

## **South African Violence: looking further than the government's explanation.**

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The purpose of this essay is to shed a very dim light on a very vast issue: violence in South Africa. The light shed will be dim partly for the fact that it is rooted in the author's personal experience, and if nothing else, begs the question: of how much relevance is the perspective of one privileged 'outsider' when trying to understand a social ill which, by and far, worst devastates the least privileged and most impoverished of South Africans? At the same time, the issue is a vast one because it informs many fundamental facets of life in South Africa, and it informs these different facets differently for different people. Violence means something completely different for someone who has grown up near the University of Cape Town in Rondebosch, compared to another human being who may live 30 minutes away in Overcome: one of the countless ghetto-like 'squatter areas' in South Africa, located by the dumping grounds of the opulent Muizenberg beach in Cape Town. Violence in such communities is difficult to explain, and nation-wide violence is even more difficult to unravel. No one has an answer. The government of South Africa, however, feels obligated to find an all encompassing explanation for the unique suffering their country plays host to. As such, in 2007, it's Minister of Safety and Security, Mr. Nathi Mthethwa, hired the Centre for Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) to produce an explanation for the ruling government. The report, released in 2010, would be called "Why does South Africa have such high rates of violent crime?" The commissioned writing would be produced in accordance with the "terms of an agreement, entered into by the Minister on behalf of the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security (JCPS) cluster of cabinet"<sup>1</sup> and released in 2010 upon the Minister's inspection and approval<sup>2</sup>. However, the truth of the matter remains

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<sup>1</sup> "“Why does South Africa have such high rates of violent crime?” *The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation* (2009): 2.

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of clarity, the reader should be aware that the South African government is the sole customer of the CSVR, and has been for some years. On [www.csvr.org.za](http://www.csvr.org.za), under the section for Funding and Affiliation, the opening line reads: "The CSVR receives no financial support from the South African government." At the very end of the page, however, the reader will find this: "CSVR has received funding to do specific projects in partnership with government involving the following government departments: Department of Education (Northern Cape), Department

that the politicians who order reports to be made about the nature of violence, similar to the students of politics who read or write the pre-approved publications, don't usually rest their heads within the violent communities that the report concerns. As such, this paper will try to make use of the dim light which is the experience of one person who has lived in such communities in order to perhaps provide a different perspective to that which is the common understanding of the nature of violence in South Africa, as championed by the government, the Centre for Violence and Reconciliation, and their mutually supported report.

### **What Violence?**

The common understanding of violence within South Africa, as pushed by the government and as articulated by the CSV, is one premised by the belief that the violence in South Africa is not unique. Within the commissioned report itself, statistics are skewed in order to push this view, using low estimates for South African murder rates, and high estimates for countries such as Venezuela. But even after such ambiguity, South Africa statistically trumps others in that category too; however, murder rates are hardly a just indicator of the violence which plagues this country. Shaky and highly irrelevant antidotes follow, such as "During the last 100 years several other countries such as Rwanda, Cambodia, and Germany, have engaged in forms of mass violence or other systematic human rights violations, such as campaigns of genocide, in which rates of killing have far exceeded those in South Africa."<sup>3</sup> This is both derogatory to those who suffer from violence in South Africa, as it merely dismisses their

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of Education (Gauteng), Department of Community Safety (Gauteng), Department of Health (Gauteng), Department of Social Development (Gauteng), Department of Welfare (Gauteng), Gauteng Legislature Committee of Public Safety, South African Police Services - Crime Prevention Division, Umsobomvo Youth Fun, The Department of Safety and Security" Such obviously deeply vested interests and long standing relationships must be at the forefront of one's thoughts when analyzing the publication at hand. It is difficult to overlook the obvious interests the government has in the findings of the report. One must also remember that the government has final say on what is and is not published by the CSV in this report. The CSV receives payment from the government for this paper, and the paper itself is governed by guidelines and agreements drafted by the paying party. Naturally, the CSV must produce a report based on the framework demanded by the government in order to fulfill the work they were commissioned to do. One must also be weary of the possible effects such political/financial interests can have in the production of the hypothesis.

<sup>3</sup> "Why does South Africa have such high rates of violent crime?": 4.

suffering as yet another chapter of injustice in history, while it is also disingenuous to reality because it fails to acknowledge that South Africa's relationship with violence is a unique one in that violence defines essentially every major facet of life for the most impoverished of South Africans, nurturing generational suffering, and entrenching violence as life's corner stone for the worst off in the so called 'Rainbow Nation'. Thus, one goal this essay seeks to accomplish is to demonstrate the unique nature of violence in South Africa, highlighting some major facets of an entrenched culture violence, challenging the very foundation of the government commissioned report.

There is another claim that this essay will challenge: that the violent nature of crime in South Africa is due to apartheid. According to the report, so responsible is apartheid for today's violence that one section of the report goes as far to claim that 'white South African culture legitimised the ownership of personal firearms'<sup>4</sup>. No mention was made to the current President's far more recent championing of the song 'Umshini-Wami' or 'Bring me my Machine Gun', perhaps due to the unique relationship the government and the CSVR. Other justifications come off as more elitist, such as those which go on to claim that the violence is rooted in black South African's lack of self-esteem due to historical racism. Even when contemporary inequality is acknowledges as playing part in the violence, the inequality itself is blamed once again on apartheid policies, effectively relinquishing the current government of any liability or responsibility for the existing state of violence<sup>5</sup>. Partial blame is then put on consumerism, alluding to the idea that 'the styling and packaging of all kinds of consumer goods' incites people to commit violent acts for materials. However, as this paper will try to explain, what perpetuates contemporary violence is not simply a legacy apartheid, nor a materially-motivated inferiority complex amongst the poor; the issue is much deeper, and beyond a simple explanation.

While the report repeatedly blames the historical wrongdoings of apartheid for contemporary suffering today, and while it would be difficult for anyone who is familiar with South African history to deny that apartheid policies were instrumental in introducing certain types of violence to South African society, it would be even more difficult for anyone who has

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<sup>4</sup> "Why does South Africa have such high rates of violent crime?": 7

<sup>5</sup> "Why does South Africa have such high rates of violent crime?": 8

lives in the county's violent communities to simply hold the legacy of apartheid responsible for the suffering they experience almost two decades on. In order to be able understand the predominance of violent crime in South Africa, one has to understand the nature of violence in South Africa itself; the commissioned report seems to be completely unaware of this basic necessity, failing to demonstrate that it truly engaged with the violent realities of those within South Africa who regularly utilise violence, or are victimized by it. By demonstrating how life for many poor South Africans is defined by violence, as the following will seek to do, perhaps one can then understand that today's violent crimes are only one externality resulting from a general life of violence; the report would have been more useful if it acknowledged this reality. As such, the sections that follow will explain how the relationships, interactions, and living conditions which define life for many of South Africa's poor contribute in the habitual perpetrations of violence. This may help bringing to light the all-encompassing nature of violence within the lives of some of South Africa's most marginalized communities, and the impact this violence has on these communities' inhabitants and their own posterity towards violent behaviour.

### **Childhood Impressions**

No group is more affected by violence than young children; they are first victimized by the violence, after which they become more prone to victimizing others themselves, or at least becoming more accepting of aggression from others. They are routinely exposed to violence in different ways, with each encounter shaping that person's relationship with violence. The all too typical public exchange which took place in Overcome one November night in 2010 speaks volumes about this reality. On a typical evening, around the time when the poor return to the gang-dominated shack-lands from the rich economic hubs where most work, a woman, in her 30s, lays on the ground with her son standing a few feet away, crying in fear. It's a windy night, as it always is, and there are hundreds of people walking past her. They are not concerned: her situation is average to them. A man is standing over her. After unloading a barrage of vulgar words at him from the ground, she eventually stands and staggers away, jerking her distressed child along with her. The man walks the opposite way. He still hasn't said a word. She turns abruptly and begins her verbal assault again, more relentless than last time; she has no other

weapon. About 6 tin shacks away, he halts, turns, faces her, and points his finger at her, maintaining it there, along with a look of anger that says “be careful, or you’ll get it”. She burns him with harsher words. Remaining silent, he continues to try and intimidate her. She becomes more vulgar. He continues to point, staring at her with anger. This too is ordinary, and those walking by still pay no attention to the hostile encounter; after all, they see or partake in such interactions daily. By now the child has gone from crying to weeping, and it is at this point that his mother lets go of his hand and pushes him towards the man threatening her. “Go with your father! You guys can go have a good time together! He doesn’t want me to go out with him? Fine, then he can take you!” The child begins to cry so hard that he stumbles while attempting to walk back to her. If the mother has not been scared so far, it is clear that her young has taken on all of her fear, anxiety, and pain during this increasingly volatile human interaction. She pushes him some more towards the father. He cries more and more, but the woman keeps on pushing him to his father who is patiently waiting to snap. The child finally drags his heavy feet away from his mother, and with tears gushing down his face walks towards his father. A few seconds later he arrives at the large man’s feet, at which point the father begins to march forward, picking up the crying child with one arm, swinging him as to throw him to his right side, and continuing forward. He takes no more than 10 big steps by the time he has arrived by the woman’s face. He released the distressed child and the child momentarily stopped crying to see what will happen next. The man doesn’t hesitate: he extends his left arm out as he turns his torso for maximum momentum, swinging the extended arm as to send all his strength through the arm, and in to his large, tightly clinched fist which connects with the woman’s face. With all of his strength, he drops her. The sound which came from her face was devastating, as was the thud of her drop. At the time, it was difficult to gauge who was hit harder in such a violent occurrence: the woman, or her child? It still is. It’s also difficult to predict if the child will remember this violent exchange for the rest of his life, or if it will become but a faded memory amongst countless other memories of violence which will influence his disposition towards violence when he is old enough to be able, or forced, to utilize it.

By regularly being exposed to various forms of violence throughout different stages of early development, violence becomes ingrained in the child’s mentality, effecting their thoughts and actions towards others, their communities, and their own lives. Younger children, even

infants, come to be engulfed in violence too. On July 11<sup>th</sup>, the night that FIFA's show began in Johannesburg's multi-million dollar Soccer City stadium, life went on as usual in the violently impoverished community of Riverli located a 25 minute walk away . That night, at a backyard funeral, a female teenager abruptly yells at a man and accuses him of disrespecting her verbally. As she yells, she walks towards him and smashes him in the face with the big bottle of cheap beer she had been aggressively drinking. What ensued was a brawl involving about 20 people, with the teenager stuck in the middle of it. During this entire violent exchange, the teenager was holding her baby of a few months under her arm. Such South African realities leave deep impressions in the minds of the young who have no choice but to be witness, and at later ages often partake in, small and great acts of violence. As it is these youth who later come to be victims or victimizers, we must pay particular attention to such destructive realities in regard to their their personal development.

With more and more years of exposure, youth become increasingly prone to participation in violent crimes. Take the following real life example: at the age of 9, an impoverished youth had his bike stolen from him by the local slum bully. Any person who has had a bike as a child knows how special such a toy is, and it's an even more highly prized possession if you one is desperately poor. Later that day the bully returned with a badly damaged bike. The young owner of the bike, after 9 years of constant exposure to violence from his family of poor, career gangsters, and after a life time of exposure to countless instances of childhood violence in his community like those described in throughout this paper, reacted in kind. Filled with rage, he reached for a nearby axe and blitzed at the bully; the bully got away. However, this instinctive violent reaction for the youth had a long lasting effect. As violence is so normal in such communities, it is also often rewarded, especially in such 'underdog stories' where the weaker party is ill-treated. Those who witnessed the child's reaction applauded him for it. He remembers how his instinctive violent reaction to the situation, as well as the community's reaction to his behaviour, made him feel good about himself; for the first time, he felt powerful, acknowledged, and accepted. The violence which had been ingrained in his daily life finally came to make him a perpetrator of it from that day forward. He began to act more and more violently in his regular interactions with his family, friends, and especially strangers, inflicting mental, verbal, and physical abuse on those who he wished to dominate. By the age of 13 he assassinated his first

target as a child hit-man, working for the infamous prison gang called the 27s, not surprisingly known for specialising in the taking of blood. The youth, however, knew the gang as the one that both his mother and father's families belonged to. None of this, of course, is unordinary in such communities, nor is children's exposure to the nature of violence described in the sections below.

### **The Treatment of Women**

Another pivotal way violence is normalized and utilized in these impoverished communities is through the treatment of women. Due to the unique and important role of women within any society, this highly disenfranchised group's exposure to violence is pivotal in understanding the proliferation of violence in general, as well as the exceptional types of aggression they are forced to bear. It is distressing that the CSVN's commissioned government report paid no attention to the unique situation of women, regardless of the fact that they are the most habitually victimized group. While women are victimized in a myriad of ways, one type of violent victimization that this paper will not discuss is rape. The simple reason for this is that it is already well known that poor South African women suffer from brutal sexual violence across all ages, and at the hands of both strangers and family. To restate and re-illustrate this devastating social ill would be redundant and void of value. There are, however, other dimensions of violence towards women which are seldom discussed.

Women are generally overlooked within the communities in question, typically receiving little to no respect from men, or sometimes even boys. Such poor communities, like essentially all other communities in the world, are highly patriarchal. The normality of violence in such communities, combined with the lack of respect for women, results in routine assaults of varying potency levels. Except for the odd woman who physically out powers her partner, heterosexual relationships are generally dominated by men. Disputes, disagreements, and general dissatisfaction within relationships are settled in favour of men who practice violence on their physically weaker female partners<sup>6</sup>. Far from unheard of, a routine slap, punch, or choke is to be

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<sup>6</sup> Homosexual relationships too are no less violent than heterosexual relationships within these communities, however, homosexuals are often further exposed to violence from homophobic members of the community.

expected; imagined masculine identities are validated through them. Husbands may also stab their wives; nothing is unordinary. Rarely is such violence reported to any government branch, and if it is, little is done about. The sights and sounds of women being beat down, in public or in private depending on where one decides to exercise violence are as normal as the sounds of fire trucks and ambulance in the rich nearby communities. The normality of such treatment is reinforced by the existing patriarchal order, with violence becoming an unanswerable question for the women who suffer by it. The violent dominance of men over women in such communities renders the police that the poor already regard as 'useless' as of having even less use. Even in the rare case that a woman lays charges for being the victim of a violent crime, she may be swiftly intimidated by her assailant to drop the charges. Due to government incompetence in addressing such realities, and in light of the fact that men possess a near exclusive monopoly over violence, barring women from effectively fighting back, women remain generational victims of violence.

Beyond becoming perpetual victims though, the normalizing effect of violence on these women can also make them perpetrators themselves. This pattern is not unique; rather, it's focal to explaining the prevalence of violent crime in South Africa. When one is witness or victim to so much violence, there likelihood of becoming a participant in violence seems reasonable. Placed in a violent setting where there is, for all practical reasons and purposes, little to no rule of law, and where there is no effective body to ensure those who harm others are stopped if not punished, women often engage in violence with those who they can. Sometimes women dominate men violently. More often, women abuse each other over economic or romantic disputes. It is not extraordinary to witness women slash each other with glass pipes crafted out of the broken bottle which clutter busy dirt roads. These women are accustomed to violence, especially as a group with unique exposure to it.

## **Youth Violence**

In many ways, violence is most frequently practiced by youth. Youth everywhere strive to fit in with their peers, both in rich and poor communities. However, in an environment founded on violence, fitting in, or even surviving amongst other youth, often becomes defined by one's ability and willingness to practice violence. Take another normal exchange: one afternoon,

a young man, speaking on his phone, walks past a group of 5 others. One of the young men in the group demands that the phone is handed over. This is refused rudely (as to politely say no is often viewed as a sign of weakness and an opening for attack). The man demanding the phone reacts aggressively to what he feels is disrespect. Should he not, he would look weak amongst his peers or like 'less of a man'. He then proceeds to stab the man with the phone, and they tussle until both are injured enough to stop without looking afraid in front of the community. In such environments, one must always be stern as even signs of weaknesses can be quickly and violently exploited.

Female youth are particularly vulnerable, and it is in their younger years that they learn that even their sexuality is to be informed by aggression. Common amongst young people, from those who may be 8 years old to those who may be in their mid-20s, is a certain kind of sexual flirting which is in itself based on domination. Street corners are commonly claimed by groups of young men who grab young women at will, or get behind them and choke them as a sign of sexual interest. Some boys and even some men flirt with females by throwing stones at them. Though their purpose is obviously not to seriously hurt the women, the act itself speaks volumes about the normality of violence, and the disposition of men towards women. When thinking about the frequency and quality of sexually violent crimes within South Africa, one can't be shocked by their prevalence when even acts of affection, flirtation, and relationships themselves are so naturally violent. And though sexual violence towards women is a global social ill, the acts themselves seem to be particularly violent in South Africa. Take 'ice-boxing' for example: a form of group rape which involves two people spreading the legs of a woman apart and towards the shoulders while the third person forces a 750ml beer bottle up the victim's vagina. There are many other such examples, their use is not uncommon, but there is no need to illustrate them. Similarly, though men around the world may 'jock for position' with each other for women, such competition itself is drastically violent within such communities. Disagreements on ownership claims over the subjugated women are without hesitation dealt with violently. Causing fatality is not a fear, while showing fear can be fatal. A youth in one Cape Town squatter community got stabbed in October 2010 after another youth told him that his girlfriend is spreading rumours about him. No issue is too petty or too small to be dealt with violently in such communities, it seems.

## **Televised Violence**

Government television programming also has a very supportive roll in the nurturing of this culture of violence. The South African Broadcasting Company, a state owned and operated company, controls 3 television channels which broadcast throughout the country. There is satellite cable within South Africa, but such is a luxury meant for a small handful of privileged people in the country as the poor are far from unable to afford it. Due to a lack of opportunities within the squatter areas, many people find themselves watching state programming throughout the day. People do not have work, nor are their filthy squatter areas conducive to outdoor recreation. Given the violent nature of the communities, there is also a general element of danger associated with being outside of one's shelter. Combined with a complete lack of funds to engage in any sort of pass time or activity, be it buying a book to read, or buying materials to knit even, hungry groups often gather around the 3 channels to indulge in highly violent programming. It comes as no surprise that youth find particular enjoyment in watching television, as is the case with children globally. However, due to rampant unemployment amongst the traditional 'bread-winners', a significant portion of adult males also spend their days watching TV; women tend to spend less time doing so due to being obligated to tend to so called domestic work. With ample knowledge regarding the realities concerning violence in the poor communities, and knowing full well the demographic which watches these channels throughout the day, the government broadcasting company strategically schedules a constant, daily line up of hyper-masculine, violent programming. Primetime movie slots are usually reserved for motion-pictures filled with gore and violence. However, no program is more regularly aired and viewed within the poor communities more so than the WWE, or World Wrestling Entertainment. Such violent programming takes up many evening time-slots but even during the day it is often sandwiched between children's shows. For example, at 11:00 there may be a children show like Sesame Street on TV, followed by WWE from 11:30 to 12:30, followed by another children's show till 13:00. Given the aggressive nature of the show, and the far more aggressive nature of the communities, it resonates very well with all demographics, including many elders and women. Within such violent communities, there is an obvious attraction towards violent programming. People try to act like the violent characters they see on TV, becoming more and

more attracted to the status violent behaviour can bring. Death scenes in movies are celebrated, and images of great suffering often induce laughter. This reinforces an important reality of life: that violence is normal. Given the high viewership of violent programming, and the acutely violent nature of some communities, the frequent exposure to violence in the media assists in informing many people's outlook on violence, more often than not glorifying its use, attributing respect and status to those who can instil fear in other through it.

## **State Violence**

Beyond giving up on the police as a reliable source of protection from violence, the police themselves represent a massive and unparalleled threat of violence for the already vulnerable group of South African poor. Much like the dominance of men over women, the police often dominate over the poor, utilizing violence to achieve their ends. As the poor communities are usually seen as criminal waste lands by the police, the poor remain forever suspect. When not receiving the results they want, it is not unusual for the police to assault the poor, knowing full well that the poor have practically no voice or ability to fight back physically or legally. Children have even been tazered, while elders have been beaten in the same routine police raids. Of course, regardless of the often illegal and usually unnecessary use of violence by the police on the poor, neither the report nor the government ever acknowledges the destructive nature of the police's violent behaviour in informing violence in South Africa society.

The police's violent behaviours manifest themselves in more ways than just the inherently disrespectful relationship they usually have with the poor in these communities. Police are sometimes unleashed on mass into poor slums to enforce the agenda of the government, leaving yet another lasting impression on the minds of those victimized, shaping their disposition towards their own use of violence in the future. What happened in the mountain community of Gorachouqua, poor to the point that young girls still have to carry buckets of water up and down the mountain for life's daily needs, demonstrates the impact of state violence in the formation of violent behaviour amongst people. At 6 am on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010, some 300 police officers, accompanied by military like police vehicles move in on the Mountain. There are government orders to remove certain shack dwellers from their homes. Some argue that the reason was

capitalistic, kicking the poor down the mountain to sell valuable real-estate being sought for years by the elite, already being bought sold-off in sections in nearby, while other in the government argue that the poor shack dwellers posed a fire hazard to the mountain. Regardless of the reason, that morning the police opened fire on the community, shooting rubber bullets at men and women, young and old. Shacks were attacked with stun-grenades and tear gas. Pregnant women as well as children spoke of being taken away and beaten before being returned to their mountain slum hours later when the violence had calmed down. Two people were shot in the eye and blinded. Another was shot in his genitals. Children were most impacted by the encounter as not only did they witness brutal violence at the hands of the government, but they also saw counter violence by members of the community who sought to defend themselves against state aggression. The youth look up to this violence, gaining yet another perspective towards violence which makes utilizing it more normal, if not celebrated. Such state violence legitimizes the use of violence by the poor for many reasons. For one, many come to see that even the government falls back on the use of violence in order to achieve ends supposedly for the good of the people. If the government utilizes violence so freely, those witness to it have less reason to hesitate in using it themselves. Such large and violent encounters with the police are not uncommon in South Africa, with those hurt by it often nurturing a sense of resentment towards the state, more ready than before to react or act violently.

## **Weapons**

Alluding to the so called ‘legacy of apartheid’ again, the report puts a certain emphasis on firearms as being pivotal on the nature of violent crime in South Africa. The report reads:

“white South African culture legitimised the ownership of personal firearms and firearms were easily available to white South Africans who saw them as a personal safety measure. Intensifying violent conflict during the 1980s and 1990s was also associated with an increasing proliferation of firearms with many guns being imported from conflict areas in neighbouring countries and distributed both by the liberation movements and by the apartheid government as part of an agenda of arming their allies in African communities. After democratisation firearm proliferation further increased, through legally sanctioned and illegal means. Though the role of firearms in violent crime

appears to be decreasing<sup>10</sup>, the easy availability of firearms nevertheless played a central role in the rapid growth of violent crime in South Africa.”<sup>7</sup>

True or not, the government’s understanding of the relationship between weapons and violence in South Africa, as expressed in the passage above, is completely irrelevant. Firearms are by no means pivotal to violence within the poor communities. What is of far more importance, however, is home made weapons. Used in violent conflicts within marginalized communities, the suffering and quality of violence these weapons produce is often far more suffering than the swift firearms. Moreover, given the abstract poverty and the expensive price of guns, few can access them. However, given the violent nature of such communities, a combination of ingenuity and a lack of resources results in the utilization of easy to make or easy to use weapons. Amongst such weapons, for example, are bike chains. Widely available and highly dangerous when swung, they make potent medium-distance weapons. They can be found laying around shacks, ready for use. Bike spokes are also deadly stabbing devices that can be ripped off bikes easily in a moment of aggression. The weapon of choice, for those seasoned to community violence, are ‘spades’ or shovels with sharp, square edges.

Above and beyond the limitless amount of makeshift weapons that are produced and used daily within violent communities exist the obvious weapons such as a knives, pipes, chains, axes, and machetes. Most shacks are somehow equipped within at least one weapon, for violence can literally break through the thin metal wall at anytime. It is for this reason that many in these communities find rest hard to find, even when sleeping; the threat of violence is always lurking. Certain shacks are cluttered with easy to reach for weapons: saws, pipes, blades, and more in preparation for gang or police incursions, as well for group offensives on nearby neighbours who one may have violent conflict with. It is also not uncommon for people to carry small weapons as many on constantly edge for lurking violence. Sometimes, the weapon is even carried visibly as to deliver a message of preparedness or intimidation to others in the community.

Another pivotal weapon utilized during times of violence, or during violent crimes within the poor areas, are dogs. This reality is overlooked by the report, but anytime spent within these

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<sup>7</sup> “Why does South Africa have such high rates of violent crime?”:7

communities in times of conflict will quickly reveal the role of these dogs within such societies is of great importance. Far from than companions, dogs are bred and trained from a young age to be aggressive attacks dogs. By being beaten or at least aggravated over years, sometimes starved, and always taught to act aggressively towards strangers, dogs are programmed for their part in community violence. This role is strategic, as dogs are utilized partly as defensive weapons against intruders. Walking with a loyal, mean dog brings provides real security. Some owners even feed the dogs dried scorpions and tarantulas believing that it makes the dogs crazy and extra violent. The dogs are then utilized to attack individuals in times of conflict, or to hunt them down when they try to escape. One night, after a youth was stabbed by another in the street over a verbal dispute, the stabbed individual gathered a group of 6 people, each armed by a different weapon found around the shack, and set out for the dark shack ground. They also had with them two canines, who are, for all practical reasons and purposes, killer dogs. In such typical night time conflicts, no weapon is more effective than attack dogs as they are able run between narrow shacks and see in conditions people cannot. Contrary to the report, when thinking about violent crime throughout South Africa, guns may be actually be one of the least frequently used weapons during instances of violent crime, though it is a weapon of choice amongst the police.

### **Prison and Gang Violence**

Violence within poor South African communities is also heavily linked to a seemingly unending rotation of individuals who move between the infamous prisons of the country and its impoverished communities. This has a myriad of effects of the nature of violent crime within these communities. The prisons in South Africa are controlled from within by very well organized and powerful gangsters whose dominance and survival depends on their very ability to command respect through their power. The prison gangs, regardless of what they may specialize in, be it the smuggling of food, or the selling of sex, are all highly volatile and well versed in aggressive behaviour. The most violent of the inmates possess the most power within cells, yards, or prisons, gaining status, power, and material goods through it. However, it must be understood here that the South African penitentiaries are not necessarily filled with individuals who were 'caught' for their crimes. Rather, it is commonly the case that the prisoners are there by their own conscious choice. This happens in two ways. This first way this happens is that

many former prisoners, due to advancing on the gang hierarchy while inside, and due to a lack of opportunities outside, prefer a life in prison. There is violence in both environments, but in prison they many feel as if there is opportunity to advance; this speaks volumes on how despot the impoverished communities can be. Once back in prison, they will commit acts of violence, such as stabbing wardens or killing other inmates, in order to prolong their stay.

The second group which finds itself in prison deserves far more attention. Though the former group may have begun their prison lives due to the injustices of the apartheid years, the second group is comprised almost exclusively of youth who 'chose' to go to prison after 1994. Today, veteran gangsters who dominated the prison gangs during apartheid years profess that the current prison gangs are far more violent than those of their own years. Younger prison gangsters proudly agree. This group goes to prison for a significantly different reason. Though the older group returns to prison for they have come to feel at home there, the second group goes to prison to receive a certain kind of education. Known amongst many as the "College of Knowledge", prison is seen as a training ground for a life of violence by youth who are accustomed to violent settings. Countless individuals commit crimes to go and shake hands with high ranking gang leaders in prison, only to return to their community being more respected and feared for it. Prison is a testing ground: those with the highest grades return to rule over the poor communities they come from.

The disposition towards violence in these communities is such that returning criminals are often celebrated, honing greater respect within the violent communities after proving themselves in the notorious prisons. As such, there is a great appeal for youth in being violent outside prison, often striving to end up in prison due to the opportunity that they see in it. With work and school both practically inaccessible to these youth, the only visible path they see towards personal advancement is crime, and crime, like most other things in their lives, is violent. After returning from prison, they will strive to control certain areas or interests through violent means, often returning to prison periodically to advance in the power hierarchy both inside prison and in communities dominated on the outside.

So entrenched is this violent reality that children within these communities strive to learn prison language, codes, and laws: things kept highly secret until recent years. They do this in preparation for when they go to prison. By being able to show knowledge of gang life they hope to gain the respect of the prison gangsters whom they hope to earn their stripes from. It is beyond socially acceptable to pursue such a life; it is too often celebrated. Children as young as 8 will form gangs amongst themselves; no act of violence is unimaginable, and the greatest acts command the most respect. Where in other communities status amongst youth may be dependent on athletic or academic ability, here the young gangsters demand the acceptance of others through violence and aggression.

Not all end up going to prison, however. Many become gangsters outside prison. Another observation veteran gangsters make is that there has been an increasing number of non-prison gangs who have come to engulf poor South African communities after 1994. These gangs specialize today in the pushing of hard narcotics such as 'tik', a highly addictive and very cheap methamphetamine. Introduced in the mid 2000s, this chemical has eroded much of the moral fibre of communities, with addicts committing horrendous acts to find their next hit. These gangs propagate violence in two major ways. One way is the direct violence such gangs participate in, be it killings, theft, shootings, harassment, or fights. Violence accompanies these gangs' dominance over poor communities. Drive by shootings between gangs is common place, and wars over drug turfs plague the communities which are forced to play host to them. Innocent bystanders are usually claimed in such attacks, and the cycle of violence is difficult to break given the volatile state the communities are in. There other destructive way these gangs spread violence is through the recruitment of youth who are taught to sell drugs, and murder those who stand in the way of profits. Observing such gangs will once again show that lack of opportunities and a naturally violent environment, can often lead people down violent paths.

## **Summary**

What this paper strived to demonstrate is that the violence which plagues South Africa is not simply rooted in the legacy of apartheid as the report claims. 17 years after the retirement of the racial system of inequality that the report accuses of propagating contemporary violence,

consecutive post-apartheid governments continue to implement similarly damaging policies, seeing violence continues to fester, grow, and boil to heightened level. It is difficult to claim that the violence within these communities is due to apartheid, especially if the post 1994 governments have persistently nurtured the same practices which breed the violence, such as the creation of far-off ghettos to expel the poor to, or maintaining a penitentiary system which consistently breeds violent, disciplined criminality. As diseases become difficult for the body to battle when lacking antibodies, violence too become difficult to avoid when lacking opportunities to overcome it, and the government has neglected to provide these for the poorest of people. While it is impossible to explain why there is so much violent crime within South Africa, it is only when acknowledging and understanding the violent nature of South Africa's poor communities, as well as the violent lives its inhabitants are forced to navigate their way through, that can we get a better understanding of this difficult reality.