

# 11 MEN OF LOVE? AFFECTIVE CONVERSIONS ON TOWNSHIP STREETS

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The drum set, electric guitars, and minister's desk with its white cross looked strangely out of place in the bland concrete parking lot in front of my host's brick-walled home in a township I call Dunefields, in the sandy Cape Flats of Cape Town, South Africa. Youngsters commonly passed this spot when going to a drug house just across the street. On this afternoon in February 2008, however, drug dealing had come to a standstill. Three shy young men were intermittently playing rock music with Christian themes. Then a minister's shrill and angry voice blasted through the speakers. The self-declared ex-gangster urged those assembled to seek refuge in the love of Jesus Christ and to abjure the evil forces of gangsterism and drugs. Although the event was directed toward all "lost souls," male gang members were explicitly asked to seek forgiveness for the crimes they had committed. Every month, Pentecostal churches held events like this one all over Dunefields. For a couple of hours they reclaimed the streets for the Lord. Some young men saw these parking-lot crusades as the only viable way out of crime and misuse of *tik*, the local name for methamphetamine, or Mandrax, the sedative methaqualone. They changed their lives after being "touched" by the Holy Spirit.

My ethnography focused on young men's vulnerability in some of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Cape Town (Reihling, forthcoming). In this context, the term "gang" could be elusive and refer to loose assemblies of youngsters exchanging stolen goods and drugs on street corners to large illicit enterprises. I became interested in how men engage with religious practices to pull out of the urban informal economy. Several of my research participants turned to Pentecostalism in the course of my fieldwork. Little is known about how men disassociate from gangs through involvement in religious communities that offer solidarity and care. In particular, the effects of Pentecostalism on men who were involved in gang membership and the informal economy of drugs have hardly been explored in urban Africa. Thus, I started to ask questions about what male gang members were doing to reform themselves as "born-again" Christians. Pentecostal churches aggressively tried to disengage them from gangs *on* the streets. This was exceptional, since no other organization or entity was invested in disengagement programs through outreach in one of South Africa's most crime-ridden neighborhoods.

This chapter addresses *affective conversions* that involve a reconfiguration of personhood through shifts of "affect" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) or bodily felt intensity within the virtual space of deliverance rituals on township streets. Pentecostals turned secular places temporarily into religious ones, thus permitting, enabling, and sometimes forcing gang members to be vulnerable where they otherwise had to be in control. Intensities shifted when different values, interests, and identities crashed into each other and gave rise to an "excess" that could not be immediately grasped through language or cultural meanings.<sup>1</sup> The term "affective conversion" refers specifically to processes in which such intensities reach critical thresholds and result in confusion, loss of control, and a temporary state of pronounced vulnerability, particularly during parking-lot crusades.<sup>2</sup> This facilitated the actualization of men's potential that went beyond religious discourse and opened up a hinterland of nonrepresentational and prepersonal possibilities.

I argue that affect was vital for changing personhood from the enactment of an *ou* (pl. *ouens*), or street-smart man, to the subsequent enactment of a "born-again" gangster. During parking-lot crusades intensities of feeling were evoked by a "moral breakdown" (Zigon 2008, 165) when the sentiment of ingenuity that was learned in the informal economy on the streets directly contradicted an *ou's* perceived vulnerability in the face of God and his worldly evangelists. Rather than being a matter of mere rational reflection, the contradictions between the imperative to affect others, on the one hand,

and the imperative to be affected, on the other, opened up a nonrepresentational ground zero. Affect was experienced and given meaning through culturally coded emotions, such as shame and remorse, that were gradually turned into the “love” of a reformed Christian. Only after young men temporarily entered ritually constructed “spaces of virtuality” (Kapferer 2004), Pentecostal “love” was cultivated to be embodied as an ideally permanent sentiment, an emotional disposition that could be expressed, among other things, through secular social activism.

In the following, by means of a detailed case history, I will show that allowing vulnerability and giving up control, at least in relation to ministers and metaphysical powers, was vital for successful conversion. I show how personal transformation was retrospectively given meaning through an ethics of selfless giving and unconditional “love” that evolved in relation to a secularized world believed to be corrupted by gangsterism and moral downfall. Finally, the study shows that, in order to stay reformed, men had to perform ongoing work on the self. Becoming positive role models and leaders whom others could look up to and follow accomplished this most effectively. However, the conversion from street-smart to a man of “love” never entailed a complete break with the past, but rather a “transposition” similar to shifting a musical composition from one key to another while retaining the original structure. While reformed men emphasized selfless giving as the basis of personhood, they continued to rely on exchanges of favors, goods, and recognition through which they had defined themselves as *ouens*. At the same time, the outcomes for their social lives were radically different.

My discussion is based on ethnographic fieldwork with Afrikaans speakers in the Cape Flats, conducted intermittently between 2008 and 2015. The names of my research site and the protagonist in the case history have been changed to ensure their privacy.

#### GANGS IN THE CAPE FLATS

In South African cities, the rise of street gangs can be traced back to apartheid urban planning, economic exclusion, institutionalized racism, and the stigmatization of entire neighborhoods. In Cape Town, gangs mushroomed in the wake of social engineering projects that aimed to create racialized “group areas” during apartheid (1949–1994). Large numbers of people were expelled from the inner city and resettled in racially segregated townships on the urban outskirts. These townships trapped people in the Cape Flats lowlands and were inspired by Le Corbusier’s modernist architecture, in-

cluding high-density residential satellites linked with metropolitan nodes by railway lines and few access freeways. Where opportunities for employment, schooling, and entertainment were largely absent, some economically disadvantaged men sought success in an informal economy. Boys and young men created and transformed urban spaces through their involvement in homosocial male groups and illicit ventures (Pinnock 1984). This enabled them temporarily to acquire recognition, money, and a sense of dignity. In addition to taking over policing functions, gangs provided work in an informal economy that included trade in stolen goods, alcohol, and illicit drugs such as Mandrax, the sedative methaqualone.

In particular, urbanites classified as “Coloured” became subject to evictions. During apartheid this was a residual category that was used for those who did not easily fit other racial classifications. Although Coloured people were practically denied citizenship rights in the apartheid city, they were treated preferentially in comparison to blacks. Coloured group areas were furnished with two- and three-story multifamily brick-walled housing complexes. Here women became the unintended beneficiaries of racist legislation (Salo 2007). They were the preferential labor force in the city’s waning textile industry. Coloured women with children also qualified for welfare grants, as well as access to public housing. In contrast, men were not entitled to the same kind of government support. Many men from impoverished Coloured group areas did not become patriarchal heads of families, particularly when caught up in the apartheid state’s total institutions. For unruly boys, reformatories provided welfare nets in the face of poverty and, at the same time, constituted correctional facilities that sought to “normalize” them (Badroodien 2011, 305). In fact, they facilitated the formation of homosocial peer groups and became stepping-stones into prison. For the most marginalized, confinement turned into a rite of passage into manhood. Gangs provided relief from the infantilization and emasculation experienced by men in the colonial encounter in general, and particularly in the total institutions (Steinberg 2004).

The postapartheid city has been restructured in the wake of privatization, market liberalization, and economic differentiation. Although upwardly mobile families were able to leave the townships and urban redevelopment programs brought infrastructural improvements, socioeconomic segregation continued within the spatial grid laid out under apartheid (Besteman 2008). For the majority of people living in the Cape Flats, economic disparities increased and became more devastating in the face of new rights of citizenship. The disillusionment with the rise of democracy in the

postapartheid city became perhaps most apparent through the increase in crime, violence, and drug misuse in the Cape Flats. Many young men and a few women continue to be more or less closely affiliated to streets gangs. As Standing (2006, 201) has argued, these gangs are deeply embedded in local communities and partly based on the idolization of local drug merchants and gang leaders. Their clan-like organization is still linked to loyalty and belonging among men.

#### THE MORAL ECONOMIES OF OUENS

Male gang members commonly self-identified as *ouens*, an Afrikaans word. An *ou*, literally “old” in English, was a street-smart man who gained respect through reciprocity. Gang members often characterized themselves in terms of what anthropologists have called “dividuals,” that is, *dividable* persons made up through prior exchanges.<sup>3</sup> In the world of urban gangs, men ideally embodied this composite form of personhood through the disposition of *gedagte*, which translates literally as “thought,” “understanding,” or “mind.” The semantics of the term nevertheless comprise more than cognition. The emotional disposition I refer to as “ingenuity” marked particular preferences with respect to economic inclusion and regard for others, and was associated with giving and receiving as well as the ability of a man to think of other’s needs. From a Durkheimian perspective, *gedagte* was a social sentiment and constituted tendencies to respond emotionally in accordance with an internalized moral order.<sup>4</sup> Rather than being an end in itself, this represented an investment in future transactions from which *ouens* could benefit at some point when they were in need of resources.

Gang members used their wit to connect with others through reciprocal exchanges. This often took the form of a cunning navigation of the township, “hanging out” at street corners at the right time, taking the safest routes within and across gang territories, and exchanging favors with friends and local neighbors. In Dunefields, the exchange of gifts commonly took place on an edge that put the enactment of personhood at risk. As one gang member pointed out:

Nothing is free man, nothing. We don’t expect, but we expect something because that’s the thing that keeps us alive here in Dunefields. That’s why I say I can’t do it with someone else’s help also. I give him also, man, and I give him with the *gedagte* that when I have something this time, then he is there next time. Then he is there to defend that, if I need it. But if I don’t

need it now, then I keep it to my brother who needs it, you know. That's the way it goes here. . . . You must be very careful what you say to guys like us. If you say, "Give me this pack of cigarettes, later I give you a 20 rand." Now you take the packet and later you don't come back. Then, I *moer* [hit] you, and after that it involves a lot of people, the law, the government, all that stuff. Why? Because I don't want to be a fool. Just leave it like that. If he at first place would have told me the truth, "Look here, I don't have the money." Then it wouldn't turn out like this. Sometimes you see the guys, they come here to use you. They want to use you. If this happens and it happens like that, tomorrow you walk in the street and you say he is a *naai* [fucker]. Why does he let somebody take his cigarettes, understand? Then I say I'm not a *naai*; I'm gonna kill you now. Then in the newspaper they're gonna write it's for the rand, but it's not for the rand, it's for the stuff he talks.

Although men like David could hardly afford to give without getting something in return in the face of poverty, it was not just the material good that was at stake. If the receiving party did not comply with the more or less explicit moral code of reciprocity, the giver could lose his status, since his gift was no longer perceived as such, but as a stolen good. Michael Taussig noticed that Marcel Mauss's notion of the "gift" alludes to the "impossible marriage between self-interest and altruism, between calculated giving and spontaneous generosity" (Taussig 1993, 94). It was this paradox that gave rise to men's perceived vulnerability in exchanges with others through which they hoped to foster resilience, recognition, and self-assurance on township streets. Over the course of fieldwork, I found that ouens' use of the term *gedagte* was contradictory and never fully captured actual forms of economic integration and exclusion. Openness to being affected by others was commonly seen as an obstacle and risk factor. After all, ingenuity could also be tied to deception and the propensity to take advantage of others for individual gain. If someone did not give the desired object or return a gift, their very identity as an ou was at stake.

Similar to the seemingly contradictory nature of gift exchange, the sentiment of ingenuity could swing toward or away from the receiving party. On the one hand, the relationship was characterized through attachment and what some men called "brotherly love" among gang members. On the other hand, it could involve the maximization of one's advantage at the expense of others. In Dunefields, narratives revolved around untrustworthy and treacherous men who were tied to a fear of being victimized. When David said "the guys, they come here to use you," he was referring to the

corruption of the moral economy by those who turn the relationship into a source of personal gain and manipulation. The rampant individualism that was often part of gang life was externalized and associated with so-called *skollies*, or scavengers, coming from outside the local moral community. For men like David, the outrage and sense of indignation that came with abuse was not just about the loss of a material good. At stake was what Mauss ([1924] 1990) referred to as the “spirit” of a gift that in this case was nothing less than the very sentiment of *gedagte* that made gang members appear invulnerable in the face of rampant violence. When I started fieldwork, more than seventeen hundred people had been murdered in Cape Town over the previous year, the majority of whom were men from urban townships.<sup>5</sup>

#### RESTRUCTURING EMOTIONAL DISPOSITIONS

When I started my research, one of the few secular programs that provided a refuge for boys and young men involved in gangs had just closed its doors due to a lack of funding. In contrast, small Pentecostal churches seemed to be flourishing and were leading aggressive antigangsterism and drug abuse campaigns. Their deliverance rituals were referred to as “crusades” and reached out into gang territories, sometimes even into notorious drug houses. One of their strategies was to emphasize men’s vulnerability and force them into a realization that their past actions had caused considerable suffering to themselves and others. The ritual practice provided alternatives to the rigid emotion management required to be successful in the informal economy. The stoic and dispassionate facial expression of an *ou* that signaled ingenuity on street corners could be released during services in which the dramatization of rapidly shifting emotional states was a currency for healing, change, and the presence of a higher power. The following case history is in many respects unique, but it points out the commonalities among “born-again” gangsters’ experiences of conversion.

Thomas Fortune was an influential member of the Cisko Yakkie gang and had made a career as a “hit man” and a Mandrax merchant in Dune-fields. One day, he was urged by a friend to attend a “crusade” organized by the Mighty Gospel Church. At the time, he identified as Muslim and only reluctantly agreed to join the event. A large white tent was erected temporarily on an open space between housing units. For Thomas, it was a door to another world. In an interview he described how the charismatic faith healer seemed to read his mind and addressed the downfalls of his life without addressing him directly. The next day, the minister switched his

emphasis and seemingly pointed out the positive aspects of the gangster's life. When the minister pinned his gaze on him, Thomas looked away and sank into his seat, with his body temperature rising. The following day, he attended the third nightly ministry, which he described as follows:

The third night, this man speaks about something that nobody knows about, and this man says, "Somebody on this side," and I am sitting on this side. And this man says, "Somebody on this side must come." And I think, "Go to hell, man, how can you know? It's only me and God that knows about this thing. How do you know about this thing? Not my mother nor my wife, nobody knows about it! I did it alone. So how can you know about it?" But this thing was eating me while I am sitting there. Hey, and I am telling you, the sweat is already running down. And I am sitting in the chair, sitting in the chair. And the man—and now you must know, the people are staying in front for prayer already. And then I am sitting. And then this man said, "There is one more person in this place. Just one more person, God is waiting for you." I sit, and this man says, "Your time is short. God wants to heal you, and he wants to save you out of all this." And that time, I was a gangster, hey. . . . I tell myself, "I am not going there." But I tell you, I don't know how I got to the front. I don't know how I got to the front. But I just knew I was in front afterward. And now I was really skeptical about this praying and touching you because, remember, I'm a Muslim still. So I used to hear how the people—they push you over and all that. "Tonight I am not going to touch you or do anything to you. You just lift your hands up and ask for forgiveness." I don't know how to pray, and this man says, "All you need to do is say is, 'Forgive me Lord for what I've done.'" Then I started to talk to God.

The ritual opened up a space in which Thomas was forced to reflect upon his past actions. This highly structured frame seemed to facilitate what Zigon (2008) has called a "moral breakdown," an experience that opens up largely unconscious moral dispositions to critical scrutiny and questions about "right" and "wrong." Such a breakdown may generate an ethical demand for resolution when a person perceives his or her conduct as problematic and is forced to reflect upon the consequences of past actions. From this perspective, ethics becomes a "stepping away" from a range of available moralities, a "conscious acting on oneself" that aims at becoming a morally more appropriate and acceptable person in a particular moment (Zigon 2009, 261). Thomas overcame his resistance and started to act on himself in new ways that were in accordance with the moral practices espoused by the Pentecostal community. However, this was not merely a matter of rational

self-reflection. It has been argued that the body is central to Pentecostal religiosity (Csordas 1994b; Bialecki 2015; Brahinsky 2012). Among the men I encountered, the visceral experience of movement and intensity during the nightly ministries prompted the rapid deconstruction of the gendered disposition of *gedagte*, apparently compelling a need for ethical resolution.

The ritual offered a clearly structured internal set of practices that oriented attendees toward heaven and God. Thomas had to move his body, approach the minister, and lift his hands. This choreography evoked a series of culturally coded emotions such as guilt, shame, and remorse. The orchestration of memory, antecedent events and their interpretation, somatic experience, and bodily movement was a prerequisite for deliverance. The enactment of these dispositions was also related to the material infrastructures of the tent and the township parking lot, as well as those who were present in order to foster an emotionally mediated experience of moral breakdown. In a different religious context, Parish (1991, 333) observed that moral emotions work as “behavioural controls” because they are painful to experience and involve moral evaluations that alter the way people know themselves. In his narrative about the third nightly ministry, Thomas did not use the words “shame” or “guilt” and merely referred to a “thing” that was “eating” him, as well as the physiological response of sweat running down his face. Eventually, he raised his arms and asked for forgiveness for what he had done. That momentary intensity was channeled into a religiously meaningful experience that, however, did not immediately foster self-knowledge.

#### OPENING UP A VIRTUAL SPACE

Affective conversions entailed a temporary state of loss and uncertainty about how to enact personhood. There is no doubt that the deliverance ritual had a highly coded internal structure that is widely shared in Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity across the globe (see Coleman and Hackett 2015). A vertical spatial order of heaven and hell formed the basis for a ritual that saved the believer from “evil forces” and fit in with normative emotional dispositions. However, men like Thomas did not follow a routine when they suddenly became affected in new ways that went beyond language and established religious codes. The deliverance ritual created what Kapferer (2004, 49) has called “virtuality” understood as a means for engaging immediately with the “ontological ground of being.” This was not about reproducing the subjects needed to sustain a particular structure or the religious community. It inverted postapartheid urban space and opened up its virtual

structure of possibility in which there was no sex, gender, class, or race. For Thomas this occurred through a breakdown of cultural codes related to township gang life, with its imperative to be ingenuous and invulnerable:

Something came over me: it's like, it's like hot, but not a scary feeling. It was very peaceful, and it came over me. And I flew! I flew to the ground. And nobody touched me. Nobody touched me. After that, a nice feeling came over me. . . . Something hit me out of the ground and off my, off balance, and I, I was out for a few minutes, um. The people were actually scared because, they say, my body was going so up and down on the floor while I was lying there. And when I woke up, I was bewildered and I said, "Jy [you], jy, jy, jy, jy." And then one man came to fix me while I was there. He asked me if he can pray with me and, and I was still sitting. I said, "Yeah, you can pray with me." And he took me to a room and he asked me if I wanna be born again, saved, accept Christ Jesus as my personal savior. And you know, I was just in that state, I just said, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." And then, when I came to my normal senses, I said, "Eh, why everybody call you brother now?"

Although the codes of global and African Charismatic Christianity determined the frame of the ritual, the internal ritual virtuality transcended representation. It corresponded to a prepersonal bodily intensity that changed Thomas's capacity to affect and be affected. This capacity has been called "affect" in Spinozist philosophy. Affect opens up the potential for new sensations, emotions, and ideas to arise. As Massumi pointed out, "Affect is the virtual as a point of view" (2002, 35). The term helped me to develop an awareness of human capacity that remains hidden in studies that focus on function and meaning. In contrast to properties, capacities have not been exercised yet. When they are exercised, they are not static states but dynamic events. As movement, transition, or becoming from one bodily state to the other, this may involve excess and creativity (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 167–174). The "hit man" had the capacity to be vulnerable and affected by others all along, but it was only actualized through intensive differences generated by Pentecostal ritual.

The transmissions between affected and affecting bodies opened up a potential for change that was at odds with ingenuity as a marker of street-smart personhood on township streets. Thomas was momentarily affected by pure intensity without qualified emotion or cognition. He described a state of impaired coordination, paralysis of limbs and the entire body, inability to speak, numbness and tremors, and eventually loss of conscious-

ness. The loss of control stood in stark contrast to how a leading gang member has to conduct himself on the streets. There was nothing that would sustain a gender identity or the stereotype of a skollie. Thomas was in a state of extreme vulnerability and embraced it. Counter to notions of the virtual in computing, this virtual event was real in the sense that the temporary loss of balance came with a loss of certainties that opened up a potential with a multiplicity of alternative social practices that were nonreferential to external social reality.

Similar to historically older forms of healing in southern Africa, affliction is central to becoming a “born-again” Christian at the Cape. Referring to a diasporic Ghanaian Pentecostal church, van Dijk (2007, 316) pointed out that vulnerability in this context is commonly pursued and desired as an outcome of action rather than something to be avoided. He claimed that the resulting “vulnerable agency” in relation to heavenly forces and church leaders safeguards morality and identity among Pentecostals. In a sense, the downfalls of gangsterism in the postapartheid city were a prerequisite for being touched by the Holy Spirit. Men like Thomas increased their agency and their very potential to act when they became open to being affected by the minister, the church members, and the metaphysical world they invoked. The virtual possibilities of vulnerability were nevertheless narrowed down when Thomas slowly came back to consciousness and was asked to pray by his new brothers and sisters. In his account, he gave no interpretation of the event and emphasized his absentmindedness when indicating that he hardly knew what the minister was talking about. He just said “yes” without being fully aware of what it meant to accept Jesus Christ. Intensive differences drove the flows of actions that were gradually channeled into a preestablished religious order. In order to be more than a single event, affective conversion also required ongoing work on the self and the learning of emotional dispositions that were meaningful to evangelical Christians.

#### BACK IN THE STREETS: “YOU ARE RUBBISH”

In the process of affective conversion, “born-again” gangsters inverted prior enactments of invulnerability. Once they left the ritual virtuality, they had to demonstrate their ability to “break” with the past and disconnect from drugs, gangsterism, and township streets. The deliverance ritual I have described was only the first step in moving out of the gang into the brotherhood of believers; it did not equal instant salvation. The ritual frame only

opened up a moment to be vulnerable. This moment had to be followed by new social differentiations. There was no automatic integration into a new social collective and moral order, as outlined by classical ritual theory (Genep [1909] 1960; Turner [1969] 1995). Thomas pointed out that he struggled to curb his drug habit and remained involved with the Cisco Yakkies after the event described earlier. The “break with the past” was curbed by the material structure of the township itself. In the Cape Flats, small neighborhood wards were rigidly compartmentalized and divided by precast concrete walls, highways, and vacant buffer zones. Young men could not move freely through the cityscape because outside their local moral community they were often perceived as gangsters or thugs who needed to be fended off by local residents. Actual gang members were extremely sedentary and often walked only a few streets within the perimeters of their territory. Within these high-density residential quarters, men typically hung out at street corners and yards, while respectable women, particularly mothers, were expected to remain inside the brick-stone homes (Salo 2007).

Thomas and other “born-again” gangsters had extreme difficulties in breaking with enactments of personhood that linked sentiments, streets, friendship networks, and drug houses just outside their doorsteps. For some of them it was a matter of weeks before they could no longer stand the intensity generated by the amused or demanding companions they had to pass on their way to often faraway church gatherings that could only be reached by minibus taxis. Ex-gangsters’ commitment to change was continuously being put to the test in interactions with former friends and acquaintances. Within the radius of two blocks from my host’s home in Dunefields, I encountered five young men who were not able to live up to the ideal of self-sufficiency and returned to street life after having identified as “born-again.” Initially this was also the case with Thomas, who, weeks after “being touched,” started to reengage in the enactment of an *ou*. He remembered how six months after he had been touched by the Holy Spirit, one of the members of the church came to visit him at the gang’s hangout:

We were drinking, smoking drugs. And this man come there. And this man tell me my fortune. And I looked at him this way, I was thinking this man is not scared even. I must just [clicks with his fingers] by the click of my fingers just kill people. We did! If I must order one of my, my guys now to shoot this man, he will shoot him, man! And here this man is telling me my life. He is still here. He is like insulting me here, man. And I tell him, “Na, my bru, moenie so gaan nie [my brother, don’t go on like this].” And he tell me,

“Don’t call me ‘my bru!’ I told you to change, but you don’t want to change. You’re *gemoers* [scum], you are rubbish.” And I realized what is it about this man? This man can get hurt here. But he tell me that he wanna help. And there I experienced a different love. And I looked at this ou [man], and I was going to tell now what we are going to do. I looked at them and I say, “Who of you is loving me the way this man love me?” And since then I never looked back. I gave everything back to the gangs, money that was theirs, a car that was theirs. And I started my life from scratch over.

The indirect approach to addressing Thomas’s downfall during the deliverance ritual was replaced by direct persuasion and blunt insult. It has been noted that Pentecostal counselors can be subtly judgmental or even aggressive toward those who do not want to receive their gospel (Burchardt 2013c). In this case, the use of the term *gemoers*, which could be translated into English as “scum” or “rubbish,” was a serious defamation. At the Cape it is usually reserved for those who are presumed to be unwilling to better themselves, do not deserve any help, and are excluded from the moral economy of reciprocity. On the streets, the word is commonly accompanied by a sense of contempt; those who are humiliated in this way are commonly expected to express anger and retaliation. However, here the ambiguity of the missionary’s performance, which could not be clearly read in terms of pre-established moral emotion scripts, seemed to give rise to a moment of doubt. Thomas emphasized that his uncertainty made him question the missionary’s intentions and his gang brothers’ allegiance. Again, his openness to being affected brought about a potential for change before another cultural script was evoked and recounted.

In retrospect, Thomas recast the prerepresentational potential of not knowing into language and a new emotional disposition. In his narrative, the encounter followed another Christian emotion script that to some degree countered the disposition of *ingenuity* and *sharpness*, at least with regard to self-gratifying individualism. The reformed gangster made sense of the event by emphasizing that the missionary was willing to risk his own life in order to save him. Thomas felt touched by the “love” of a fellow man who was willing to move into a position of vulnerability. This stood in stark contrast to the positive regard involved in tit-for-tat reciprocity in the profit-oriented informal economy. Here the personhood was enacted through selfless giving. The “love” Thomas referred to coincides with the notion of *agapē* used in Christian theology for compassion, charity, and forgiveness. Its blueprint as depicted in the New Testament is the fatherly love

of God for humankind that is believed to save sinners. The underlying assumption here is that the object of God's love never does anything to merit it; hence the love is unconditional.<sup>6</sup> Although the missionary's performance was ambiguous and could by no means live up to this divine ideal, Thomas was affected in unexpected ways. He developed the sentiment of "love" in his own life and made it central to his subsequent engagement in a faith-based organization.

#### CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS: "WE NEED TO LIVE THE LIFE"

Affective conversions among "gangsters" were commonly accompanied by efforts to make up for the harm committed, rather than being a matter of millennial capitalism that promised salvation through the amassing of modern consumer goods. Before joining the congregation, Thomas had a relatively stable income through trade in stolen goods and Mandrax. For him, "breaking" with the informal economy first of all meant more financial strain and insecurity. He sought to make up for the crimes committed and joined a faith-based organization (FBO) called the Dream Factory that was dedicated to charitable acts in township schools. This could be seen as a form of restorative justice aimed at the restitution rather than retribution and punishment of an offender. However, among my research participants the restorative acts were never dedicated to particular victims of a crime or their families, as is the case in formal restorative practice (Johnstone and Van Ness 2007). They were dedicated to the "community" as a more abstract and overarching casualty of gang violence. Thomas's benefactor, the man who transformed his life by entering the drug den, was the same person who had founded the FBO. This former business administrator from a middle-class background left his career to support young people in township schools. In a similar vein, Thomas dropped out of the informal economy and exchanged his role as a gang leader for an unpaid position as youth educator. In his testimony he pointed out:

Today, I see that there was no benefit to kill one another, to rob, to steal, and we do it in our own community, we hurt one another. And today I realize there is something greater and better to do for the community, and that's why I'm working with young people today. You can still change their minds. Our organization is a Christian-based organization. But we won't force Christianity down anybody. Because our lives, the way we live, must show the difference. So we don't force a religion down anybody's throat. . . . Our aim is

just to touch one life. It's not to give anything. We need to live the life. If we look at Jesus's life, he just lived the life, a normal life, and people saw the difference. So this is what we are trying to do.

Thomas emphasized that membership in the organization was not tied to a particular denomination. In fact, the staff and volunteers of the FBO were members of different churches. The FBO provided a platform for people with various church affiliations who nonetheless mostly identified as “born-again.” Its agenda was explicitly secular in the sense that there was a distinction between the staff members' religious life and the domains in which they provided their services. Yet, Thomas stressed that the organization's success was based on prayers and its biblical foundation. As Burchardt (2013a) pointed out regarding FBOs in Cape Town, services with seemingly secular aims are based on discourses and practices that may ultimately aim at making conversion palatable through the moral, social, and financial benefits of “Pentecostal belonging.” Most likely Thomas's dedication to Christ made the missionary endorse his participation in the Dream Factory. At the same time, it is safe to say that the reformed man's main objective was not to find followers for his church.

At the time of my research, the FBO provided tutoring and extracurricular activities at a local high school. According to the principal, about half of the learners had problems obtaining passing grades for their worst subjects, and some of them remained practically “illiterate” in classrooms crowded with up to fifty students. The core of the organization's program was constituted by monthly wilderness camps in which young men were taken out to hike and camp outside the city and leave the streets. Thomas emphasized that the poorest of the poor have no means to get their children to leave the townships, and he was thus hoping to provide an alternative to the mesmerizing appeal of gangs. Although it remains an open question to what extent such programs make a difference for the bulk of disadvantaged township youth, they seem to have long-lasting effects on their religiously inspired facilitators. It seems that sentiments were most effectively transformed when reformed men like Thomas had an audience to whom they could perform their new identity and teach by example. Through recognition, they had to become accountable for their actions. This was similar to men who developed “relational dignity” through involvement in civil society organizations, based on being cherished as leaders and role models (Reihling 2013). The successes of saving youth from crime, gangsterism, and drug abuse were largely unpredictable and probably scant in the face of rampant

structural inequalities. However, former gang members could be sure that in the process they would “better” themselves, or at least not “backslide” into the informal economy.

It has been argued that Pentecostal churches in Africa may be more successful agents of change than civil society organizations because they collapse economic and personal development and are relatively independent of global development agencies (van Dijk 2012; D. Freeman 2012). In the case of the Dream Factory, the organization evolved out of affective conversions that were not necessarily determined by global cash flows, funding proposals, or formal employment. Thomas could not count on a salary and received only occasional stipends. His own financial situation and that of the organization were precarious for several years. He and other volunteers raised money from private donors, sometimes by asking for small donations at traffic lights. Thomas strongly believed that the Lord would provide a modest amount of money and emphasized that he was not tempted to re-enter the lucrative drug business. Restitution and maintaining reformation seemed to be a more meaningful currency than money alone. Thomas eventually married a member of his congregation, a female professional who, at times, contributed more to the household’s financial resources than he did.

#### TRANSPPOSITIONS OF URBAN PERSONHOOD

Affective conversions denote nonlinear processes of relatively sudden and unexpected changes in how enactments of personhood are valued and inscribed into the city. Reformed men sacralized urban spaces and thereby created intensities that facilitated the actualization of virtual potentials. These were real but largely invisible in the township. The camps erected on parking lots or vacant plots were literally part of what Burchardt (2013b) called Cape Town’s “hidden religious topography.” This also involved evangelical outreach into schools and drug houses that were by no means conceived as religious institutions. The very enactment of Pentecostal “love” spurned the blurring of boundaries between secular and religious places. While one was contingent on the informal economy of gangs and drugs, the other was tied to evangelical congregations and charity work. One was tied to substance abuse and interpersonal violence, the other to involvement in a form of civic activism that has become a unique feature of postapartheid development among the “urban poor” (Robins 2008).

Once a critical threshold was reached, affect could drive the conversion from street-smart to “born-again” gangsters. This conversion never rep-

resented a complete break with the past but rather a transposition—that is, old configurations of personhood were enacted in a different context with very different outcomes. Evidently, the men I encountered could never fully balance out the Pentecostal ideals of loving self-sacrifice and self-sufficiency. The very personhood of “born-again” gangsters was made up of externalized parts of others, such as goods, favors, and recognition. At the same time, it depended on individual achievement and navigation of the cityscape.<sup>7</sup> For the reformed men I encountered, composite personhood was the basis for individuality, since they had to connect with other “born-again” people to distinguish themselves from the gang brothers they had to leave behind. Thomas and other reformed ouens continued to enact ingenuity when they seized small opportunities to obtain donations on the streets or favors from other church members. Moreover, when Thomas worked with township youth, he depended on other people’s appreciation and ongoing social affirmations of his identity as a reformed gangster. To make up for their misdeeds, ouens often had to commit themselves to role-modeling alternative behavior to be worthy of their following. The composite personhood of reformed men was based on spiritual rather than economic leadership and as such did little to change the poverty-sustaining secular political economy that partly led to its emergence. This nevertheless made a significant difference by keeping the reformed from backsliding into gangs.

The implicit coexistence and rupture between individualist and relational enactments of personhood complicate any notion of linear progression toward reformed men of “love.” What “born-again” gangsters did was, after all, somehow similar to what they had done in their best moments as benevolent ouens. They enacted “open reciprocity,” as David Graeber (2001) has called it, based on open trust and open credit rather than tit-for-tat exchange.<sup>8</sup> This commonly resulted in the giver’s social and economic security over time. At some point, Thomas’s benefactor offered him a job. For converts, individual agency was premised on social relationships. This resonated with findings across Africa that show how Pentecostals establish new communities of solidarity and care in times of distress.<sup>9</sup> Men like Thomas were “miraculously” able to make a modest living and, at least in part, overcame the dichotomy of selfless charity and self-absorbed accumulation that characterized Cape Town’s urban market economy at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this sense, men’s reformation based on mutuality was tied to ongoing interactions and affect that could not be fully codified in Pentecostal discourses or neat divisions between secular and religious places in the city.

Pentecostal ritual outreach enabled, encouraged, and forced (ex-)gang members to be vulnerable in an urban milieu in which it was dangerous to show tenderness. Conversion was only possible through men's continuing openness to being touched in relation to the evangelists, the community of "born-again" Christians, as well as God and his son Jesus Christ. The ability to be vulnerable without having to fear abuse from competitors in the informal economy seemed to be a major reason for men to convert. This may be a distinctive feature of conversions for young men involved in gangs in Cape Town. Vulnerability in conjunction with the emotional disposition of "love" marked a turning point. It complicated the claim that Charismatic Christianity in Africa became popular mainly because of its promise to deliver the believer from poverty.<sup>10</sup> For "born-again" gangsters it was affect and emotion that made them convert rather than capital. In fact, they left behind lucrative as well as potentially deadly opportunities to gain money and recognition through involvement in the gangs that have become ubiquitous in South African townships.

#### NOTES

1. Žižek, in *Organs without Bodies*, locates the notion of "excess" at the center of Deleuze's philosophy of becoming. He affirms an "irreducible excess of the problem over its solution" or of the "virtual over its actualizations" (2004, 50). From this perspective, the "reality of the virtual"—not to be confused with the unreal in media simulations—exceeds the actual world of observable things because it contains potentially infinite capacities to affect and be affected.

2. Here I follow a Spinozist notion of "affect" of the sort developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1994) and Massumi (2002). As intensive difference, affect can only be registered in the body as an increase or decrease in its capacity to act, to affect, and be affected.

3. Strathern (1990) built the term upon the work of McKim Marriott, who used it to refer to South Asian notions of personhood that are opposed to the Enlightenment understanding of "individuals" in the sense of bounded and indivisible units. For a detailed discussion of the concept, see Fowler (2004).

4. See Durkheim (1912). Building on him, Radcliffe-Brown (1922, 233ff.) defined social sentiment as an "organized system of emotional tendencies centered around some object" and pointed out that "society depends for its existence on the presence in the minds of its members of a certain system of sentiments by which the conduct of the individual is regulated in conformity with the needs of the society."

5. Crime statistics recorded fifty-seven reported murders in Cape Town per 100,000 inhabitants in one year (2005/2006), which accounts approximately for the

figure given earlier if one takes into account a total population of about 3 million. See *City of Cape Town* (2009).

6. See Lewis (1960) for a discussion of the four types of love. He considered *agapē*, which he translated as “charity,” to be more virtuous than other forms of love such as affection, friendship, and *eros*, which according to him are based on an individual’s needs.

7. Robbins (2015, 179) argued that the co-presence of relational and individualist “value configurations” is common among evangelical Christians. Van Dijk (2001b), Daswani (2011), and Werbner (2011) also noted this for sub-Saharan Africa.

8. Graeber builds upon Sahlins’s notion of “generalized reciprocity” tied to the virtues of altruism and generosity among people in close proximity (1972, 198). He distinguishes this from “closed reciprocity” that is more akin to short-term transactions of goods that in his opinion largely resemble the mode of market exchange.

9. See Dilger 2007; Dilger, Burchardt, and van Dijk 2010; and Burchardt 2013a.

10. See Gifford 1990; Maxwell 1998; Hasu 2012.