.

“It's the boy's birthday,” Musa whispered to me.

I had been meaning to get the details of Musa's crime and arrest from him, so I asked him for clarification.

“So, why are you in here?” I asked.

“The reason I came here, Kath ... it was salvation for me. I was saved from the person I was becoming out there, you know” He smiled. “I got to grow and become a better person in all aspects of my life. It's given me a new lease on life, you could say. Because now I'm going to lead a different life than the one I did before coming here”.

“Oh, I meant ‘why are you here?’ as in ‘what crime did you commit?’ – sorry”.

We laughed, and he told me more about how he'd slid into armed robbery from petty theft as a teenager, and about the day he got arrested.

“I'm here because I committed a crime, Kath, but that's not the whole reason. I see things in a different light since coming here, you know”.

“So you're saying it's a good thing that you came here?” I asked.

“I definitely changed in here, for the better. For me, Kath, the prison is a blessing in disguise,” he responded. “And I know many of the men in here say the same thing”.

In the short two years that I’ve been researching prisons in Johannesburg, I’ve heard imprisonment being described as ‘a blessing in disguise’ from almost every inmate and ex-convict that I have spoken to. South African prisons are notorious for failing to deliver on their promises to rehabilitate and to give any real expression to prisoners’ rights. Better understood as ‘warehouses for the poor’ replete with the risk of arbitrary violence, disease, malnutrition, and associated with stigmatisation and a loss of dignity, I have always been struck by this (mis)representation. How could it be that imprisonment is so often interpreted as a blessing – as a positive episode in someone’s life – even if ‘in disguise’? This conundrum formed the basis of this investigation, and has emerged not only as a question about the complexity of South Africa’s carceral world, but also as a methodological challenge. It is true that the prison has been refashioned through an elaborate discursive disguise, as I tried to trace in Chapter One, but that does not account for the curious interpretation by inmates – those at the centre of the prison – of the institution as a beneficial experience. I became faced with the ethically and methodologically charged question of what to do with inmates’ stories – stories that lend themselves to the overall ideology of betterment and reform that sustains the prison in South Africa. This question is universally anthropological, however became sharpened in this context – when my own point of view (and much statistical evidence) so profoundly opposed the stories being offered to me by my informants (people who systemically have their voices silenced). Taken uncritically, the autobiographies offered to me by inmates – that minimise the structural causes of their crime in favour of moral redemption – provide evidence for the ‘good’ work that prisons are doing. Yet they could also provide evidence of the coercive nature of the institution. What are the possibilities and limits of conducting research of this nature, and what is the most appropriate methodological approach?

A dispute that unfolded in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 2002 is illuminating. In a lengthy review, Loïc Wacquant presents a scathing critique of three books – Mitchell Duneier’s *Sidewalk* (1999) on homeless street vendors, Katherine Newman’s *No Shame in my Game* (1999) on the working poor, and Elijah Anderson’s *Code of the Street* (2001) on the struggles of inner city residents – entitled ‘Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality, and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography’ (2002), in which he makes the case for critical ethnographic

distance rather than a liberal, humanising approach when researching the ‘underclass’. He argues that all three authors explain rather than critically analyse their participants’ behaviours and orientations, presenting them needlessly and naively favourably. “All three authors,” he argues, “put forth truncated and distorted accounts of their object due to their abiding wish to articulate and even celebrate the fundamental goodness,” of their informants (Wacquant 2002: 1496). For Wacquant:

The task of social science, ethnography included, is not to exonerate the character of dishonoured social figures and dispossessed groups by “documenting” their everyday world in an effort to attract sympathy for their plight. It is to dissect the social mechanisms and meanings that govern their practices, ground their morality (if such be the question), and explain their strategies and trajectories, as one would do for any social category, high or low, noble or ignoble.

(Wacquant 2002: 1470)

Didier Fassin (2011) has made a similar point, noting that compassion in the face of inequality can be depoliticising. Duneier’s and Anderson’s counter suggest that ethnography should, “shed light on the basic humanity” (Duneier 2002: 1575) of its subjects and that researchers’ portraits of their informants should strive to be, “faithful to their understandings of themselves” (Anderson 2002: 1575) – arguing that a preoccupation with theory can ignore important and revealing human dynamics. This debate exposes a difficult position – should the ethnographer be faithful to their personal or their academic commitments? Too much focus on structure, as Duneier and Anderson suggest, can subordinate cultural complexity to theoretical models and may result in the loss of important perspectives. It can also render informants as psychologically defeated, pathetic, and helpless. Yet presenting the self-portraits of my informants’ uncritically would thwart the chance to analyse and critique the mechanisms and the conditions under which people follow certain paths, and the consequences of those actions. I have tried in this thesis to resolve this seemingly insoluble conflict by holding off from heavily my informants’ stories as I present them, and inserting analyses at key moments in the thesis where I believe they could be contextualised or elucidated by theory.

Taking the redemptive story on from a critical perspective throws into relief the difficulties outlined in the dispute above. It requires a level of scepticism, distrust, and

distance that can begin to feel difficult when you establish a relationship with your informants. The redemptive story throws up other important questions. What can a 'soft' prison reveal about the insidiousness of reform discourses? What can 'good' prisoners show us about the interpolation of structural violence? I have stepped into this awkward terrain rather than distancing myself from it in favour of stories that speak more explicitly to the violence and the detrimental effects of imprisonment. This requires understanding 'violence' not in any simple terms, but rather violence in its 'structural' and 'symbolic' incarnations. This extends beyond any straightforward reading of the material forces that hinder prisoners' freedom, and into their embodiment of the discursive and symbolic effects of power (Bourdieu 1999; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2000). This understanding is useful because it helps to account for the 'denial' that I perceived in Musa's redemptive story. In order to better understand how this works, and what its effects are, I tracked the reform narrative – that manifests as religious conversion, as salvation, and in more secular ways as the emergence of the aspirational or entrepreneurial self – and how it becomes internalised, operationalised, negotiated, transformed, and reproduced. I tried to let the material lead, without losing sight of or obscuring the power and presence of the coercive context within which this all unfolds. The methodological move that I have made has been less to try and discount my informants' stories, but to bring into focus the context within which they operate and from which they stem. I have undertaken to contextualise these narratives within wider contexts – of the institution, and of the general discursive environment of possibility in South Africa – to frame and to augment these hopeful, optimistic stories without thinning the potency of the social and psychological work that they perform.

I conducted multi-sited research to gather material for this thesis. I have spent time at Magistrate's Courts in Johannesburg, many weekends both at Boksburg Correctional Services and Leeuwkop Prison during visiting hours, and travelled to Cape Town to watch a play at the Artscape Theatre that was devised and performed by inmates from Pollsmoor in collaboration with Nicro, an NGO working in South Africa's criminal justice sector, and a Norwegian theatre programme called Varde Theatre. The bulk of the material presented, however, comes from countless hours of discussion with Musa and Tshepho – inmates at Leeuwkop and Boksburg respectively – with whom I have become close. Speaking via Whatsapp and in phone calls, I have garnered their biographies and their thoughts and experiences of prison in rich and exhaustive detail. Rather than being a hindrance or a compromise, the use of social media to speak with my informants highlighted the mediating

role that language and text can have in representing identity and experience. Instead of being seduced into security around my information, the sense that the evidence that I collected was only partial became heightened. This method, then, lent itself well to my argument about the partiality of narratives and other discursive forms. Beyond the abovementioned dilemma that I faced, I encountered other ethical quandaries during my research ‘in the field’. In this thesis, I focus less on the nature of Tshepho’s and Musa’s crimes, not to downplay the harm that their victims would have experienced, but to show that the current functioning of South Africa’s criminal justice system helps neither victims nor offenders in really making room for change. I do not claim that there should be no accountability when a crime is committed (as abolitionist frameworks are often incorrectly blamed for suggesting) – but that individual acts of harm need to be contextualised within broader forms of harm if effective solutions to crime can be established. I negotiated consent with all of the informants that I have included in this thesis, trying to keep it active and dynamic rather than static. I was granted consent to use all of the information that I have included in this research. Tshepho and Musa did not approve some stories, insights, and conversations for inclusion, and I have left those out of this thesis. My concern about communicating with them using a cellphone – contraband in prison according to official rules – quickly fell away, as I realised that the presence of cellphones in prisons is a practical norm – an ‘open secret’. The following chapter is the result of many months of this kind of research. In it, I try to straddle the line between rendering Tshepho’s and Musa’s self-portraits faithfully, and analysing their stories for a more critical evaluation of their effects. This has meant bracketing analytical cynicism for moments in the narration of their stories, so that the politics of absorption into moralising narratives can be disentangled.

* * *

Chapter Two

Place of Hope

“Hey, sister, don’t forget to hide your valuable possessions out of sight,” a warden dressed in head-to-toe beige shouts to me. “Crime likes to rear its ugly head here from time to time”.

“Thanks,” I call out, already having done that. I am always amused by the irony of the ‘Park at Own Risk’ sign in the prison’s visitor’s parking.

Boksburg Correctional looks like most of the other prisons I’ve been to. It’s a large, bleak, brick compound surrounded by high fences curving inwards, giving the impression that this place is a closed social world with its own system of gravity and its own social logics and moral ecology. Tangles of barbed wire enhance the divide.

“Welcome to Boksburg Correctional Services,” a large, green sign exclaims. “We Serve With Pride”. Underneath it, another garish sign affirms that it’s, “A Place of New Beginnings!” in mustard yellow cursive. Large pot plants have been placed at the entrance presumably to soften its austere appearance, but they somehow make it worse. Browning leaves slump over the sides of their containers. Large pine trees remain upright despite the dry, brown decay that is spreading upwards from their roots.

After the entrance ritual that I’ve become accustomed to during weekend visits with Tshepho, and a few extra minutes of waiting for an official to confirm my permission to be there – it is a Thursday, after all, so not regular visiting hours – I am let in. On the bus to the juvenile centre, the warden driving me asks what I’m doing here.

“I know Tshepho,” I reply. “I’m writing about all the good work he does here with you at Boksburg”. This isn’t entirely true, but it’s the story that got me in. I’ve learned by now that certain stories open up doors, literally, while others keep them firmly shut.

The driver smiles. “What’s Tshepho doing today? He is a star in the prison, that one,” he replies paternalistically, although he must be no older than Tshepho himself. If by ‘star prisoner’ he means ‘poster child for South Africa’s project of moral reform’ then I couldn’t agree more.

“He’s opening up a new project for the young offenders, where they read and write poetry,” I say. “He’s an amazing guy”.

“He’s always busy with one project or another,” the warden adds. “Last month the director took him and a few others to speak at the school in Vosloorus”.

I stop myself from saying I’d heard all about it already. That might provoke questions about how Tshepho and I communicate, and a star prisoner would not have a cellphone in prison.

Boksburg’s juvenile detention centre is the only maximum juvenile facility in Gauteng, and houses about 300 inmates serving sentences between fifteen years and life. After another search, another round of questions, and some more confusion about my presence, I’m sent

down a brick corridor to wait for the prison's spokesperson to meet me. "Welcome To A Place of New Beginnings" has been painted in fluorescent green across the corridor's peach coloured walls, with a graduation cap and a scroll. The dark visitor's waiting room that I've been sent to has also had its walls adorned with murals. From a wooden bench, I examine the paintings. On my left, a group of smiling men line the sky blue wall. They're all the same height and shape, like those strings of people that emerge from cutting just one little man into a folded sheet of paper. There must not have been a wide variety of paint to use, because their skin is either yellow or orange, some of the men blending almost seamlessly into their orange jumpsuits. A large speech bubble rises from them: "Place of Hope!" they exclaim in chorus. The opposite walls provide a silver, graffitied echo – "HOPE". Behind the wooden desk where the officials normally sit and call out names during visitation, a tatty poster lists "Our Vision" in bullets, providing a summary of the White Paper whose values seem only to exist in words in this place. A halogen light above me flickers. The sloping ceiling appears near to giving way to a leak. The orange peoples' declaration of hope is drowned out by the bleak reality of the prison; the words try, but fail, to compete with their miserable surroundings.

The official with whom I'd spoken to over the phone, after Tshepho had requested that I come today, arrives with a few other officials and outsiders. He takes us into a stark courtyard surrounded by more high walls and four deserted watchtowers. A few plastic seats have been set up, and about 100 juvenile offenders sit on the floor behind them. I spot Tshepho talking to his collaborators Mandla and Mpumelelo. After about 20 minutes, Pat – the prison's spokesperson – addresses the small audience.

"Our greatest goal is to rehabilitate the next generation – you guys in here. We've got a lot of programmes in the pipeline – education, therapy, art – and we encourage you to use this opportunity to turn your lives around". It was a predictable speech, placing responsibility on the inmates for their own transformation.

"Once you acknowledge that you've failed," he continues, "you can begin to build up a new life for yourself".

Tshepho is introduced. I'd never seen him speak publicly, but he'd sent me a voicenote of himself rehearsing the day before, so I was prepared for a powerful speech.

"Welcome, brothers and sisters, to the launch of Poetry Passion Group," he says. He offers a history of the project's beginnings, and how, through hard work and determination, he acquired permission to bring the mini-project into the juvenile centre. "Poetry allowed me

to fight my demons, to face the music, and to forgive myself. Poetry, with public speaking, is my passion. In them, I became a better man. Brothers, do not be weighed down by the burdens of your bad decisions. Rise up, and be better. It is your choice”. He recites a poem entitled, “I Read for Redemption” and ends his speech with an Oprah Winfrey quote, and a nod to Gayton McKenzie: “We all hold the pens required to write our names in the hallways of success, but not everyone is willing to fight for the ink,” he declares.⁸ “When you take back your story, you give yourself a chance to repent. I encourage all of you to rewrite your story, like I rewrote mine”.

Framing the chapter

Foucault would say that discipline ‘makes’ individuals (Foucault 1975), but as Comaroff and Comaroff importantly noted, “there is more to social life than the disciplinary determinations” of this model (Comaroff and Comaroff 2017: 76). Narratives and other processes of self-making are often thought about in relation to how they work to bolster and reproduce hegemonic ideologies. These approaches emphasise what social action, or social outputs like narratives, do for discourse and hegemony, but rarely consider what narratives do for the subjects that are responsible for their reproduction. In this chapter, I will track the social processes and try to sketch some of the conditions under which certain narratives – specifically the ‘redemptive story’ – become internalised and used, either consciously or unconsciously, by inmates in the institutional setting of the prison. It is my aim to uncover the politics of this absorption in order to understand its pervasive presence in the self-representations of inmates, whose biographies reveal precariousness, vulnerability, and victimisation. As I have established, the prevailing narrative of reform that animates South African criminal justice is rooted in a belief that the prison should be a catalyst for individual moral transformation – a monastic space that encourages reflection and accountability. Many accounts of prison life reveal that this is rarely the case. How and why, then, does the institutional trope of betterment come to be absorbed by inmates? I would argue that it is insufficient to think of prisoners’ reform stories as being the products of ‘discipline’ or docility in any simple sense. Instead, I want to analyse their use by prisoners to show that there is a degree of agency, however fraught, in the appropriation of these stories, and that far more

⁸ This is a paraphrased quote from McKenzie’s website, in the description for his book *A Hustler’s Bible* (2017) <http://www.gaytonmckenzie.com/product/a-hustlers-bible-the-new-testament/>

complex reasons exist for their popularity than any straightforward cases of ‘change’. Gupta and Sharma have argued that analyses of the, “ideological entrenchment and shifts in different institutional and social sites, through everyday practices, are important because they suggest how and where struggles against marginalisation and exploitation can be waged” (Gupta and Sharma 2006: 20). Tracking these stories, and highlighting the contradictions that they reveal, may be used as a source of grounded critique against penal reform and the powerful ideologies that undergird it.

In this chapter, I want to think about what the prison produces, rather than what it constrains. Wacquant explains that punishment in its contemporary incarnation, “must be viewed not through the narrow and technical prism of repression but by recourse to the notion of production” (Wacquant 2010: 122). The use of the prison has, “engendered new categories and discourses, novel administrative bodies and government bodies, fresh social types and associated forms of knowledge” (Wacquant 2010: 122). Without losing sight of the prison’s repressive qualities, to which I will return later in this thesis, the prison must also be understood as generative of specific identities, stories, and frames for understanding the past, the present, and the future – all of which can be understood through the optics of narrative. Jonny Steinberg has noted that, “Stories in prison are weapons, tools, the stuff of action; they are insinuated into the exercise of power” (Steinberg 2004: 18). This power is ambiguous, and can refer both to hegemony, and to power that springs from individual manifestations of agency. In tracking the stories of Tshepho and Musa, I will employ a Bourdieuan sensibility about the dialectical relationship of structure to agency. Understood in this framework, the ‘betterment story’ put forward by the state through discourses on penal reform is also a vector of agency inside of the prison - it is both constraining and enabling. Both Anthony Giddens (1981) and Stephen Duguid (2000) have noted that the prison is a prime site for the enactment of these dialectical processes: Giddens’ conception of the ‘dialectics of control’ posits that institutions like prisons can be simultaneously enabling and constraining (Giddens 1985: 197), and Duguid has described the prison as both, “an authoritarian destroyer of selves and a nurturing centre for the creation of new selves” (Duguid 2000: 85). The use of narrative within the prison reflects this dialectic: the redemptive script becomes absorbing for a number of reasons, and part of the reason lies, I hope to show, in the control that authoring your own story (however much it is unconsciously drawn from metanarratives) produces.

Tshepho

My phone buzzed. ‘Transformation Legacy wants to connect with you on Facebook Messenger,’ an alert informed me.

“Good evening, sister,” his message read. “I thought you may want to know. I am back to reality and hard at work. I have been incarcerated since 1999 and today I am 37. But all is not lost; I am due to be released soon and I am on fire to go out and take my rightful place – I am going to change the world”. His message continued, “I have written two books already and am working on getting them published. I also have a vision to establish a company called Motivation Empire which is going to have a great impact on Africa”.

Before embarking on this research, I thought that finding a prison informant would be difficult. I was soon proven wrong by a man named Tshepho - an inmate from Boksburg Correctional Services in East Gauteng. He had found out about my research through Musa, with whom he had recently won a public speaking competition, and reached out to me to provide his insights on prison life. Tshepho’s proactive assertion of himself into my research called to mind Jonny Steinberg’s description of conducting research in Pollsmoor Prison: “Everyone wants to stop you, to own you, to unload his tales into your notebook” (Steinberg 2004: 17). His first message, I soon learned, was a good illustration of Tshepho’s approach to communicating. His messages seem to follow a formula – a recipe – that includes an acknowledgment of past or present difficulties, the mention of an achievement, and a plan of action for the future. He has an abundance of self-assurance and drive, a lot of composure, and a deep sense of mission. Everything he says betrays a clarity of vision about his purpose and the meaning of his existence, and these qualities explode in a number of textual forms on social media, in books he’s authored, in his poetry, and in his conversations with me. Tshepho’s sense of self has been so well plotted, edited, and rehearsed that within a few days I felt that there was no room to discover anything more about him.

Tshepho has achieved many things during his 17 years in prison. At the time that we began speaking, he was in the process of launching ‘Poetry Passion Group’ and was the leader of the ‘Making a Difference Generation’ – a small group of prisoners in Boksburg that meets every week to discuss motivational speaking. He’s the founder of ‘Motivation Empire’ – a business that he plans to register and to turn into a publishing house after release. He’s written a book called *Go and Motivate Them* – a handbook for aspiring

motivational speakers replete with quotes, bulleted lists, instructions, meditations, and poems on the topic. The book's cover – also his Facebook and Whatsapp profile picture – depicts a man standing at a podium, arms raised, while a crowd cheers below. I was emailed a copy of the draft along with some poetry, a few chapters of the autobiography he'd been working on, and his 'profile'. Like his other textual constructions, this 'profile' (a CV) seems bound up with his identity – not as a representation of it, but as an incarnation of it. His profile is a cohesive, succinct, and legible document that encapsulates everything Tshepho believes anyone would need to know about him. In this contained and cogent document lies Tshepho's life.

“Who is Tshepho?” one slide asks. A bulleted list provides the answers. He is an inspirational speaker, public speaking champion, public speaking trainer, author, events organiser, and social entrepreneur. The next slide, with similar clarity, reads, “Tshepho– A Giant Born in the Wilderness” and includes a photograph of him in a suit, leaning against a wall. The document touches on, but doesn't emphasise, his status as a prisoner. It lingers in the backdrop but does not define him. His biography reveals this:

Tshepho is a son of South African soil, born and raised in the East Rand of Gauteng. Due to the pressures of youth, Tshepho lost his way when he was a teenager and he got involved in doing drugs and crime which ultimately landed him in prison. He got arrested when he was 19 and he spent almost two decades in prison.

Tshepho describes a moment of rupture, and outlines his achievements since this change:

That is where he found his purpose. In 2004 he received the Lord Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour and that is when he started to turn his life around. He went back to high school to complete his education and he went on to study Business Management in which he finished his N6 certificate and he is currently pursuing a Degree in Communication Science. He is a founding member of an organisation called the 'Making A Difference Generation' which promotes self development. In both 2014 and 2016 Tshepho entered a Regional Public Speaking competition in which he won and earned the title of Best Public Speaker of the year.

Tshepho's use of the third person subtly signifies a remove between the 'real' Tshepho and the new, improved version of himself that he has crafted over the years. The following slides describe “Tshepho the Author” and “Tshepho the Speaker”, “Tshepho's Vision” and,

finally, “Tshepho – An Icon of Change”. The document ends with an adage provided by Socrates: “The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new”. This quote is Tshepho’s personal motto, and has made it into his books, Facebook and Whatsapp statuses, and into our conversations. In repeating this quote, and by repeating other things like, “I am a motivational speaker” or “I am an icon of change”, Tshepho demonstrates a cohesive and unitary sense of self. All of Tshepho’s representations overlap and connect, compounding into a united and cohesive identity – like a brand. Narrative analysis might usually require an analytical leap, in order to read social forms using techniques most associated with literature, but with Tshepho his narrative exists literally in textual forms – it is where his identity resides. His close connection to written and spoken words highlights this – his lived experience is also his narrative experience, and they seamlessly overlap. As I tried to understand Tshepho better, I felt that I would never be able to penetrate the choreographed and polished version of himself that he so devotedly embodied. Yet, the more we spoke, I began to realise that this version is not an artificial construct, but who he really is. I stopped trying to penetrate what I perceived as a veneer, realising that remaining on the ‘surface’ would produce a very real, and not superficial, understanding of his self-conception and his interpretation of life in prison. Tshepho’s narrative is sutured deeply into his identity; as a motivational speaker and an author, Tshepho exhibits a profound belief in the power of language to effect positive transformation and to reconfigure the terms of reality.

The most salient and illustrative example of the interpenetration of narrative and identity in Tshepho’s life is his autobiography. One morning, I received an email from ‘motivatedtshepho@gmail.com’.

“Hello sister,” it read. “Please find attached my autobiography entitled ‘The Round About Way’. Let me know your thoughts”.

Tshepho’s metaphorical adage about being the author of his own story turned out not to be metaphorical at all. *The Round About Way*, in 197 pages and 30 091 words, captures his entire biography, from birth to the present, and includes poetry, some of his speeches, letters written to his victims, confessions, biblical scriptures, and motivational thoughts. The book is framed as a journey to his ‘Rightful Place’ – and eleven chapters detail his path to finding it. Chapters titled ‘The Age of Innocence’ and ‘The Seed of Corruption’ capture his formative years and his first encounters with crime. ‘My Darkest Hour’ and ‘The Truth that was Never Told’ describe in rich detail his first encounters with the criminal justice system

and his experience in awaiting trial prison, while ‘The Survival’ details his joining the 26s gang after being sentenced to life in prison for murder. His autobiography takes a turn at ‘The Day of Salvation’ that describes an epiphany-like moment of change that is laden with biblical scripture. ‘Icon of Change’ and ‘My Rightful Place’ describe the Tshepho that I have come to know – and delineate many of his achievements, his first experiences with public speaking and motivational talking and his subsequent accomplishments, as well as his deep connection to the church. His final chapter - ‘Burying the Past’ - makes a case for self-forgiveness, and includes letters to the families of his deceased victims, and the woman that he raped.

My Rightful Place

In granular detail, Tshepho’s autobiography captures a difficult life. Yet, using the narrative template of salvation, he manages to refashion a tragic biography into the story of a quest, showing that something good can always come from a trying situation, or a hard life. He draws from a range of different texts, exhibiting both a conscious and unconscious appropriation of generic forms, metaphors, literary references, quotes, and moral lessons. Like its author, the book is deeply intertextual, with quotes from Oprah Winfrey and Elon Musk, Socrates, and Gayton McKenzie. Filled with shards and scraps of biography, myth, conventional narrative tropes and institutional discourse, the autobiography is a captivating palimpsest - overall, however, his autobiography bears the unmistakable mark of a Christian salvation story. During a visit one Saturday morning, I discussed the book with its author.

“Writing it gave me a chance to reflect on the past, and on how far I have come as a person. I have grown so much from the person that I used to be, Kathy,” he said. “And when I wrote all of it down, I realised that. I am so much more than this orange jumpsuit”.

In writing his story, Tshepho reclaimed authorship and authority over his life. He was able to make sense of his past and his incarceration, rendering them the keys to becoming the successful person that he is today. Tshepho also revealed that in writing his story, his purpose became clearer.

“I realised the reason why God put me here. He tested me in many ways, and I failed. But I will not fail in doing the work that he has set out for me. I am going to change many lives, Kathy. When I come out, I am going to make a great impact”.

Michael Jackson has noted that, “Every human being needs some modicum of choice, craves some degree of understanding, demands some say, and expects some control over his or her life” (Jackson 2002: 8). Tshepho’s reason for writing his own story reveals this psychological compulsion – it is not simply about recording his past and providing an account of the changes that he’s made – in writing his story, he was able to work existential questions out in the process. Tshepho both asks and answers philosophical questions in his autobiography – in poems like, “Why Am I Here?” and “Once You Find Yourself” – and, in doing so, has transformed his understanding and experience of imprisonment, while mapping out a plan for the future. There’s a part in his book where Tshepho confirms all of this.

“I have a vision,” he says, “And that vision has changed my life. While I work for my vision, my vision works for me in the following ways: It builds my self esteem, it gives me direction, it inspires me, it motivates me, and it helps me to overcome difficulties”. He concludes, “Having a vision will change your life”. Tshepho’s ‘vision’ can be read as the narrative that he has constructed around himself about being a motivational speaker and an ‘icon of change’. It is part truthful, part aspirational and future-oriented. In *Go and Motivate Them*, Tshepho asserts that, “I am not a motivational speaker when I am on stage, motivating people is my life”, emphasising the interpenetration of experience and narrative in Tshepho’s life.

A Heaven out of Hell

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur argues extensively in his three-volume work *Time & Narrative* (1984) that there is a deep connection between narrative and experience. “Narrative,” he claims, “is a privileged means by which we reconfigure our confused, unformed ... temporal experience” (Ricoeur 1984: 54). For Ricoeur, narrative identity is, “an open-ended, incomplete, imperfect mediation, namely, the network of interweaving perspectives of the expectation of the future, the reception of the past, and the experience of the present” (Ricoeur 1984: 67). He argues that there is a close relationship between identity and storytelling, asserting that stories are not merely aesthetic objects disconnected from experience, but that they are rooted in the very fabric of life. Narrative discourse and life are for Ricoeur dialectically tied to each other; through this lens, the stories that we tell about ourselves are inseparable from identity. Jerome Bruner similarly said that narratives are, “... instruments of the mind in the construction of reality” (Bruner 1991). Joan Didion

asserts that, “we tell stories in order to live” (Didion 1979: 11), while Hannah Arendt has argued that, “Life without speech ... is literally dead to the world. It has ceased to be human life because it is no longer lived among men” (Arendt 1958: 176). For Dan P. McAdams, “each of us constructs, consciously or unconsciously, a personal myth” (McAdams 1993: 11). It is clear, through Tshepho, that narrative functions beyond representation, and extends into the ontological dimension of human life. Constructing a narrative can be seen as, “a coping strategy that involves making words stand for the world, and then, by manipulating them, changing one’s experience of the world” (Jackson 2002: 18). This transformative potential is important, and calls to mind John Milton’s famous assertion, spoken through Satan in *Paradise Lost* (1667), that, “The mind is its own place, and in itself / can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven” (Milton 1667: lines 253-54).

The relationship between agency and narrative becomes sharpened in contexts like the prison. The experience of imprisonment can lead to, “the disorientation of a person’s self-narrative” (Maruna 2006: 180), meaning that existential issues of purpose, belonging, and identity become threatened in this space. This struggle becomes worked out through the construction and use of narrative as a form of representation. The prison is a repressive institution – it constrains not only the body, but in many ways narrows the opportunities that an individual may have to feel a sense of belonging or self-esteem. As Shadd Maruna, Louise Wilson, and Kathryn Curran noted in ‘Why God is Often Found Behind Bars’ (2006), “Central to the stigmatising process experienced by prisoners is the loss of one’s identity as an individual and the transofmration into a ‘type’ or a member of a larger, undifferentiated group: prisoner, offender, criminal ...” (Maruna et al 2006: 172), and reform narratives offer themselves to prisoners as a means to supplant their ‘spoiled identities’ (Goffman 1963). The prison consequently becomes an extreme environment for, “the reconstruction of identity through narrative” (Maruna et al 2006: 169), which might help to explain why prisoners are such, “compulsive storytellers” (Steinberg 2004: 21). In prison, the function of stories to generate a sense of purpose, meaning, order, and hope becomes heightened. The religious conversion narrative that Tshepho has aligned his own biography with performs all of these functions, and also offers a ‘framework for forgiveness’ (Maruna et al 2006: 172). Tshepho’s daily Facebook statuses include quotes from the bible about the changes that salvation brings. Aphorisms like “Corinthians 5: 17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!” and “Isaiyah 43: 18-19: “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a

new thing!” weave their way through his daily interpretation of prison life. Using the lens of Christian redemption, Tshepho’s incarceration not only becomes bearable, but is rendered instrumental to his moral change.

Tshepho’s story is fulfilling and affirming – in his autobiography, he is able to exonerate himself by absolving guilt for his past actions. He also produces a sense of belonging by rendering himself an active and meaningful member of a wider community, and as an inspiration to others. In his book, Tshepho asserts that, “My time is now and the day has come to take my rightful place. God has allowed that I take the roundabout way to get to my destiny so that you who is reading this book may quickly find your purpose and know what to do with your life”. Others can use his story, and in this way his past experiences did not happen in vain. As Steinberg has noted, stories offer a new language and a framework that can help to construe imprisonment as, “doing battle for a cause”. With that, he says, “comes the possibility of personal sacrifice, indeed of martyrdom” (Steinberg 2004: 328). His story also protects him against difficulties and disappointments. During another visit, Tshepho saw a man who he knew from the outside, Jack. Tshepho had worked with his brother while he was also incarcerated at Boksburg, and they had become close. He had been released a few months earlier, and Jack was there to visit his other brother, Patrick. They caught up briefly, and Tshepho learned that Jack’s brother had been arrested again. He was being held at Sun City, another prison in Johannesburg. Tshepho turned to me afterwards, visibly disappointed at the news, but said to me, “I suppose God had another plan for him”.

Tshepho’s experiences in prison seem to be wholly defined by the narrative that he inhabits, and in many ways, determine his responses to the prison. But the story has had a number of other outcomes that go beyond these psychological effects. He says that since converting to Christianity, he has gained a lot more respect from other inmates and wardens.

“Life is easier,” he said. “I have a different kind of respect from people. The days are more predictable”. He was also considered for early parole based on his good behaviour and his positive contributions to the prison. When I met him, he only had a few months left inside.

Tshepho’s interpretation of imprisonment and his actions reveal a strong devotion to a particular narrative – one that, he has said, he has for 17 years been crafting. Yet his story bears many of the marks of wider prison discourses on moral reform. Bourdieu (2000) has argued that there is always an internalisation of the vocabulary, lexicon, narrative template,

tropes, and subject positions within a given ‘field’, echoing Ricoeur’s assertion that action can only be comprehended within the context of culture, itself a system of symbols (Ricoeur 1984). Tshepho’s story is the product both of the institutional tropes of rehabilitation and reform, and the related Christian conversion narrative. His self-conception reveals a, “strong alignment between the self-interest of the prisoner and the governing interests of the authorities’ (Garland 1997: 191) – the prison, according to Tshepho, was a necessary setting for his moral transformation. Despite the agency that his narrative change reflects, it is also clear that Tshepho’s story became constructed according to the available narrative archive of the institution. Bourdieu (1991) has explained this creativity-within-constraint using the analogy of a piano – a composer, he suggests, is able only to produce songs using the available keys. My visits to Boksburg and Leeuwkop offer a similar example: during my visits, I often saw inmates whose orange jumpsuits had been tailored. Stylish collars, curved hemlines, shortened sleeves and narrow waists transformed their orange uniforms into idiosyncratic displays of style. They were, however, still orange, and were still covered in the repeated pattern of the fabric’s DCS stamp.

For Margaret Somers, social identities become constituted through the, “intricate interweaving of history, narrativity, social knowledge, and relationality, as well as institutional and cultural practices” (Somers 1994: 634). Narratives and narratively constituted identities can therefore be understood as the complex products of overlapping structures, relationships, choices, and contingencies. The real story of Tshepho’s religious conversion reveals this. In his book, he describes his first encounter with God as an epiphanic moment – yet also includes a detailed description of a more complex process that preceded this. Before he became ‘reformed’, Tshepho’s membership in the 26s gang required that he find creative ways to communicate with other gang members inside of the prison. The church became a prime site for meeting and for passing messages along. His time in the church exposed him to a different side of prison life – one that seemed stable, and safe. He began to attend church services without any gang-related reason for doing so, and soon became an active member of the prison’s Christian community. But moving into this identity from the role of a gangster was difficult. Tshepho noted in his autobiography that, “The code of gangsterism is very intimidating, it says that there is only one gate to come in and there is no gate of going out”. The relative protection that the church offered Tshepho made this transition easier, though: “Now I have found a gate to go out and that gate is my

Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”. The ‘code of gangsterism’, Tshepho explained, “says that a man can only come out by blood; and yes, I came out through the blood of Jesus Christ that washed my sins away”. The framework offered by Christianity made his identity shift easier than it would have been if he simply wanted to stop being a gangster – Tshepho stepped out of his role as a gang member and into the culturally and institutionally endorsed one of the Christian – providing new means for gaining respectability and acceptance, without the violence associated with gang membership.

A way to belong

In May of 2017, the *Kathorus Mail* - a source of local news in Katlehong, Thokoza and Vosloorus – ran a story about Tshepho titled “Prisoner Tells How He Turned His Life Around”.⁹ It reads, “Tshepho (37) has spent more than 17 years at Boksburg Correctional Services. Delivering a motivational speech to more than 200 people at Vosloorus Civic Centre on Thursday, May 17, he said being in prison has helped him find his life purpose”. Tshepho is quoted in the article as saying, “When I grew up I wanted to be married by this time, have my own family and my own house and probably a decent car. But being in prison took all that away from me. I do not even have a child of my own”. This admission is revealing. It explains why Tshepho might have been drawn both into religion and into the institution’s redemption narrative. With little else to draw from, but with a deep desire to feel ‘normal’, narrative became the instrument with which Tshepho could construct a normative sense of belonging. In the prison, he has become a leader and someone that other inmates can look up to. His identity means that he is recognised by prison officials, members of the Department of Corrections, the media, his family, and by his wider audience as an exceptional inmate, rather than another deviant prisoner. Inhabiting the narrative that he has crafted for himself has meant that he has been able to participate in the wider South African discourse of aspiration; it is a surrogate for the ‘real thing’ that prison kept him from realising. In the next section, I will show how this sense of belonging can be established through the use of the redemptive script in different and surprising ways, by sketching the representations of one of Tshepho’s friends, Musa.

⁹ Damane, A. 2017. ‘Prisoner Tells How He Turned His Life Around’
<https://kathorusmail.co.za/18634/prisoner-tells-how-he-turned-his-life-around/>

Musa

It's 5:30am and my cellphone begins to vibrate. Reaching in the dark, not ready to be woken up by my alarm just yet, I see that it's a call - 'Musa Leeuwkop'.

"Hello?" comes out in a groan.

"Hey Kath! Are you still sleeping?" he asks, with the clear and cheerful voice of someone who has been awake for at least an hour. His wake up call is at 4:30am.

"Yes ... but I was just waking up," I lie, trying my usual but probably unsuccessful best not to highlight how different mine and Musa's days usually are.

"I just want to tell you to have a wonderful day, Kath. Keep working hard at your dreams. We will chat later". He hangs up.

I have become used to these unwanted motivational wake up calls from Musa. Since we met, we've been in contact almost every day, and Musa quickly wove a friendship out of our interactions, giving me a nickname and frequently saying things like, "That's what friends are for!". He was warm and open from our first interaction.

"Feel free to ask me about anything," he said. "I will do anything in my power to assist you". A few days after we first met, he sent me a photograph of his lunch: something that looked either like dry chicken or very dry fish, a grated carrot salad that had long lost its vigour, and some plain rice, served on a rectangular metal plate with plastic cutlery.

"That looks nice," I began to type, not really sure how to respond. But before I hit send, he sent another picture, one that actually warranted my previously insincere reply. His lunch had been transformed into a glistening pile of rice, carrots, and chicken that looked like it had been tossed in mayonnaise. There was a dollop of chutney on the side, some toasted slices of bread, silver cutlery now, and all of the food had been transported to another plate – a ceramic orange one with hand painted sunflowers along its edges. There was a chocolate bar in this picture that hadn't featured in the first. He sent yet another picture, this one of a bottle of chutney, a tub of mayonnaise, and the dirty, abandoned metal plate in the background. Amazed at the transformation, I asked him how he managed to do all of it – where he kept the mayonnaise, how he had silver cutlery when its forbidden, whether they were allowed their own plates – and his response was simple: "I always make something out of nothing. You've just got to hustle".

Musa's identity splinters into many forms: he is a businessman, a public speaking champion, political leader within the prison, the captain of a debate team, and is constantly working on collaborating with people inside and outside of prison to make money. His 'business ventures' range from making beads from recycled cardboard, to smuggling cellphones through the kitchen to sell to other inmates. He oozes confidence whenever we speak. I once asked him, teasingly, if he'd ever read *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

"No," he responded, "But I did read *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* twice".

Musa lapses between sardonic realism and optimism, but he's still invested in the betterment narrative. His version draws upon a number of resources and archives, showing an ability to change based on moments of contingency and necessity.

"There's a lot you have to do just to survive in here," he said. "The most important thing? You have to be able to adapt".

Musa's grip on his image is looser than Tshepho's is, and this flexibility allows him to inhabit a more ambiguous role in the prison. Taking on multiple roles, Musa is actively resisting the 'mortification' (Goffman 1965) so often brought upon by imprisonment. One of the roles that Musa took on with enthusiasm was that of the prison informant. If I asked him about prison conditions, or about a fire that was reported at Leeuwkop in December 2016, I would often receive 5 or 10 minute long voicenotes from various inmates that Musa had interviewed on my behalf. In the interviews, Musa asks questions in a serious voice, emulating an investigative journalist.

It's difficult to understand Musa's perspective about his own imprisonment because it seems constantly to be shifting. His attitude about his imprisonment moves between frustration at the listlessness of prison life, and gratitude. But it is always enveloped in acceptance. He's got a predilection for mimicking my points of view, like a sponge. When we discuss the prison, he often presents my own thoughts back to me. After explaining my thoughts on the prison with Musa, he agreed, presenting what I'd said back to me:

Prison is only the aftermath of other issues. I for one can attest to that ... I'm only here because of socioeconomic issues, you know. I wasn't born a criminal, and I didn't choose to become one. I didn't choose to start stealing, but circumstances led me into that direction. I was left with little or no choice but to engage in a life of crime. So we should be addressing the social and economic ills that plague us as a country, and try to curb the rise of crime. People that are in prison are mostly reoffenders. They don't reoffend because they enjoy

committing crime, its because they have little choice but to commit crime once they get out in order to survive. The government turns a blind eye to these things, you know?

Yet his understanding of this issue lapses into this view and out of it often. In a voice note that he sent me, containing a speech that he was rehearsing for a competition, he repeated the same, familiar narrative about making poor decisions. His awareness of the coercive nature of living a precarious life had been wiped away again. I asked him about it, and his response was frank.

“Kath, they don’t like troublemakers in here. I won’t be chosen to do public speaking if I am talking about issues like that. The question is, ‘How can we prevent the youth from committing crime?’ and my answer cannot be that the government needs to provide more for them. They want me to say that I made the wrong choices. I won’t win if I make trouble!” Musa’s use of the reform narrative reveals a more self-conscious and strategic set of practices that Tshepho’s does. It has formed part of his adapting to prison life, but he has not inhabited the role uncritically – refraining from fully incorporating the pathologising gaze of reform talk into his self-conception.

Like Tshepho, Musa is also deeply invested in self-representation. On Whatsapp and on Facebook, Musa frequently posts images depicting a more money-oriented understanding of ‘the good life’. If you perused his social media presence, you might not know that he is in prison at all. Images – some of him, but most lifted from the Internet of men who look like him – contain branded clothing, luxury cars, and expressions of wealth. Their faces are always cropped or obscured. Gucci hats, Louis Vuitton bags, Balenciaga shoes, and luxury cars are woven into Musa’s social media presence. There are a few pictures of him, and in them, he is always wearing a navy suit and white shirt, with a spotted necktie, shiny shoes, and a shiny silver belt buckle. He takes pictures like these when he’s doing public speaking competitions, when he gets to swap his orange jumpsuit for this smarter look. His current profile picture shows him leaning against a wall with sunglasses on, in a pose not unlike one you might see on the cover of *GQ Magazine*. In the distance, a small group of orange dots – fellow inmates – break the pretence. Many of the photographs that Musa sends me contain interesting aesthetic juxtapositions. When he travelled to the Western Cape for public speaking, he sent me a picture of his packed luggage. The repeated pattern on his own Louis Vuitton carry bag clashed with the DCS pattern on his bedspread

underneath, revealing a, “balance between actual experience and the politics of aspiration” (Nuttall 2004: 440).

Sarah Nuttall has argued that cosmopolitan spaces are critical sites for ‘the remixing and reassembling of identities’ (Nuttall 2004: 431). These observations extend usefully into the prison space. “Selfhood and subjectivity can no longer be interpreted as merely inscriptions of broader institutional and political forces,” argues Nuttall, but are representative of, “self-transformative practices based on specific aesthetic values and stylistic criteria and enabled by various techniques and technologies” (Nuttall 2004: 438). Read through the lens of performance offered by Goffman in *The Presentation of the Self in the Everyday Life* (1956), Musa’s actions may be read as the attempt to define his situation. Engaging in ‘impression management’, he is invested in presenting himself using both officially and culturally accredited values. This is what Goffman calls ‘idealisation’ – using performance, Musa can expressively confirm his belonging in a wider, abstract community. He vacillates between being wholly absorbed by his own act (like Tshepho) and employing narrative and performance more as a means to an end. The boundary between these two is often indistinguishable. Musa’s identity, residing largely in his performance and through images, shows the ‘enigmatic and divergent forms of knowing and self-making’ that emerge within the confines of supposedly ‘disciplining’ spaces.

Self-making in the prison

Musa’s many strategies and his chameleonic identity show that the prison space is more contested and complex than classical depictions of it might be. The reform script – for Musa – finds expression in a number of shapes and forms. He uses it both as a way to make sense of his imprisonment – as a ‘blessing in disguise’ – and operationalises it in a more utilitarian sense to gain access to certain services and privileges within prison, like entrance into public speaking competitions and the travel associated with it. In this way, Musa’s ‘self’ is his capital, and betterment the currency that allows him to manoeuvre through life in prison, embodying entrepreneurial forms of self-making and the secular form of salvation that this produces. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff’s thesis in ‘Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming’ (2000) offers interesting ways to think about identity in the modern era. Invoking ‘mythical’ and ‘messianistic’ practices, they posit that neoliberal market logics have become entwined in processes of self-making. Social and cultural modes

of adapting become inscribed into the logics of the market – the ‘self’ becoming a form of capital used to undercut and penetrate previously entrenched borders. The market is a, “gospel of salvation that, if rightly harnessed, is invested in the capacity to wholly transform the universe of the marginalised and disempowered” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 292), and if you can, “master its spectral technologies”, then alternative ways of existing and establishing social legitimacy can be produced (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 298). Musa embodies the ‘spectral’ practices described by Comaroff and Comaroff – he navigates his experience in the prison by inhabiting refractions of the redemptive script fluidly. His splintered narrative identity could be read as a response to the precariousness of prison life, and to his inability to gain status through more conventional means.

Closer to home, Sharlene Swartz, James Hamilton Harding, and Ariane De Lannoy have argued in *‘Ikasi Style and the quiet violence of dreams: a critique of youth belonging in post-apartheid South Africa’* (2013) that impoverished youth in South African townships, “aspire to upward mobility, considered the post-apartheid destiny for free South Africans, by employing the normative narrative of potential and elevated personal goals” (Swartz et al 2013: 28). This argument is instructive, because it puts forward that markers of belonging become generated by alternative means in contexts of poverty – creating facsimiles of the ‘good life’. Aspirational actions and narratives can be understood, from this perspective, as prophylactics against despair, alienation, and futility. In the place of normative social inclusion, both Tshepho and Musa have invested deeply in their future-oriented narrative identities. “By dealing in dreams,” Swartz argues, those without the means to obtain normative inclusion, “appear to be writing themselves into the country’s narrative by constructing their own sense of opportunity, and, thereby, belonging” (Swartz et al 2013: 33). Tshepho’s intense devotion to religion and motivational speaking, and Musa’s compensatory consumptive script, show how narrative can become a privileged site for the fashioning and re-fashioning of identity and inclusion in spaces like the prison. Marie Lindegaard and Sasha Gear, writing about gang culture in South African prisons, have argued that, “disempowered people establish alternative codes and cultures in order to adapt to their lives” (Lindegaard and Gear 2014: 36). Their observation that the practice of violence amongst gangs is part of a subculture that has developed in response to the deprivations of prison life can be productively translated in order to understand the actions of ‘good’ prisoners, as well.

As in gang culture, the dividing line between conscious choice and coercive forces becomes blurred. In the prison, “agency is not clearly distinguishable from the structural pressures that shape it” (Lindegaard and Gear 2015: 50). One of Musa’s stories reveals this. He is a part of and helped to establish the ‘Participative Management Committee’ at Leeuwkop – that serves as an, “ear and mouth piece for the inmates as well as the officials in cases of mass grievance. In a nutshell, we advocate for the rights of inmates by engaging with the relevant personnel in here. Like the SRC in schools,” Musa explained. The way that this structure came about reveals the often indistinguishable relationship of agency to constraint. He explained that two months before, a group of inmates including Musa collected up the five jerseys that the administration had given their cell of 50 or 60 men in the middle of winter.

“Either we all get jerseys, or none at all,” Musa said.

The officials didn’t take their demand seriously, so Musa and the others drafted a memorandum listing their grievances.

“We mentioned nutrition, clothing, toiletries, medical supplies, and the hospital as things we weren’t happy with,” he said. “We requested to deliver the memorandum to the prison director, but he was never available. We were ignored for three days”. Half of Section C had signed the document. One Wednesday, they refused to go to their cell for lock up.

“Finally, the director came and took the memorandum. But the head of the prison issued a warning the next day, saying he would charge us for inciting bad behavior among inmates if we ever did that again”. Musa and a few others met with some prison officials to discuss the matter: “I asked them, ‘What about our rights?’ I told them that our misconduct was a result of theirs. That’s when we were encouraged to form the PMC – a more formal, official body that could mediate between officials and inmates”. They ran some elections, and 16 people were elected – 8 for administration, and 8 for ‘internal affairs’. Musa was chosen to be a part of internal affairs. “I was voted in the top 3. No, the top 2 actually”.

Musa’s leadership in the prison was one of the first things that I learned about him. On the surface, it formed part of his impressive identity and the agency that he seemed to possess. He presented the formation of the PMC as a triumph over the prison, and as a personal triumph in his own aspirational project. Yet, casting a critical eye on his story, it becomes clear that their resistance was co-opted by the institution into an instance of prison ‘betterment’, in turn placating their critique. This vignette of prison life is a good example of the murkiness of agency and constraint, and can be read as an analogy for the politics that animate the ways in which narratives of reform become absorbed. The immediate relief

and sense of control that moments like these produce reflect the capitulation by inmates (and stakeholders that surround the prison) onto practices and beliefs that generate ‘agency’ and, importantly, that precipitate hope.

The politics of hope

It has long been argued that dreams and aspirations are forms of resistance. Michel De Certeau (1984) and James Scott (1985) have described these intimate forms of hope as ‘weapons of the weak’. Returning to Steinberg’s assertion that, “Stories in prison are weapons, tools, the stuff of action” (Steinberg 2004: 18), narrative can then be understood as a meaningful coping strategy during imprisonment. Tshepho’s and Musa’s stories reveal that narratives become an integral part of identity making, but that they are also important forms of self-preservation. As Lynn Davies has noted, dreams and hopes have ‘survival value’ (Davies 2005 in Swartz et al 2013: 32) – taking the place of fear and fatalism that might otherwise emerge while incarcerated. Comaroff and Comaroff have noted that, “Complex, poetically rich, culturally informed imaginings have always come between structural conditions and subjective perceptions” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 302) – understood through this lens, the redemptive script is an instrument that inmates can use to subvert their structurally depreciated positions, allowing them to invest in a new, brighter future. Gillespie, commenting on the wider politics of penal reform, said that, “Morality, flexible in its ahistoricism, is what can muster hope in the context of the impasse” (Gillespie 2008: 76), and this compromise is simulated in the inhabitation of redemption stories by inmates on the ground. There are important resonances between Swartz’s observations about *ikasi* style and what has emerged out of Tshepho’s and Musa’s aspirations: “In a context where you can’t realise the dream,” she says, “the dream itself functions as a currency” (Swartz et al 2013: 33). What this currency gets you in the prison, I have tried to show, is a sense of freedom and reprieve rooted in hope.

In a poem written to God, Tshepho says, “I know in you that there is peace / I know in you that there is joy / I know in you that there is rest / Forever more”. But this relief has insidious effects. As Vincent Crapanzano (2003) has argued, investing in hope can create passivism, resignation, and docility. The vernacular of hope that dictates the contours of prisoners’ narratives, identities, and experiences is both the product of, and has a hand in reproducing, structural forms of violence. Redemptive self-narratives, with their aspirational projections

into the future, appear at first to be a refusal of the helplessness of their teller's social position. Yet investing in hopefulness is itself a form of surrender – an admission that nothing can be done in the present. It is a mark of powerlessness – “the symptom of a certain kind of loss” (Gillespie 2008: 76). In the book *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Lauren Berlant explains that the attachments that people form to ‘fantasies of the good life’ are precisely what eclipses the source of their suffering. This is what Swartz has called ‘the quiet violence of dreams’ – a denial that transforms weapons of the weak into weapons against them (Swartz et al 2013: 32). In the next section, I will consider where a broader politics of hope, grounded in radical critique, might lie.

* * *

Interlude

A Blessing in Disguise, or Disguised as a Blessing?

In Chapter Two, I showed that despite the relative practical apathy of the prison to the project of rehabilitation, reform does arise in this space. It manifests in moralising religious conversion narratives, through motivational speakers, and in neoliberal forms of aspiration. Inhabiting the role of the reformed prisoner, as Tshepho's and Musa's stories reveal, produces meaningful ways to make sense of incarceration. This identity provides a significant barrier against the isolation, stigmatisation, and the other forms of physical and emotional violence that characterise prison life. ‘Betterment’ – in Musa's case – manifests less as ‘soul correction’ and more as aspirational self-making rooted in consumption and narrative flexibility. Both of their reform stories reveal the coercive nature of the institution; in symbolic and in material ways, aligning one's identity with the prison's discourse on corrections offers specific opportunities and a degree of safety. Overall, conforming to the institutional framework opens pathways for belonging – participating in South African ‘discourses of possibility’ (renders them a part of rather than a threat to democracy. But the hopefulness of these effects undercuts the structurally violent contexts from which inmates come, and to which they will likely return. In this way, their stories reveal a profound misrecognition of the ‘slow violence’¹⁰ that has defined and that will continue to define their lives. What is left out of these stories of salvation? What are the political stakes of this erasure?

¹⁰ In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) Robert Nixon argues that invisible forms of violence – that are ‘neither spectacular nor instantaneous but instead incremental’ – create continuums of apathy and

“Google me,” Musa once said. “I’m quite famous on the internet”. I did as he said, and typed his name into my search bar. The first result was an article titled, ‘Project gives juvenile offenders a second chance’ from 15 years ago.¹¹

“Musa may be pint-sized, but he is becoming the poster-child for a project that plans to rehabilitate 60 000 South African juvenile offenders,” the article read. “The 14-year-old, who has a history of petty thieving, has helped six other gang members escape their lives of crime, and has even helped establish a soccer team to occupy bored youth in Alexandra township, Gauteng”. It speaks about Musa’s, “anti-crime advocacy” and his involvement in Khulisa’s ‘New Directions’ programme.

“By far the biggest success has been Musa,” the article proclaims, “who was referred to the programme after he was caught stealing a bicycle. Said his mother, Angeline: “He was starting to be so naughty, so I’m lucky they arrested him.” Musa’s class teacher, Norman Lebusha, agreed, saying Musa’s formerly aggressive and disruptive attitude was no more. “That programme changed his lifestyle,” Lebusha said. The article is illustrative of Musa’s transformation: “The teenager — an A-student who fell in with petty criminals because he was tired of being picked on because of his small stature — said the programme had changed his life so much that he wanted to help when he saw six members of his former gang in danger of becoming serious criminals.”

Musa is quoted as saying that he, “saw they were falling into the same path, letting their lives be destroyed day by day”. He said while he had lost some other former friends who had tried to lure him back into crime, he was happy with his life. “I learned to listen to my conscience,” said Musa.

The article has an optimistic conclusion, describing how Musa and other former gang members now tend to a garden in a disabled home for bed-ridden children: “It’s looking beautiful, and the scent of the flowers comes in the windows,” he said while surveying the garden”.

suffering. This has ties to Galtung’s (1969), Scheper-Hughes’ (1998) and Kleinman, Das, and Lock’s (1997) arguments about the invisibility of structured forms of violence

¹¹ ‘Project gives juvenile offenders a second chance’ (2003) by Michael Schmidt on <http://www.cyc-net.org/features/ft-Secondchance.html>

In this article, at only 14 years old, Musa displays the same confidence and conviction that he has today. He is a convincing storyteller, and he was good at it then, too. I asked Musa what happened.

“You know,” he started. “I did the programme, it went well, I was celebrated, then they moved on. The programme was over, it was just a pilot. I was 15 when I finished with it, and for a few months I was better. But I got stupid again. My friends were into robbery, my mom didn’t have much money, and I wanted to be able to buy things. I wanted to bring money home, to contribute to the household. She’s a single mom, you know”. He continued, “One day when I was 20, a robbery got out of hand. We were robbing a white family’s house and we got caught”. He was kept in awaiting trial for 6 years and finally sentenced to another 4 years in prison.

“That article makes it look like your life had completely changed,” I said.

“I know,” he responded with half a smile.

I said that the Khulisa project couldn’t have been as effective as he’d made it out to be in the end.

“Because?” he asked, teasingly. We laughed.

“Because you’re back in here,” I said.

He laughed again. “Well, no one wants to hear that story!”

“But it’s the truth, Musa,” I said. “It shows it wasn’t just about you ... or going through a project ...”

“Yes, that’s true, Kath,” he replied. “But what good would it do to tell that story?”

There is a lot at stake for the individual in telling this story instead. Explaining the denial of structural violence that many vulnerable young people demonstrate, Swartz, Harding, and De Lannoy ask a provocative question: “Would the act of remembering itself cause a rupture of dreams, a denial of opportunities, and thereby reinforce their social exclusion?” (Swartz, Harding and De Lannoy 2013: 37) They observe that a, “Pervasive critical consciousness [is] absent ... there appears to be little understanding about how these current problems have structural causes and origins in historical injustice” (Swartz, Harding and De Lannoy 2013: 37). In Musa’s case, his denial is self-conscious. He is aware that his crimes were not simply the product of his own actions, but a symptom of the context that he grew up in, or at least a mixture of the two. Tshepho, with his heavy emphasis on moral transformation and frequent acknowledgement of his delinquent behaviour, shows similar signs to the ones pointed out in Swartz’ argument. Yet, in his autobiography, he renders in great detail a life

marked by vulnerability, precariousness, and violence. At 12, he learned how to use a gun during riots in the township that he lived in. His mother was often jobless, and they moved between relatives' and friends' houses constantly. You could get lost in an uncritical reading of his autobiography – in the inspirational narrative that downplays the negative so that the positive may take centre stage. The facts of his past do not make it into Tshepho's understanding of his crimes, and he does not use his motivational speaking platforms to mention the structural origins of his actions. He is focused on the future, not the past, and places great emphasis on the function of forgetting the past in a project of transforming for the better. As Swartz et al noted, dwelling on the past may jeopardise the future: “they seemed keen to forget and move on, little realising how remembering might in fact aid their liberation’ (Swartz, Harding and De Lannoy 2013: 37). It is in this denial that their complicity in the reform narrative lies. Even when subjected to determinisms, these people have a role, if only partial, in reproducing the outcomes of the structures that suppress them. The critical barometer for measuring rehabilitation does not reside in the claims to transformation that inmates like Tshepho and Musa make – rather, it lies in their experiences after release. The prison, in its benevolent guise, buffers the effects of structural inequality by providing a semblance of stability, and room to grow into ‘good’ citizens. It can also, as Wacquant has argued, “counterintuitively and within limits [act] as a stabilising and restorative force for relations already deeply frayed by the pressures of life ... at the bottom of the social edifice” (Wacquant 2002: 388). This offers a more convincing understanding, to me, for why the prison may be seen as a ‘blessing in disguise’. It can interrupt periods of addiction and violence, it provides food and shelter, and offers some sense of stability. In essence, it is a removal from context. One could then argue, as Wacquant does, that the prison has become a ‘perverse agency for the delivery of human services to the social refuse of society’ (Wacquant 2002: 388). These facts, as well as the hopefulness that reform produces, keep prisoners quiescent when it comes to expressing critical perspectives on the prison. How could a more critical approach to these stories show that rendering the prison as a ‘blessing’ is not an acknowledgement of the benefits of incarceration, but rather an indictment on society? It is my belief that a radical critique, and important epistemic shifts, could emerge from the stories told by inmates and ex convicts, if only they were told a little differently.

“What good would it do to tell that story?” - Towards a radical grounded critique

The redemptive story serves those who make use of it only in a very narrow sense. How could their stories be better used to serve the interests of social justice and radical, broader change? If amplified, Musa's and Tshepho's biographies could serve as an abrasive to, rather than an extension of, the official story put forward by the state. Inmates have a hand in promulgating knowledge about crime and the prison, especially when their narratives make it out into motivational talks, speeches, and published books. Gayton McKenzie, the famous gangster-turned-motivational speaker and author of *The Choice* (2007) is a good example of this. While his narrative includes accounts of violent prison life, and offers inside insights into the gang culture of South African prisons, the title alone reveals that he, too, believes that it is the individual's choice to turn his life around. People like McKenzie and Tshepho are, however, exceptions – they are not the successful products of design. Yet only these exceptional cases gain the platforms and exposure that would allow the wider public to be able to understand what prison is really like, and where crime really stems from. Somers has observed that, “People are guided to act in certain ways and not others on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity – but an ultimately limited – repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives” (Somers 1994: 614). Musa and Tshepho both demonstrated a degree of agency in their use and mobilisation of specific narratives. While they were discursively conditioned, this shows that the prison and its surrounding discourses are, in small ways, contested. These negotiations do not make it onto the surface however; their individual acts of self-transformation become absorbed by the wider institutional narrative, helping to reproduce its legitimacy. The narrative negotiations that I detailed in Chapter Two indicate that the story could shift, and may be subject to change and contestation. How could a shift in narrative be mobilised to form part of a grounded and radical critique of penal reform, and of structural inequality more broadly? Tshepho's and Musa's stories show that, in an individual sense, narratives ‘construct worlds of possibility’ (Ricoeur 1984). Inmate narratives, if recommissioned for a more radical critique of the prison, might expand the function that Ricoeur describes. Without overestimating the power of a single story, or underestimating the power of the institution's hegemony, it might be worth asking what a different set of narrative templates and another way of portraying a life story could contribute to the broader cultural shifts that are required in order that real, structural change can begin to unfold.

* * *

Chapter Three

Unsettling the Script

I shuffled into my seat in the middle row of a small basement auditorium at the Artscape Theatre in Cape Town. Looking around, I saw wardens placed at every corner of the small theatre space; this was no ordinary play – its cast was comprised entirely of inmates from Pollsmoor Prison. The set was Brechtian in its minimalism, with just one spotlight illuminating two wooden benches made of stacked crates. The pamphlet I was clutching read, “The Making of a Criminal: Part Two – hosted by Nicro and Varde Theatre, Norway”. Behind me, a group of stylish Norwegians chatted. The pamphlet described the play as, “the end result of 8 months of intensive theatre training and direction, and demonstrates the use of drama and theatre in rehabilitation and integration”. The lights dimmed and the play began. Ten performers in orange jumpsuits emerged from a door at the back of the stage, and split into two groups. The audience watched from above as the inmates performed their roles as gang members in a fictional feud. Two of the inmates acted out their roles as star-crossed lovers, while the others conspired together to launch an attack on their rivals. The play culminated in a fight between two mobs, and the malevolent character, Frank, being killed. The two gangs came together in the end and the lovers were reunited, restoring the order and balance of this imagined universe. They sang together, and the play finished. The inmates had worked hard and it showed. After 45 minutes, the play ended, and there was a palpable sense of collective fulfilment in the tiny, modest theatre.

Afterwards, there was a Q&A session with the performers, where audience members could ask them about their experience. They stood before us in a line. There was reticence at first. “Ask us anything you want,” one of the actors, Damon, said.

Judge Nathan Erasmus – a Western Cape High Court judge - spoke first. “It’s been wonderful seeing you all doing something so productive,” he said with glowing admiration. “It is amazing to see you all putting your best foot forward”.

Simon, another cast member, said that it had been an honour to be a part of the programme. “I know the change starts with us,” he said. Some of the cast spoke, answering questions warmly and openly. Others remained silent. Much of what came out from those who spoke was that the programme had taught them teamwork, responsibility, and trust: “Overall,” one of them said, “it has been a very meaningful experience”.

Staff from the Department of Correctional Services were there. One of them commented that they could see there had been a positive change. One of the Norwegians stood up. Yo, speaking in a thick accent, explained what Varde Theatre strives to do: “In theatre you are your own tool ... these programmes can help to build a bridge between prison and society by teaching basic social skills like listening and communicating,” he said. “It has been a pleasure working with you,” he added. “You are all powerful beyond measure”.

A pastor stood up and gave a speech bathed in religious language.

“Birds of a feather flock together,” he said. “No one owes you anything, so stick to people on the same mission as you. You need to work towards finding the light. Miracles don’t happen, you have to make them happen. But don’t forget that God has a plan for you”. Some of the cast nodded in agreement – one of the actors, Amoré, said that she knew that her imprisonment was part of God’s plan for her, and that being in this play had been an important part of that journey.

“I made a family with people I wouldn’t ever normally spend time with,” she confessed.

A senior official from Pollsmoor stood up and began his feedback with a joke. “I’ve been serving my sentence for 24 years now,” he said with a chuckle. He told a story about choices: “When I was in high school, my best friend died in my arms. I was raised in Mitchell’s Plain – in a place like that, you have to choose who you want to be. My brother joined a gang. When I was starting my career with the DCS, he was beginning his sentence in Pollsmoor. But look at me; I have recently completed my PhD. Remember this: it is not about where you come from, but about the choices you make”.

The hopefulness of redemption that I tracked in Chapter Two can be found in other institutional practices that surround the prison, beyond those of inmates. Myself and all of the other audience members in the theatre that day experienced an absorption into the potentiality of reform first-hand - many of the people who had come to watch the play mentioned how good it had made them feel to see prisoners doing something so positive with their time behind bars. Many of the themes internal to the play – overcoming gang culture, extricating yourself out of violence, and overcoming criminal involvement in order to rebuild social order – were mirrored in the discussion that ensued after it was over. The theatre programme, transplanted from the Norwegian prisons that it was developed in, had transformed for these 10 inmates the banality of prison life into a chance to ‘perform’ – not only their fictional roles, but their citizenship, too. The result of the play was a miniature version of the discourses that operate in the political and cultural arena of penal reform – a transformation had been performed, the audience became convinced, and catharsis arising from the hope that this moment produced swept over us. There was no need to discuss the source of the performers’ crimes – what mattered was that they had shown great signs of moral improvement. In this chapter, using the literal performance described above as a case study, I will argue that the ‘performed’ reform of inmates, when they trickle into spaces outside of the prison, acts as an impediment to real critique and radical change. I will argue that the immediate relief that is produced by enactments of transformation, as in Chapter Two, obstructs the chance to confront and critically contest South Africa’s prison problem, highlighting the tension between reformist and more abolitionist strategies for prison work. I will then provide an ethnographic example of an exceptional moment when the master script became disrupted, and consider the political stakes of these rare instances of resistance.

Act II

Examining the play’s pamphlet in greater detail after the performance had finished revealed that the play had been devised under a cultural outreach programme called, ‘Help! I am Free’ in collaboration with a Norwegian organisation, and funded by the Peace Corps in Norway. The performers from Pollsmoor had developed and written a script based in part on personal testimonies, life histories and experiences during, before, and after incarceration in collaboration with directors and choreographers from Norway. “We are given a rare glimpse of prison life,” the pamphlet reads, “normally hidden or invisible from society’s eye”. The play, “allows us to build up some insight and empathy into the impact

and consequences of incarceration and the fears and challenges of inmates,” it said. If I had read this before, I would have expected a series of monologues or a narrative that spoke to the structural causes and detrimental effects of prison on the country’s most vulnerable populations. It was titled, “The Making of a Criminal,” after all. “This play challenges the audience’s own perceptions of criminal offenders,” the pamphlet said, and encourages them to, “leave with an open mind on the concept of theatre as a rehabilitation tool”. While the latter was persuasively demonstrated, there were few traces of its claim to providing insight and empathy about the impact and consequences of incarceration. The performance – borrowing from Western narrative tropes – seemed far removed from the context that its actors came from. The performance ran from a Thursday night to a Saturday afternoon in September 2017 – with an opening show on Thursday evening, and afternoon and evening shows on Friday and Saturday. I had attended the Friday afternoon show – Thursday’s performance had been reserved for prison staff, family members, and media. I decided to attend Friday’s second performance to see whether the discussion afterwards might change, or whether the same worn-out script about transformation might be repeated by visiting judges and other stakeholders. ‘The Wizard of Oz’ was running at the same time, and the sign that had been erected to advertise it stretched across the large building. There were no signs up to advertise Nicro’s event, so I found myself pointing people who were looking for it in the direction of the small auditorium at the far left of the theatre. A ‘prison indaba’ had been set up in the foyer outside of the main theatre, advertising different non-profits and the work that they do in the prison. Arts and crafts schemes, poetry initiatives, and other projects including ‘Beauty Behind Bars’ – a group aimed at, “providing dignity by pampering female inmates” – had provided stacks of business cards, pamphlets, and photographs of their accomplishments.

I made my way back to the small theatre for the second performance of the day. It unfolded as it had that afternoon, with only a few technical glitches and forgotten lines. There were less people in the audience than there had been in the first performance, but just as many wardens. After it had finished, instead of another Q&A, one of the Nicro representatives stood up and said that there would be another act.

“We are very lucky,” she said, “because some alumni from one of our previous theatre programmes are here to give a very special performance”.

This group, we learned, had worked with Nicro before but were now running an independent programme in some of the communities around Cape Town. Four men –

Nathaniel, Anthero, Ayanda, and Wyden – introduced themselves as newly released offenders that had set up their own community-based project based on the things that they had learned about acting while in prison. An image was projected onto the wall at the back of the stage: “We Are Going To Tell You Some Stories,” it declared. A cartoon hand entered the animation and scribbled a few words in: “We Are Going To Tell You (pieces) of (some) Stories”. Ayanda began.

“I am Ayanda,” he said to the audience with a bright smile. Performing an imaginary ritual, he brushed his teeth, put his clothes on, and faced an invisible mirror.

“I am Ayanda,” he repeated, “and one day, I’m going to be a neurosurgeon”. He fixed his imaginary tie, and walked off of the stage.

“I am Ayanda,” he said again, after re-entering the scene. He repeated the pretend sequence. “And I am working hard at school so that I can go to university”. He smiled widely into his mirror. He repeated this sequence four or five times, each time losing a little of his enthusiasm.

“I am Ayanda, and no matter how hard I try, my dreams keep moving further and further out of my reach ... I am Ayanda, and I’ve been thinking of joining my friends in an armed robbery. I have nothing”.

He walked off of the stage and back onto it, his shoulders sloped in defeat.

“I am Ayanda, and we got caught”.

His last declaration indicated a change: “I am Ayanda,” he said with renewed confidence, “And things are looking better for me now. But it hasn’t been easy”.

Wyden performed next. He was small and muscular, and looked no older than 18 or 19. In a poetic and fast-paced rap, Wyden explained that he had, “always had trouble with discipline / it’s tough having nothing in the world we live in / people expect you to be good all the time / but sometimes there is no other option than to commit a crime”. He described life after release, using an analogy to explain what the experience had been like for him.

“If you want a tree to grow, take it out of the pot that you planted it in and let its roots expand, it can only grow bigger if you let it free,” he explained with performed exasperation. He expressed frustration at wanting to move beyond his criminal past, and having limited resources and social support to do so. The three other performers formed a circle, holding their arms out to construct a boundary around him.

“I want to study,” he bellowed, as he tried to escape this human cage. He rebounded off of Nathaniel and Anthero’s arms.

“I want a job, I want to be able to take care of my mother, I want to be taken seriously, I want people to see the potential in me,” he yelled, each time bouncing off of the arms that were constricting him in his small circle. Finally, he began to dance, and the circle broke free. Next, Anthero and Nathaniel took to the stage. They were impressive lyrical poets, weaving autobiographical fragments and philosophical ideas into fluid raps about growing up in poverty, and, “being around crime / all the time, knowing no life apart from the / art of stealing”. Their narratives revealed trajectories into the prison that began almost from birth, being raised in a neighbourhood where gangsterism is a popular, if not necessary, way of adapting to the precariousness of life in the Cape Flats. Their performances spilled seamlessly into one another, with the ex-convicts rapping in unison about multiple encounters with the law, spirals of drug addiction, years in and out of Pollsmoor, and the difficulty of being back on the street.

“It seems like people respect the gangster I used to be,” Anthero began. Nathaniel completed his sentence, “More than the person that I want you to see”.

The Q&A session after this performance was different from the one that I had been a part of that afternoon. Soraya – the head of Nicro – thanked all of the participants for entertaining and enlightening us, and commended their excellent work. The audience was, again, invited into a dialogue, and the first question that was asked seemed to have been prompted by the play’s unexpected second act.

“How do you cope,” a young woman asked, “with constantly being demonised by society, when it is clear from your stories that you are victims yourselves?”

One of the currently incarcerated female performers, Roxanne, spoke up.

“Society doesn’t see us as victims, they only see us as criminals. I didn’t choose to be this way, I just made a lot of mistakes”

Nathaniel chimed in, saying that, “Outside, reality kicks your ass. The punishment actually starts when you’re released. It’s you by yourself. You have to be strong”.

“Please just trust us,” another inmate added. “We don’t even trust ourselves. If someone sees something in me, then maybe I will see it too”.

One of the audience members stood up and spoke. “I think this has shown that it is more about us being transformed than about them being transformed,” he said.

“Well,” one of the prison staff added, “Corrections is a societal responsibility”.

The audience and the performers began to engage in a dialogue that differed greatly from the one that had unfolded before, that felt more like a monologue in its harmony. Many of the inmates discussed their fears about being released. Anthero, who had been out for a year, said, “It’s hard when you come out. You will meet the devil. But you need to walk in a straight line – just walk the fucking walk!”

“But how do we do that?” one of the inmates, Zikhona, asked. “We need help from the DCS when we get out, that’s when we need the support from the government”.

Shafiek, who had played the male love interest in the fictional play, spoke about the first time he was released.

“When I was let out, I left without owning any clothes. I didn’t even have pants to wear. I had to take some from one of the wardens who helped me,” he said. “I didn’t even have clothes. But I was expected to pick myself back up”. He added that he was back in prison a month after his release.

Alfonso, who had played Frank, said that prison was actually a respite from the hardships of life outside: “Inside, at least someone is watching you. Outside, it’s harder to resist temptation. You are on your own. It is like a second imprisonment when you’re released”.

The second act that evening brought to fruition the pamphlet’s promise of allowing a chance to, “build up some insight and empathy into the impact and consequences of incarceration,” as well as the, “fears and challenges of inmates” in ways that the first performance didn’t. The four performers – operating outside of the institutional scene of the prison and the NGOs working within it – provided honest portraits of the roots of their criminal actions, and their experiences of life after release, pointing to more structural determinants of crime and resisting the pathologising gaze that is so often cast upon inmates. In themselves, the three performances by Wyden, Anthero, Nathaniel, and Ayanda were examples of resisting the ‘state script’ about individual rehabilitation. Ayanda’s biography – presented as a sequence of episodes – depicts a life that throws into relief the insufficiency of merely dreaming. He was always Ayanda – it was his life that began to fray. Wyden’s performance scathingly contested the idea that upon release, ‘rehabilitated’ prisoners are treated with respect and given opportunities to extend their personal change outside of the institution. Nathaniel and Anthero’s poetically presented biographies emphasised the role that social and cultural surroundings play in who people become, and what activities they engage in. These four did not seek to tell a single story; in telling ‘pieces’ of ‘some’ stories, the ex-convicts unsettled the narrative that had been so innocuously repeated in the first

performance, and in the discussion that arose from it. A palpable shift had occurred in the first and second round of questions that I partook in – in the first, the power of rehabilitative projects was emphasised, with every member of the dialogue noting the positive transformation that they believe they had witnessed. It produced a genuine sense of catharsis and relief amongst the audience that found expression in comments about the hope that they had for the inmates’ futures. “You are powerful beyond measure,” Yo said, and for a moment, we all believed it. Yet he refuted his own sentiment when he spoke after the second performance that Friday, reminding us that, “Monday will be an empty day for them. We must not forget about these people”.

The State Script

The tension between investing in reform rather than wider and more critical projects of abolition came to life in these two performances. Leaning heavily on the notion that creative acts and experiences like theatre can effect moral change or instil within offenders a sense of personal responsibility, those that had helped to devise the play argued that this project had transformed the inmates that had participated, and had better equipped them for life outside. Agnes Wilcox – the artistic director of a theatre programme in the United States called ‘Prison Performing Arts’ – suggested in a *New York Times* article that, “If you want to prepare inmates to rejoin society, create a prison theatre program” (Wilcox 2012). She argues that, “theatrical productions provide an excellent environment in which to learn and practice skills that prepare people for success in life and work – among them commitment, self-control, discipline, self-worth and teamwork” (Wilcox 2012). Wilcox asserts that theatre programmes:

Teach offenders that there is something bigger than their individual wants and needs. It reminds them that they are part of a community that requires them to be responsible and accountable for their behaviour and acts. It is teaching the lessons of life to those who have failed those lessons in the past.

(Wilcox 2012)

During a symposium hosted a few days before the inmates’ production, NGOs, academics, DCS staff, and artist-facilitators met to discuss the power of theatre as a rehabilitative tool. Alex Sutherland, a prison theatre facilitator working in the Western Cape, suggested that

theatre projects within the prison provide significant ways to explore ‘playfulness’ and ‘vulnerability’ while stepping into roles other than the role of the ‘deviant’ ascribed to them by society and by the institution of the prison. “Theatre work offers an embodied technique,” she said, “where inmates can try out a variety of roles different from the narrow set of options given to them by their past actions and their current situations” (Sutherland 2017). For Sutherland, this practice is, ‘radically democratic’ and contains within it politics and possibilities for liberation. Yet, as I argued in Chapter Two, the emancipatory benefit of inhabiting normative and conventional roles – or ones that differ from the assigned one of ‘the criminal’ – has its limits. The belief that Wilcox, Sutherland, and some of the people that had spoken after the first performance have in programmes like this mirrors the wider political tendency and the cultural inclination to place trust in the ‘rehabilitative prison’ to provide appropriate remedies for crime and criminal behaviour. These thoroughly liberal ideas are rooted in the philosophy that great structural change can occur from individual rehabilitation. In Norway – a country notorious for low rates of poverty and crime, low income inequality, and a society that for most of its citizens provides the means to live without committing crime – a theatre project like this might be beneficial for those who do. In a South African context, however, investing too much faith in a project like this represents the incompatibility of moralising morals and societal reality in the pursuit of criminal justice. Inserting the inmate-performers into a normative framework that renders them capable of self-actualisation, the theatre production (both in its internal content - an orthodox and cogent plot – and in the reformative potential underlying it) reproduced the individualising principles that undergird and sustain penal reform discourse in South Africa. As Liat Ben-Moshe noted, “Reformist politics ... are in the greatest risk of being co-opted by the state and its apparatuses” (Ben-Moshe 2013: 88) - however blame does not need to lie, she argues, in the work of these reformers and their programmes. “The ideology and overarching goals of public policy,” (Ben-Moshe 2013: 88) she suggests, coerce reformist activity into reproducing the structures that underlie systems of criminal justice. “In many cases,” she continues, “the state’s mechanisms are not even necessary because activists embody the state in their actions and interactions” (Ben-Moshe 2013: 88).

Participating in the theatre programme had provided some structure, a sense of dignity and recognition, and a productive experience for the inmates where there would otherwise have been none. Musa’s and Tshepho’s own performances – of citizenship and belonging – produced similar effects. In all of these cases, a sense of hope could arise out of

an otherwise hopeless situation - the redemptive tone of rehabilitation opens up a space for the individual to imagine a possible future, different from the one that might otherwise lie ahead. Yet, as Gillespie reminds, “Ideational intervention with little basis in any structural transformation of social relations eviscerates the very politics that are being rhetorically invoked” (Gillespie 2008: 77) when hope and transformation become so energetically invested in. At the symposium, Chiedza Chinhanu - a scholar researching prison theatre in Zimbabwe - spoke in response to Sutherland’s claims: “Is ‘playing’ with marginalised groups – with real needs - really going to be enough?” she asked.

Dani Snyder-Young, the author of *Theatre of Good Intentions: Challenges and Hopes for Theatre and Social Change*, reminds that while theatre is an, “emancipatory praxis” (Snyder-Young 2013) inherent in theatre and other artistic programmes for prisoners and marginalised communities, ‘good intentions’ often reify the hegemonic structures and the harmful ideologies that these projects aim to dismantle. In their pursuit of hope, the inmates at Pollsmoor and the Norwegian stakeholders and facilitators played into the pernicious understanding that crime is remediable through individual, moral intervention. In downplaying structural barriers and emphasising agency – “You are your own tool” – everyone in the room was, momentarily, insulated from the difficult realities of the performers’ past lives, their current incarceration, and their likely futures.

Unsettling the script

In the previous section, I asked what becomes foreclosed or silenced when hopeful stories are told. The second act offered answers to this question: accounts of structural vulnerability that speak to the relationship of poverty to crime, the stigma that accompanies imprisonment despite the state’s claims to ‘embracing prisoners back into society’, and the limits of moral transformation upon release. Narratives of redemption, as the four performers showed, cannot come up against the structural forces that shape and condition the lives of vulnerable populations in South Africa. That their performance was not funded by or choreographed with the help of any institution is revealing; these ex-convicts, operating independently and not beholden to the institution, were free to represent their lived experience without the use of a digestible narrative filter. Sutherland, commenting on the difficulties of developing theatre programmes within South Africa, importantly noted that NGOs, “need to frame the usefulness of these projects in ways that the Department of Corrections wants to hear it”. She continued to explain that access is often only granted

when projects like hers align themselves clearly with the institutional logics and goals of the prison, and further, that platforms for the performances that arise from these programmes are only given when their content is palatable:

It is mostly the less political art forms, like music and dance, that make it into the DCS events and their national tours. Last year, a female group of inmates got to tour the country with the DCS. Their production was about four women who had committed sins, and who were looking for redemption. Their story was deeply religious, and highly moralising. In the end, they confessed their sins and asked for forgiveness.

Pathologising notions of criminality are the linchpin for the Department of Correctional Services' rehabilitative project, so it is clear why ex-convicts-turned motivational speakers, performances like the one described above, and other forms of moralising representations of crime are given platforms above more radical and honest critiques.

The second act's four performers, subject neither to this institutional censorship nor to any self-censorship (rooted in the hopefulness of redemption), demonstrated what could lie beyond the state-approved narrative. Their performances provided an abrasive to the 'state script' – and showed how the presentation of another set of stories might hold the potential for a more grounded form of radical critique. Troubling and extending Bourdieu's conception of the dialectical relationship of agency to structure, scholars like Craig Calhoun (1993), Didier Fassin (2003), and Dominique Behague (2008) have made compelling arguments about the role of individual agency and creativity in producing structural transformation. In a study on the negotiation of blame and accountability among obstetric patients in Benin, Behague (2008) pushes Bourdieu's dialectical framework of agency to counter more common uses of the model to explain how larger hegemonic structures become reproduced through individual action, arguing instead that non-structuralist forms of resistance can arise from 'transformative agency' in the everyday. Micro-revolutionary actions within an institutional 'field', like the second act at the Artscape, can be studied to illuminate exceptional (if only fleeting) moments that may work to transform or reshape wider structures. "Despite a lack of social, economic, and symbolic capital," she argues, "minority groups could position themselves as disruptive" (Behague 2008: 4). Calhoun (1993) and Fassin (2003) have also argued that institutional transformations can arise from, and give rise to, new social patterns.

Analytical focus on these moments could reveal how the possibility of institutional change may, in part, lie in deviating from normatively sanctioned practices and narratives. The second part of Thursday evening's performance was a notable example of the potential that lies in these forms of action. In diverging from the norm, the second act prompted a debate that addressed issues usually silenced by discourses on reform. The audience was forced to confront the reality of the prison's inadequacy in effecting long term and meaningful change, and showed willingness to engage in what is so often ignored, by asking questions about life after release, and by acknowledging the structured forms of violence and victimisation that the offenders had themselves been subjected to. If ex-convicts, NGOs, researchers, and inmates could inhabit the discursive and institutional scene of the prison more disruptively, then we may begin to chip away at penal reform's master narrative. Making room for the stories that could motivate epistemic changes and broad cultural shifts is where a different kind of hope might lie.

* * *

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have tracked the social life of penal reform and the discourses of rehabilitation that it has given rise to, in an attempt to demystify the complex processes that sustain the prison – a fundamentally undemocratic institution – in a putatively democratic, post-apartheid South Africa. I have shown that ideologies of ‘betterment’ have given rise to a moral economy that operates at the level of state discourse, in the media, in reformist projects, and in everyday prison practice. Using narrative as a conceptual lens, I have tried to show that these investments in rehabilitation are not merely performances, but that they become complexly intertwined with experience, perception, and identity. The master narrative or ‘state script’ – contained in policy documents like the White Paper – has trickled into everyday understandings of crime. Moralising conceptions of accountability are both the products of, and sustain, the stylised ideal of the ‘rehabilitative prison’. Cycles of complicity in this system – even for those whose lives are most affected by its failure – are the result of coercive forces that I tried to illuminate in chapters two and three. Tshepho and Musa’s stories shed light on the allure of discourses about reform and redemption: in all of its forms, the redemptive script produces possibility and hope for prisoners, acting as a guard against the material and symbolic assaults of incarceration. For NGOs and other stakeholders who are invested in making prison life more constitutional, the immediacy of reformist (rather than more radical abolitionist) approaches to transformation is justifiably attractive. Without conforming to the framework of prison betterment, access and funding becomes restricted. Reform and redemption are, as I have tried to show, responses to an impasse – a desire for transformation without the means to really achieve it.

In the discursive environment of reform, thought and action are forced into a binary: ‘bad’ and ‘good’ prisons. Aspiring towards ‘better’ prisons and to being ‘better’ represents a profound foreclosure of more radical forms of critique and intervention that are sorely needed in a South African context. The intellectual project with which this thesis has been aligned is a critical one – that steps out of this binary, to hold open a space for thinking more

broadly about the prison and its relationship to history and wider society. This has meant rooting the argument in an ideological critique of the prison – not merely of its quantifiable but its symbolic effects. I have tried to show that antiprison critiques can be forged using ethnographic methods – by moving closer towards, rather than further away from the institutions that comprise South Africa’s criminal justice system. I have used stories of redemption to reveal the ideological power that rehabilitative models perform, and to show how moralising frameworks contribute to structured denials of violence in the political and the social sphere. I have argued that the disavowal of structural violence implicit in documents like the White Paper (and in official discourse more widely) becomes repeated in miniature through inmates’ self-narratives, and that these acts have profound political implications. By revealing the relationship of agency to coercive state institutions, I have outlined the difficulties of exploring other more radical modes of critiquing the prison. By inserting narrative into my critique, I have tried to establish new ground for conducting analyses of how prisons operate ideologically. Concerned with the ethics and the politics of knowledge production, this research has shown how different questions can lead to different forms of evidence, that allow systems like the prison to be unpicked with fresh perspectives. This could form the basis of new understandings of crime, justice, and accountability, that will create room for a new intellectual, social and moral agenda rooted in a broader politics of hope.

As I showed, certain narratives have the capacity to govern individual and collective action. At present, that narrative is rooted in reform. Constructing a new narrative towards a more democratic future for South Africa could help to plot reformist and antiprison action together along a continuum, that takes into account both broader concerns and more immediate obligations. For this reason, I would argue that a ‘narrative intervention’ is required on every scale. Bourdieu has described this phenomenon as the imposition of hegemonic frameworks onto marginalised people. This framework – within limits – could be productively reversed to unsettle taken for granted knowledge at the level of discourse. Can narrative be an engine of social change? Recent counter-assertions like #FeesMustFall across universities in South Africa, #metoo and Black Lives Matter campaigns globally, as well as pop cultural inquests into criminal justice like NPR’s hit podcast *Serial* and HBO’s *Making A Murderer* show how alternative ways of thinking about and representing taken-for-granted social systems can pave the way for their erosion. Complicating widespread and unexamined understandings of crime and justice in South Africa could contribute

meaningfully to the dismantlement of the system of mass incarceration, and I have tried to demonstrate the way that anthropological methods might lend themselves to this project. Tshepho often repeats James Baldwin's famous assertion that, "not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed if it is not faced" (Baldwin 1962). What must be faced, as I have shown, is not the moral failure of criminals in any narrow sense, but the structures that condition criminal behaviour and the violence and victimisation that characterise the lives of many of South Africa's prisoners.

Angela Davis has argued that, "The most difficult and urgent challenge today is that of creatively exploring new terrains of justice, where the prison no longer serves as our major anchor" (Davis 2003: 21). Effective solutions will lie not in reactionary forms of punitive incarceration, but in the transformation of the structures that track vulnerable populations, mired by the legacy of apartheid, into South Africa's criminal justice system. The knowledge required to establish a broad cultural understanding of (and empathy for) this phenomena can be drawn from the biographies of those at the center of the debate, whose life stories show the interpenetration of poverty, precariousness, and crime. Their stories, if undiluted by claims to moral redemption, could help to make the widespread disavowal that marks much of South Africa's approach to crime and punishment impossible. Uncritical investments in rehabilitative prisons reveal an impotent form of hope. In *The Method of Hope* (2004) Hirokazu Miyazaki asked what the role of hopefulness might be in knowledge formation – and as I have shown, hope has played a stultifying role in the production of knowledge about crime, accountability, and justice in South Africa for the last 25 years. Critique grounded in the structural reality of the present, and in a utopian future without prisons, might provide the ground for a different kind of hope – one that points to a radically different South Africa.

* * *

Postscript

After I finished collecting material for this thesis, Tshepho was released. As I write this, he has been out for just over a month. He is enjoying his freedom, and launched into action as soon as he was out, giving talks and radio interviews about his life and his plans for Motivation Empire. I met with him recently, and we spoke about his life outside.

“Things are not as easy as I hoped they would be, Kathy,” he said. “But I have not lost sight of my vision. I will still change the world”

We discussed what his challenges had been, and his reflections echoed those that I’d heard during Act II at the Artscape.

“You should write about it, Tshepho,” I said.

“You’re right” he replied. “It might be time that I add another chapter to my book”.

* * *

Works Cited

- Agamben, G. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press
- Agboola, C. 2015. Consensual same-sex sexual relationships in South African Female Prisons. *Gender & Behaviour* 13(2)
- Alexander, M. 2012. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colourblindness*. New York: The New Press
- Albertyn, C. 2013. 'Cultural Diveristy, "Living Law" and Women's Rights in South Africa' in *Constitutionalism in the Global South*. Cambridge University Press
- Anderson, E. 1998. *Code of the street: Decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city*. New York: Knopf
- Arendt, H. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: Chicago University Press
- Behague, D. Kanhonour, L. Filippi, V. Legonou, S. Ronsmans, C. 2008. 'Pierre Bourdieu and transformative agency: a study of how patients in Benin negotiate blame and accountability in the context of severe obstetric events' *Social Health*
- Benjamin, W. 1996. 'Critique of Violence' in *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913 –1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University
- Biehl, J. and Locke, P. 2010. "Deleuze and the Anthropology of Becoming." *Current Anthropology* 51(3):317-351.
- Biehl, J. and McKay, R. 2012. 'Ethnography as Political Critique'. *Anthropological Quarterly* (85)4
- Biehl, J. and Petryna, A. eds. 2013. *When People Come First: Critical Studies in Global Health*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bourgois, P. 2009. "Recognizing Invisible Violence: A Thirty-Year Ethnographic Retrospective." in *Global Health in Times of Violence*, edited by Rylko-Bauer, B, Whiteford, L and Farmer, P. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press.
- Brown, A. and Toyoki, S. 2013. Identity Work and Legitimacy. *Organisation Studies* (34)
- Brown, M. 2009. *The Culture of Punishment: Prison, Society, and Spectacle*, New York: New York University Press.
- Bruner, J. 1991. 'The Narrative Construction of Reality'. *Critical Enquiry* (18) 1
- Buntman, F. 2005. 'Imprisonment in post-apartheid South Africa: Personal Histories' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 31 (3)

- Buntman, F. 2009. 'Prison and Democracy: Lessons Learned and Not Learned from 1989 to 2009' *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* (22)
- Christie, N. 2000. *Crime Control as Industry: Towards Gulags Western Style*. London: Routledge.
- Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J. 2001. *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J. 2004. "Criminal Justice, Cultural Justice: The Limits of Liberalism and the Pragmatics of Difference in the New South Africa." *American Ethnologist* 31(2)
- Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J. 2017. *The Truth About Crime*. Wits University Press
- Crewe, B. and Ievins, A. 2015. 'Closeness, Distance and Honesty in Prison Ethnography' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Ethnography*. Palgrave Macmillan
- De Certeau, M. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: California Press
- Deleuze, G. and Felix G. 1977. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. New York: Viking Press.
- Dirsuweit, T. 1999. Carceral Spaces in South Africa: A Case Study of Institutional Power, Sexuality and Transgression in a Women's Prison. *Geoforum* (30)
- Drake, D. Earle, R. Sloan, J. 2015. *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Ethnography*. Palgrave Macmillan
- Duguid, S. 2000. *Can Prisons Work? The Prisoner as Object and Subject in Modern Corrections*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press
- Duneier, M. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Ellis, C. 2004. *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.
- Ewick, P. and Silbey, S. 2003. Narrating Social Structure: Stories of Resistance to Legal Authority. *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (6)
- Foucault, M. 1977 [1975]. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Press.
- Galtung, J. 1969. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 6(3):167–91.
- Garland, D. 1991. 'Punishment and Culture: The Symbolic Dimension of Criminal Justice'. *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society* 11: 1911-1922.
- Gear, S. 2010. *Imprisoning Men in Violence. Masculinity and sexual abuse: a view from South African Prisons*. *SA Crime Quarterly* (33)
- Geertz, C. 2000. *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Geertz, C. 1973. *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books

- Giddens, A. 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Gillespie, K. 2008. 'Moralising Security: Corrections and the Post-Apartheid Prison' in *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* Volume 2 Issue 1. Indiana University Press
- Gilmore, R.W. 2007. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalising California*. California: University of California Press
- Goffman, I. 1968. *Asylums*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin
- Holstein, J. and Gubrium, J. 2000. *Constructing the Life Course*. Rowman & Littlefield
- Jackson, M. 2002. *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Kotze, H. and Greyling, A. 1991. *Political Organisations in South Africa, A-Z*. Tafelberg
- Lindegaard, M. and Gear, S. 2014. 'Violence Makes Safe in South African Prisons' *Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* (68)
- Livingston, J. *Improvising Medicine: An African Oncology Ward in an Emerging Cancer Epidemic*. Duke University Press
- Maruna, S. Wilson, L. and Curran, K. 2006. 'Why God is often found behind bars: Prison Conversions and the Crisis of Self-Narrative' *Research in Human Development* (3) 2
- Masutha, M. 2015. Justice Dept. Budget Vote 2015/2016. URL: <http://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-michael-masutha-justice-dept-budget-vote-ncop-201617-19-apr-2016-0000>
- Masutha, M. 2015. Justice Dept. Budget Vote 2015/2016. URL: <http://www.gov.za/speeches/speech-michael-masutha-mp-adv-minister-justice-and-correctional-services-occasion-justice> Accessed on 28/08/16
- McKenzie, G and Cilliers, C. 2007. *The Choice*. Cape Town: Zar Publishing
- Miyazaki, H. 2004 *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Muntingh, L. 2010. *Prisons in South Africa's Constitutional Democracy*. CSPIR Quarterly
- Newman, K. 1999. *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Nixon, R. 2013. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press
- Ochs, E, and Capps, L. 2001. *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Okri, B. 2015. Under The Sun: a meditation by Ben Okri on stories. The Irish Times. URL available: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/under-the-sun-a-meditation-by-ben-okri-on-stories-1.2416769>

- Presser, L. and Sandberg, S. 2015. *Narrative Criminology: Understanding Stories of Crime*. New York: NYU Press
- Ricoeur, P. 1984. *Time and Narrative*, Volume 1, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Redpath, J. 2012. *Failing to prosecute? Assessing the State of the National Prosecuting Authority of South Africa*. Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Monograph 186 (2012)
- Scheper-Hughes, N. 1992. *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Somers, M. 1994. 'The narrative constitution of identity: a relational and network approach' *Theory and Society* 23(5)
- Scott, J. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press
- Scott, D. 2002. *The Sovereignty of the Imagination: An Interview with George Lamming*. Small Axe
- Sharma, Aradhana and Akhil Gupta. 2006. *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Snyder-Young, D. *Theatre of Good Intentions: Challenges and Hopes for Theatre and Social Change*. Springer
- Steinberg, Jonny. 2004. *The Number: One Man's Search for Identity in the Cape Underworld and Prison Gangs*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers
- Swartz, H. Harding, J. & De Lannoy, A. 2012. 'Ikasi style and the quiet violence of dreams: a critique of youth belonging in post-apartheid South Africa' *Comparative Education*
- Tsing, A. 1993. *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Super, Gail. 2016. 'Punishment, Violence, and Grassroots democracy in South Africa: the politics of populist punitiveness' in *Punishment & Society* 18(3) 325-345
- Tsing, A. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press
- Tyler, S. 1987. On "Writing-up/off" as "Speaking-for". *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 43(4)
- Vetten, Lisa. 2012. Going somewhere slowly? A comparison of the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act (no. 116 of 1998) in an urban and semi-urban site. *ISS Quarterly* (78)
- Wacquant, L. 2000. 'The new "peculiar institution": On the prison as surrogate ghetto'. *Theoretical Criminology* 4(3), Special issue on 'New Social Studies of the Prison'
- Wacquant, L. 2001. "The Penalisation of Poverty and the Rise of Neo-Liberalism." *European Journal of Criminal Policy and Research* 9(4)

Wacquant, L. 2002. The Curious Eclipse of Prison Ethnography in the Age of Mass Incarceration in 'Ethnography' Volume 3 Issue 4. London: Sage Publications

Wacquant, L. 2002. Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality, and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography. *American Journal of Sociology*

Wacquant, L. 2009. *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Duke University Press.

Wacquant, L. 2009. *Prisons of Poverty*. University of Minnesota Press

Wilcox, A. 2012. 'Prison Theatre Transforms Inmates' *New York Times*