

“DIE OU BALLIE IS NET SO ‘N NAAI SOOS ONS”¹: RACE PLACE AND GANGS IN A DURBAN TOWNSHIP

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ABSTRACT

There are many aspects of any community's collective life that are difficult to penetrate. Gangs are one of them. This is exacerbated when one is trying to interview gang members in the midst of violent conflicts fuelled by age old feuds and the trade in illicit drugs. Police are on high alert and gang members particularly edgy. It helps if a researcher is already known in a community and has established networks. In the case of Wentworth, my primary work over the last year has been to construct family histories concentrating on the question of racial identity. In the midst of this research, there was a burst of gang violence that resulted in two murders. I spent a long time talking, debating and interviewing gang members, relying on old style ethnographic fieldwork that involves, as Mintz reflects, “the same willingness to be uncomfortable, to drink bad booze, to be bored by one's drinking companions, and to be bitten by mosquitoes as always” (2000: 170). The more information I collected, the more I started to reflect on Walter Benjamin's idea of the destructive character. It is typical Benjamin, full of nuance and subtlety, and I used it as a basis to understand the gang members' sense of themselves, their mission and how they viewed their defence of “their” turf. This latter aspect emerged time and again in many forms, with Wentworth seen as both a place of danger and place of refuge. The theoretical underpinning for this article is the notion of space as a social creation rather than the “passive locus of social relations” (Lefebvre, 1991: 11, 26) and that our task is to understand “by what social process(es) is place constructed?” (Harvey, 1996: 261).

Keywords: Gangs, gang violence, illicit drugs, revenge killings, Wentworth.

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical underpinning for this article is the notion of space as a social creation rather than the “passive locus of social relations” (Lefebvre, 1991: 11 & 26) and that our task is to understand “by what social process(es) is place constructed?” (Harvey, 1996: 261). On 31 May 2016, the front page of the *Daily News* (a Durban-based newspaper) led with the following story:

“A packed church was petrol-bombed, a man shot dead and a 71 year-old hit in the arm by a stray bullet as gang war gripped Wentworth. Religious leaders and residents believe the violence, over a 48-hour period, was sparked by the murder of a former gangster outside a Florida Road nightclub two weeks ago” (Dawood, 2016).

From the end of 2015 into 2016 the author interviewed people in Wentworth, Durban. The primary research focus being to develop the life histories of families in one street of the township, in particular exploring issues of place and identity. When a burst of gang violence left two young men dead, it was hard to simply stay focused. In this neighbourhood, violence and drugs are intertwined as the trade in dagga, mandrax and a more recent phenomenon, known on the street as ‘Mercedes, Mitsubishi and Lacoste’², all

¹ [The old-timer is a fucker just like us] (Lloyd Hill quoted in AmaBhungane report, Mail and Guardian, 20 Nov 2015).

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fuel the tensions, turf wars and revenge killings between rival gangs. Using an existing range of contacts, a considerable period of long time was spent talking, debating and interviewing gang members, relying on old-style ethnographic fieldwork.

The man shot dead in Florida Road in central Durban was 32 year old Kyle Morrow. Morrow was allegedly a member of the Destroyer gang or one section of it. He became embroiled in conflict with the Young Destroyers. The irony is that Morrow was killed by an off-duty policeman who instinctively reacted to the shootings in a night-club as rival groupings squared up.

The killing was swiftly followed later that night with the drive-by shooting of a house belonging to people allied to Morrow in Wentworth (*Daily News*, 31 May 2016). On 28 May 2016, Kyle Sewell, 25, who was at the Florida Road shooting, was killed. He was allegedly part of the Destroyer gang opposed to Morrow's. On 4 June 2016, Sewell's funeral was held amidst strong police presence. For good reason. At Morrow's funeral on Friday 21 May, a man was arrested for spitting on his coffin. How did Sewell get killed?

A Young Destroyer tells me that:

"...he was attending a Pampers Party – for the boys. Baby Showers are for the ladies. Pampers Parties are for the men. You must come with nappies. Pampers are expensive, so you must come with them. You must bring nappies for the father. I got twins. I know. So, Kyle Sewell leaves the Pampers Party to go buy airtime at the garage across the road. One of the people that attended Kyle Morrow's funeral was at the Pampers Party. He phoned them to tell the killers Kyle was leaving the house. They shot Kyle while he's walking...they shot him 23 times."

Wentworth, Durban, was reserved for Coloureds, as the apartheid government moved to separate communities into racially fixed areas. It is home to approximately 30 000 residents, and twenty two years after the first non-racial democratic elections, is still overwhelmingly Coloured. It is contiguous to a vast petro-chemical industry that 24 hours a day spews plumes in the air. Dilapidated two storey government-issue flats dot the landscape (Leonard, 2014). While not the main focus of the author's long-time research, once the shootings took place, many an hour was spent in Wentworth, seeking to understand and explore what motivates young men, to 'make a life' in the gangs, knowing that there is a high possibility of not living beyond their twenties. Increasingly, the author was drawn to Walter Benjamin's idea of the destructive character:

"The destructive character knows only one watchword: Make room... and only one activity. Clearing away... The destructive... has few needs, and the least of them is to know what will replace what has been destroyed. First of all, for a moment at least, empty space—the place where thing stood or the victim lived... Just as the Creator seeks solitude, the destroyer must be constantly surrounded by people, witnesses to his efficacy" (Benjamin, 1978: 301).

To talk to a destructive character is revealing because there is:

"...no interest in being understood. Attempts in this direction he regards as superficial. Being misunderstood cannot harm him... The destructive character is the enemy of the etui-man. The etui-man looks for comfort, and the case is its quintessence. The inside of the case is the velvet-lined trace that he has imprinted on the world. The destructive character obliterates even the traces of destruction" (1978: 302).

The greater the number of interviews, the longer the observations, the increasingly intense debates undertaken with the Young Destroyers, the more the author came to see the power of Benjamin's destructive character as a lens to make sense of why young men are prepared to die defending a narrow piece of turf that is bleak, barren and seemingly worthless.

The murders are followed inevitably by the funeral. In a small community, it is almost unavoidable that the funeral cortege will pass the house of the person fingered for the murder. In Wentworth, churches are as ubiquitous as gangs and the church becomes an uneasy location for the gangs to come together. The funeral has traditionally been the time in which a kind of truce prevails. But in recent times, this has been punctured, as rumours do the rounds that the cemetery will be attacked, being the one place in which gang members are easy targets.

The funeral

“Which person in Wentworth is a sweetie pie? Only to our mothers we are sweetie pies. You get what I’m saying. Our mothers don’t worry about our wrongs and rights we do. We are all perfect” (George).³

Kyle Sewell’s funeral was more sedate event than that of Morrow’s. It was as if Wentworth needed to take a collective sigh.

Kyle Jerome Sewell was the only son of Eric Le’Cordia and Jacqui Sewell (Kyle kept his mother’s surname). His body arrived at the Catholic Christ The King Parish at 11am. The hearse arrived alone. No family car was in sight, just the solitary hearse with Kyle’s coffin inside – backed up to the open doors of the parish. The hearse was state of the art, fit for a rock star. The coffin – a casket – was top drawer, to use the language of Wentworth’s streets. Made of shiny varnished wood and adorned with gold handles, it glinted in the mid-day sun. A massive cross made of roses and a wreath almost enveloped the entire coffin. People in Wentworth don’t usually go to such lengths or effort for a glamorous funeral, especially when it’s a burial, not a cremation. The purpose is to grieve and mourn the dearly-departed. This was different.

The church grounds were empty for at least half an hour. Even in the empty church, the environment was tense and eerie, the air brittle with nervous expectation. The first people to arrive at the church were policemen. In the parlance of crime reporting, there was a ‘strong police presence’. They were on ‘high alert’. Revenge killings were expected. The reason: decades of on-going violence in Wentworth around drug sales and turf wars. The drug trade in Wentworth has moved insidiously from dagga to mandrax and sugars and ecstasy. Lives are damaged, families split apart. Since 2014, incidents of drive-by shootings, burning of cars, attacks on houses, random murders, block-by-block drug raids and the confiscation of weapons have become part of the fabric of everyday life in Wentworth. There’s an unofficial curfew. Lock your kids indoors by 5pm. Or else. Not that indoors offers any respite. In the 48 hour violent spree that followed the shooting of Morrow, 71 year old Thelma Wiseman was shot just above the elbow as she lay sleeping in her flat.

As heavily-armed police enforcement settled outside the churchyard – and with the time slowly approaching ‘viewing hour’ – Kyle’s parents arrived. First to arrive was his father Eric, who climbed out of the family car. It took a while for the church to empty out and for the procession to head to Dudley Street Cemetery. The hearse backed up to the graveside on a dusty hill whipped by wind. Every corner of the cemetery was guarded by heavily-armed policemen. This need for security stemmed from an incident at Kyle Morrow’s funeral – the first Kyle who was killed in Florida Road – where a man pulled at the coffin and is reputed to have said, *“Come here, you [expletive deleted]. You’re not going? Where do think you’re going. Come back, here”*. Reports from the mourners said that the man was drunk, spat on the coffin and he was thereafter ‘beaten to a pulp’ by some of those present – as well as rumours circulating in the community – by most accounts, an accurate account. Kyle Morrow was buried on Friday 27 May – the same day that Kyle Sewell was killed. Morrow’s funeral was meant to take place the day after, on Saturday 28 May – but his mother said she wanted her son to be buried on the Friday because that was her birthday and that’s how she wanted it done.

At Dudley Street Cemetery, young men in red T-shirts sporting Kyle Sewell's image with the words 'Minnie – Moving and Grooving' carried the casket to his gravesite. Perched on a hill, a red gazebo-style tent was erected to shelter Kyle's nearest and dearest. As each expensive car pulled up to the burial site, police kept their hands on their guns. Cousins and friends at both the church and the cemetery found it difficult to sum up Kyle's character as either good or bad; innocent friendly-friend or gangster. The emotions of sorrow were sincere, but many refused to call him "a good boy". To his mother, he was everything – her only son and her last born. The informant George (a pseudonym) whispered:

"Good boys are only good boys for the eyes. That's only there for the eyes. Still waters run deep. The way you look at them over there so sweet and adorable, when they come out of their camouflage, they've got a different walk. The boy's using slang. Whistling and all. We all fool our parents like that when you grow up in Wentworth. When you grow up and you get streetwise, and you see how things really need to get done, you see that instead of being the 'out there' outtie, you rather be an undercover outtie. That way your books are still clean at home. 'Yes, mummy. No, mummy. Ma, do you mind...? Yes, ma'. But, outside, 'What kind, outtie? Genuine. Correct. Hoeziet'. You gotta blend in. You've gotta be able to blend into any situation. Suit and tie. White collar. Flannel pants. However you are wanted to, you must be able to act that part. It's all about survival. Kyle Sewell had a tattoo on his forearm with a picture of Leonidas – the King – from the movie "300" that said, 'I'd rather live like a man than die like a coward'."

This tattoo sums up what many of the gang members use in their conversations. It brings to mind what Agamben (1998) labelled as the distinction between 'political life' (*bios*) - that which is infused with purpose - and 'bare life' (*zoe*) - that which is limited to mere survival. In Wentworth, the lack of jobs, the sense that as a Coloured person one is discriminated against, forgotten about, that the only presence of the state is as a repressive force, creates a perception that one is in the zone of bare life and rather than simply accepting this status, one must make a life of purpose, even if it leads to death.

The funeral does create a sense of belonging, togetherness, but this is merely temporary. As one of the informants remarked: *"Next week, and the following week, it's going to be somebody else. Like Aunty Jacqui is crying for Kyle this week. Aunty Jennifer is going to be crying next week. It's gonna keep going on and on and on..."*

New generations, old feuds

One of the leading members of the Destroyer gang at the beginning of the new millennium was Michael 'Bumpers' Edwards. He was shot in the back of the head on 17 July 2005. He was 39 years old. The assassins, it is alleged, were also from the Destroyers, who at the time were known as 'Naughty Youngsters'. The killing led to a split. The alleged assassins got bigger and more powerful. Only a rump was left of those loyal to Edwards' memory. But then a new generation of Destroyers arose, grouped around Edwards' son, Llewellyn (Doogoo) Edwards.

"There were two gangs here. Now there's one. Naughty Youngsters was the young teens at the time. But now they are all over 50. The young can't mix with the old. They want to take over the area, that's why. They want complete control. In terms of taking over the drug activities, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. Basically, it was about greed. Where there's nothing happening, they give the laaties guns. They control G-Section. They want to use G-Section to come kill our boys, so they can take over this area."

The Young Destroyers who swear allegiance to the memory of ‘Bumpers’ see themselves as up against a maniacal leader, once part of the Naughty Boys, who pulls the strings. They blame him for the hit on Edwards and everything else:

“Anthony [a pseudonym] is the kind of person where you can come up to him and say that you’ve ‘got a luck with diamonds’. But, now, you’re gonna buy these diamonds, and he must buy the diamonds from you. That will never work with Anthony. He’s gotta kill you and take the diamonds. Or he’ll sell it to you. He wants to sell it for you, and give you a cut off your own thing... and takes the profit. He’ll take everything. Yet you brought the product. Say, if you make a sale R10-million, he wants to give you R2-million... and he won’t budge on that. It’s your thing, and he wants to take R8-million because he’s fucken greedy. With that man, there’s no brothers, no mothers, no fathers, no sisters. His blood cousin – his mother’s, brother’s child, because of the same thing, greed – he organised one of his friends to kill him. That’s why his own cousin in town shot him thirteen years ago. Because of greed. If the man can call his mother a bitch, who are we? The man swears his mother. Who are we?”

The young generation grew up in front of Anthony:

“We’ve been in his company. We used to move with him. He taught us how to use guns. We were 14 years old and he was taking us to the shooting range. After school, he used to take us to the range and say, ‘Here’s the gun’. He’s the guy that taught us how to use the guns. Even those guys who killed Bumpers for him. He then killed them. They were getting too clever for him. He didn’t want his family to go to jail. Bumpers was also big like him – a heavyweight. So, if you can kill Bumpers, why can’t he kill you? And he promised us all these things. They never materialised. So why do we need to listen to you? We can just kill you, too? So he didn’t like the fact that the guys were now fending for themselves and standing on their own two feet – and, in a way, to him challenging him. So what did he do? He said, ‘Oh, you getting too big for your boots? I made you too clever. I’ll show you now. Just like how I put you there, I can take you out’. Anthony wants to control everything and he wants all the glory. If he becomes your partner, he runs the company. Every area you go to, he’s got a drug shop happening. Only this area he doesn’t have... and he’s not giving up. He wants to fight for this area, but this is our area. We will fight him. We are not gonna go anywhere. The only way you can get rid of us is to kill us. Kill everyone.”

For the Young Destroyers, life is lived on the edge:

“Anthony never comes into Wentworth. He sends people. He sends Cape Town people. Guys from Umlazi to kill us. He doesn’t do his own dirty work. The G-Section are coming down from the bottom to come and shoot at us. Sent by Anthony. The children here had to sleep on the floor the other night because of the shooting. All the people in Destroyer flats have to sleep on the floor.”

While Anthony does not live in Wentworth anymore, he is often fingered by both community activists and the Young Destroyers as behind almost all the drug-related dealings in the area. He is seen as having a myriad of underworld networks, stretching across the country and also high-level police and political connections. In many respects, Anthony epitomises Thomas Blom Hansen and Oskar Verkaaik’s notion of the ‘urban specialist’, figures that are highly networked, operating in places that are volatile and everyday life is uncertain (2009: 6).

These figures have a charismatic status as “their gestures, are informed by and suffused with that elusive spirit of the city, or the neighbourhood itself” (Hansen & Verkaaik, 2009: 6). Part of the reason these specialists personify charisma is down to the tales that are told about them, often in whispered tones. Their charismatic status is reinforced “by virtue of their actions and the knowledge and resources in the city they are rumoured to command” (Hansen & Verkaaik, 2009: 6). Somehow “everything becomes intelligible through stories about the cunning of hidden powerful forces and their local and often excessively visible minions – the local hustlers and big men” (Hansen & Verkaaik, 2009: 16). While the Young Destroyers are caught in a narrow space, Anthony’s alleged contact with old prison networks, as well as police and politicians beyond Wentworth, give him the aura of power and a seeming uncanny ability to both survive and pull the strings from afar.

When listening to the voices of many informants on the ubiquitous Anthony, whom was taken to be an amalgam of a few people. This was a person at once politically connected, with networks into the police and having the ability to call on hit men across the country. But when some of the informants mentioned that one of the leaders of the Destroyers, Lloyd Hill, attended Kyle Morrow’s funeral in the company of Jacob Zuma’s son (the name of the son was not mentioned), it became clearer. Hill was also fingered as having high-level police connections and the fact was known by the author that he had served time for murder. But these revelations from young men on street corners were treated as another urban legend. However, the author wanted to make sure of the facts. It was said with such conviction. Contact was made with figures in Durban’s underworld. To the author’s embarrassment, the author was told by a high ranking 28 gang member that all this was in a public report. He did not know the name of the report but it was easy to find.

In November 2015, a report was published by the highly respected AmaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism. It revealed that President Jacob Zuma had in the run-up to the 2011 local government elections, met with Western Cape gang bosses at his official residence, Groote Schuur. The Report said that the gang members were met at the gate by Zuma’s son, Duduzane. The facilitator of that meeting was none other than former Wentworth resident and Destroyer Lloyd Hill, a man who had served a lengthy sentence for murder, rumoured to have put a hit on Bumpers. The Report also went on to feature overlapping business interests between Duduzane and Hill and detailed some of Hill’s post-1994 activities:

“According to a news report, in December 1995, he was arrested near Cape Town when police stopped and searched a vehicle he was driving and discovered it packed with 3 678 abalone. It is not clear what became of the case. On April 24 2002, an insurance broker, Bill Sabido, was abducted while he was waiting to give evidence in a case against a Durban businessperson, Osman Aboo. Hill, Claude Samuel and others were later arrested for Sabido’s murder. Samuel became a state witness, implicating Hill and others, but then recanted. A fortnight before he was due to appear in court, he was found strangled in a cell in Westville prison. Charges were withdrawn against all the accused. In 2003, Hill survived what police described as a gang shooting – he was struck by bullets in the stomach, chest and hand. In April 2009, Hill became director of a company called Goldridge Trading. A month later, he resigned when the company became part of the Gupta family stable. This was at about the same time that Duduzane was taken under the Guptas’ wing” (AmaBhungane, 2015).

According to the AmaBhungane Report, Hill opened the meeting by thanking the President for agreeing to the meeting and then switched to Afrikaans with the following words: “*OK, ouens, hier’s julle kans nou, praat nou. Die ou ballie is net so ’n naai soos ons.*” [*OK, guys, this is your chance now, speak up. The old-timer is a fucker just like us*].

If ever there was a case to be made for the charismatic, cunning, urban specialist that Hansen and Verkaaik (2009) write about, then Lloyd Hill would be a perfect fit.

The killing of Kyle Sewell rattled the Young Destroyers: *“Our friend got shot 23 times like a dog.”* George was at Keys Nightclub the day Morrow was shot and killed:

“The policeman who shot Kyle Morrow, handed in his firearm and his badge, and he said, ‘I killed this man’. That policeman, at the moment, is on suspension. It was not a mistake though. The policeman was the only one on the other side of the shooting who had a firearm. So, he was protecting himself and the people behind him. That’s why he ended up shooting back at Morrow’s people. Kyle Morrow and them started shooting. Kyle Morrow and two others. They were walking out of Keys nightclub, and then they pulled their guns out and started shooting at us in the club from the outside. There was a whole bunch of people. The club was full. Everybody was lying on the floor. We were throwing bottles at them. Kyle Morrow said with his own mouth, ‘I hope you’ll better know... This is Town. You’ll gonna fucken die tonight. We’re gonna kill you’ll tonight. This is our friend’s club, too. We’re gonna kill you’ll tonight. You’ll better watch it’. So they walked out the club. They pulled out their firearms. We saw them. We never took our eyes off them. They drew the firearms. They start shooting. We threw the bottles in defence. Trying to save our lives. If you don’t anything, they’ll run up to you and fucken shoot you in the face. At least they can see these ous here are not scared.”

Why did they go to a Club that was frequented by the enemy?

“...we are young and we want to go out and enjoy ourselves. We want to go where the ladies are. We went there innocently. It was also our friend’s party – and at the last minute, we said lets go enjoy ourselves at Keys. We were first in the club. These boys came afterwards...even if we never went to Keys... If we went as a group to the movies, we will clash with these guys... So, it’s not about where you are. What place you are in. It’s about the tension between the two groups. Those people make it known that they want to kill us. Always in a public place. Because that’s the only time they can see your face. Because they can’t come here to our area. We’ll never fucken allow that. Will you allow a criminal in your house to come and do what they want? To rape and kill anyone they want to? You would have allowed that? Even as a woman, all by yourself, you will do whatever you can in your power to try safeguard yourself. People send messages through other people.”

George tells me that tensions were so bad that a lot of people refused to come to his wedding:

“The other Destroyers knew where the wedding was going to be. They knew everything. People in my wedding party were scared for their lives. They want us dead because they want this area. They want Reiger Road. One area is not enough. We think that maybe if we say we surrender and that they can come in here and take the area; maybe they won’t kill us like dogs. But, then they’ll come in here and they’ll abuse our women and children and parents. They are fucken barbaric. They’ll just come in here and do as they please. All they want is a market for drugs.”

The once Naughty Youngsters, now older Destroyers, want complete control according to George:

“Besides making a lot of money, they want to be the mafia in Wentworth. The whole of Wentworth must be under their hands. They hate the boys from the area. They do not like the fact that they got a challenge of people standing up to them. In other areas in Wentworth they won’t stand up to them. Only this area will stand up to them. All the other people in Wentworth are like puppies to them... and we know them. We understand them. Many are born and bred in The Destroyers flats. Their families still stay in these flats in the front. He’s got family in this flat and he’s got spies in this flat. They all stay here, but we do nothing to them. If we were bad people, we could have burnt all those flats and killed those fucken people. We are not that bad. But, if you are coming towards us, our boys will retaliate. We don’t throw the first stone. They are targeting our women and children, too.”

Many of the Young Destroyers face charges which they claim are trumped up:

“They reopened an old case with new witnesses and new suspects. Rearranging the case to implicate us. So they decided to build a profile on us so that one day when something does happen – when we do something – we’ll basically be fucked in terms of the law because now we’ve got all the history of these kinds of things. So, it will be very hard for us to get off. He thinks we are stupid. We can see what he’s trying to do. All these things... All these cases... We always come off because we were never there. It’s proven facts in terms of the witnesses and everything. We were never there. They are thumb-sucking names. I used to always work out of Wentworth. One time I get a call from an investigating officer with a charge that you were shooting. I’m like, what the fuck? I don’t own a firearm – first and foremost. Second, I’m mostly in Joburg or working in Sasol. What are you talking about? I’m at a National Key Point. You can pull my timesheets to prove where I was. You want me, you fucken come to me. I’m not playing this game with them anymore.”

Despite this, for George and his crew, knowledge of place is vital to survival, even if that means the constant threat of death:

“You see how it’s going here in Wentworth? We stay here by the oil refinery. We’re surrounded by factories. We’ve got Island View, Treasure Beach, Engen, Mondi, Sappi, and Jacobs at the bottom. This is our life. We live here. We work here. When job finish here, we jump back. We know who’s sniffing. The foreman is sniffing. So, when we are on the job, we are connected. But, we don’t know outside there – because we are not connected there.”

This is what Clifford Geertz (1983) referred to as a community’s local knowledge. In George’s worldview, chances for a livelihood as a Coloured man are limited and opportunities have to be created:

“You’re not given any chance of survival in Wentworth. If ten companies are hiring ten people, out of the ten, more than six must be Black. So, where do we stand? We are not given a chance... So, we make our own opportunities to go. We go to the Nigerians in Point (Mahatma Gandhi) Road that will sell you an eight ball – just like a snooker ball or a golf ball – for R1500... and it’s solid. That is cheap and it’s weak. But, we need to make money quickly. We are hustling. We don’t know what to do with ourselves. A quick turnover. Three of us put that money together. We can cut it up and cut it up and mix it with some teething powder – and make bags and bags and bags of them. You know those R2 bankies? We fill them all up. R300, R300, R300... And then we make a better profit. You won’t be

complaining the first time. The second time, we hit you – complaining that the shit never worked and they are not high. We play it like that. We chop it up. There’s always a friend whose parents have gone to work and nobody’s there at home. We can always work from somebody’s house. That’s a risk we are willing to take. We want money. We want girlfriends. We want cars. We also want the finer things in life... and why must we wait so long? You know how much it costs to print and copy a CV – and giving out CVs, CVs CVs? You will have everything they ask you for in that company, you still won’t be given that opportunity. Just because you are coloured. I think people are scared of us. You can show me how to do something once, and you never, ever need to show me again. We are the best at engineering, construction, mechanical work, boiler making, pipefitting, welding. Go on the shutdown and you’ll see hundreds of coloureds. But a shutdown is only for a short period. Go in the offices. No coloureds. How come we are not allowed to work in the offices? You see very few coloured men in office jobs.”

One is reminded of what Desmond (2012) called ‘the survival question’. How do people get by in the absence of state grants and formal employment? For people, such as George and others with limited skills, it is the local contacts that facilitate intermittent employment and the neighbourhood that gives you access to market drugs. But what Desmond does not contemplate is that the very basis for survival could also be the perpetual zone of possible violent death (Wacquant, 2007).

While talking to the Young Destroyers, there is a constant flow of traffic. People are buying dagga, mandrax and sugars. While it is a narrow piece of turf, they pose enough of a threat to older Destroyers for them to want to literally remove them from this space. This, despite the increasing evidence that the older Destroyers dominate the drug trade in the rest of Wentworth and use it as a staging post to supply areas across the South Basin of the city.

Chatter among the mourners was mostly about the current patrols in the neighbourhood, the fear that parents have for their own children getting involved in the drug trade, gangs, drive-by shootings – whether innocent or not – and, how seriously, or not, law enforcement in Durban tackles crimes that occur in Coloured areas. People spoke about how gangsters have been operating in Wentworth from the time their own fathers were getting up to mischief – decades ago. There will be court cases and more information will emerge. Feuds, bred over the generations, will never go away. For one of George’s crew, the way of life in Wentworth has been honed through the generations and has become almost genetic:

“It’s evolution that makes them that way. It’s like if you put people in a cave and you make them walk around hunched in the cave, and they have children in the cave and live in that cave. Over a period of fifty or a hundred years – a 150 years the most – over that cycle, those children’s children’s children’s children’s children will never stand up straight when you bring them out of that cave. Your body ends up adapting to that cave of bending like that. Your genes will end up like that. So, our children, way down the bloodline, will have adapted to their surroundings and end up just that – like their fathers and mothers. Even if you take them in the open, they’ll still have it in their blood to be like that. No matter where you go, you can just tell, ‘This one’s from Wentworth’. Did you know that? It’s a known fact. Everywhere. Everywhere you go. The first thing a person will ask you is, ‘Are you from Durban? Oh a Durbanite. Where you from? Wentworth?’ Where else are you gonna find people like this? It’s impossible to grow up in Wentworth and not have that style.”

Here we have echoes of Bourdieu's notion of the habitus as 'second nature' (1990: 56). Some of the young men interviewed will die in the next year. There are no jobs here, drugs consume bodies and lives. The flats will house four, five, six people in two rooms. Everybody sleeps on the floor to make space and avoid bullets. Dignity and respect come from defending a narrow piece of turf and settling the scores of one's fathers:

"Now, we have to kill one of them to make it even. That's how war works... and after we've shot you, we must shoot you in the head, too – to make sure you don't come back. You must lay there dead. We will fucken blow them up. It's been going on for years. We are all gonna die. We all have an 'Expiry Date'. Our time is marked. They don't want to listen. So, we are also getting stubborn, too. We are very few because we are just dying, dying, and dying."

Benjamin (1978: 303) tells us that the destructive character:

"Always positions himself at the crossroads. No moment can know what the next will bring. What exists he reduces to rubble-not for the sake of rubble, but for that of the way leading through it. The destructive character lives from the feeling not that life is worth living, but that suicide is not worth the trouble".

CONCLUSION

What would lead young people to prepare to destroy and be destroyed defending a piece of barren turf a few blocks wide: a mission George keeps reminding me of? Why indeed are the Destroyers bent on destroying each other, rather than focusing on a myriad of other rivals or leaving the exposed spaces of street corners, taverns and the bottom of stairways to live secluded lives in the suburbs, such as the *etui-man*? In Benjamin's terms, the answer is stark.

For Benjamin, the destructive character is a positive force, someone related to the epic hero. The destructive character clears away and destroys current and inherited commonplaces, making them open to the new. He simplifies social and architectural space by deciding what deserves destruction. It seems that in Wentworth, this decision has come to settle on him, himself. What comes next is of no import, there will always be uses for a street corner or a tavern, maybe better uses such as a crèche or soccer club, but he does not burden himself with building. He is incapable of that. His sole gift is knowing what needs to be destroyed. A certain kind of street level gangsterism is *passé*. It's old, embarrassing and spent. It must go. To do that properly, the Destroyers have to be swift, strong and ruthless. It is not suicide in which rival factions of Destroyers are engaged. It is something far more profound: it is erasure. On Kyle Sewell's arm was tattooed, *"I'd rather live like a man than die like a coward."* The reality is actually an inversion: *"I'd rather die like a man than live like a coward."*

All through the narrative of gang members, space is vital. Feeling excluded from wider society, gang members fall back on their local knowledge of Wentworth, which allows them to know when a job is available; in the words of George *"when the foreman is sniffing."* The gang can thus be seen as a spatial response to social exclusion.

But perhaps most hauntingly, the Destroyers, both old and young avengers, are in a deadly struggle to control space. The Young Destroyers need the small piece of turf to wage their war and retreat. The older Destroyers will always feel uncomfortable that they have a sworn enemy on their doorstep which needs to be eradicated.

Massey (1997: 322) reminds us that place is "constructed out of particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus". In trying to come to grips with the gang feuds in Wentworth, one sees how apposite this theoretical premise is. Instructively, what we also learn is that the demise of apartheid boundaries has not necessarily resulted in increased mobility for the working class and the

poor. Rather, as the example of the Destroyers has shown, the lack of jobs has reinforced a sense of place and racial identity, even as old feuds are taken up by new generations.

ENDNOTES:

2. 'The old-timer is a fucker just like us' (Lloyd Hill quoted in AmaBhungane report, *Mail and Guardian*, 20 November 2015).
3. An ecstasy-based pill with metal inside, which by April 2016 had already killed a dozen people in Durban.
4. Some of the names used in the article are pseudonyms.

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