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### Becoming cornered

*Migration, masculinities and marginalisation in inner-city Johannesburg*

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **Introduction**

## Violence in South Africa

At the commencement of the fieldwork portion of my study, in June 2017, the story of Karabo Mokoena, a South African 22-year-old woman who was murdered and burnt by her boyfriend, was trending on social media. According to a South African Police Service (SAPS) report, she was one of 2,930 women murdered in the country in 2017/18 (SAPS Crime Report 2019). Mokoena's death once again brought into the spotlight the everyday reality of violence against women in South Africa. Her death sparked other social media commentary, including the trending of #MenAreTrash, #NotAllMen and #NotInMyName, the last of which resulted in a 'movement of men' that established a nongovernmental organisation (NGO). Known as #NIMNSA (Not in My Name, South Africa), the NGO aimed at 'curbing femicide by empowering underprivileged women' in South Africa (see [www.nimnsa.org](http://www.nimnsa.org)), and it joined a growing number of NGOs run by men implementing interventions to address violence against women.

Mokoena's murder was initially labelled as femicide, defined as the 'intentional killing of females because they are females' by Statistics South Africa (Africa Check 2019). However, in 2019, as the case progressed, reports emerged that most of her internal organs were missing when her body was found. The police concluded that it was a ritual murder, in which the organs were most likely used to appease ancestors, to acquire wealth, or for protection from evil (Maughan 2018; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). Regardless of the police report, Mokoena's murder had already been widely interpreted by the public as yet another example of a woman being killed by a man who claimed to love her. The multiple and varied definitions of 'violence', both what it is and what it is not, as well as what triggers it, contribute to its slipperiness as a term. As I explore in this thesis, this slipperiness can make it difficult to address gendered violence when one relies on predefined categories of gendered violence, such as those commonly promulgated by development interventions.

In addition to its high levels of violence against both women and men, for more than a decade South Africa has also been the focus of worldwide news coverage of periodic xenophobic violence against 'foreign' (African) nationals. Targeting mostly men from specific African countries, and labelled 'Afrophobic' by some, such outbursts of violence were reported across the country, with the most spectacular incidents occurring in 2008 and September 2019. Commenting on the endemic nature of violence in South Africa, Sibabalwe Mona (2019), a South African social media activist, has argued that violence against women is linked to violence against African migrants. On her Instagram page, she posits 'men who are discontented due to lack of access to economic opportunities, and frustrated by being unable to fulfil their perceived role as breadwinners in the household,

turn to crime (against foreigners) as a coping mechanism and violence against women as an assertion of power'.<sup>1</sup> Stories such as these, backed up by statistics, have contributed to South Africa's reputation as one of the most violent countries in the world, especially for a country not at war (Abrahams, Jewkes, and Mathews 2010). Scholars in South Africa have also reached a consensus that men's violence against women is related to their (men's) use of violence against men, as well as to their usually unacknowledged position as victims of violence (Jewkes, Flood, and Lang 2015).

Mona's Instagram post on violence reflects ongoing narratives in the public sphere and the development world around violence and problematic masculinities in South Africa, in which violence is explained as perpetrated by men who want to assert themselves to compensate for their failures as breadwinners. This premise, however, belies the complexity and the messy interactions of economic, political and social factors that give rise to the supposed state of men's 'failure'. It also overshadows the multidimensional scenarios emanating from said failures or crises that precede violence against women. Mona's post, notably, refers to violence against migrants as emerging from the same roots as violence against women, thereby framing both migrants and women as victims of problematic masculinities.

Relevant to this dissertation is the paradoxical position of migrant men; as men they constitute problematic masculinities, while, simultaneously, as migrants they are framed as helpless victims at the hands of 'failed' South African men. This dissertation questions the unidimensionality implied in the 'crisis of masculinity' narrative and its associated assumptions, particularly in the context of marginalisation. Drawing on ethnographic research, I examine the diverse ways that migrant men in inner-city Johannesburg have responded to political, economic, legal and social marginalisation in relation to normative ideas about masculinity, often framed as problematic or in crisis. In this introductory chapter, I highlight the questions, key concepts and assumptions that guided this study, and situate it within the scholarship on masculinity.

## Aim and main argument of the study

This dissertation investigates how various forms of marginalisation intersect with normative ideals of masculinities among migrant men in inner-city Johannesburg. I use the term 'normative' to refer to certain practices performed and/or ideas to which a man might subscribe in order to qualify or prove his manhood, such as the idea that a man should financially provide for his family.

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1 Sibabalwe Mona. 2019. Instagram photo. On Instagram as 'sibzxmona', available at <https://www.instagram.com/p/B1gMKYjbUo/>, accessed 31 October 2019.

Specifically, I examine how men who could be considered as in crisis – or in ‘money crisis’ to quote my interlocutors – responded to self-, structural- and societal-inflicted pressures to behave in a ‘manly’ manner. I seek to contribute to the analyses and discussions of masculinities in post-Apartheid South Africa, focusing on how these intersect with migration, marginalisation and violence. I include public, media and political anti-immigrant discourses as part of larger political, economic and social marginalisation. I also consider legislative mechanisms that prevent migrants from staying and working in South Africa, thus having an effect on chronic unemployment, housing insecurity and poverty. Migrants’ marginalisation also is related to race, language and ethnicity, among other factors. These many factors push them to the margins of the economy or the ‘corner of life’, as my interlocutors called it. This corner is characterised by precarity and violence, which can be interpreted as the enactment of problematic masculinities, a framing that emphasises men as perpetrators, or as structural violence, which highlights the vulnerabilities associated with migration.

Following my interlocutors’ conceptualisation, I refer to them as ‘cornered men’, which allows me to offer an alternative to current dominant narratives of ‘the crisis of masculinity’, ‘toxic masculinity’ or other ‘problematic’ masculinities routinely circulating in South Africa and beyond, which also include narratives of migrant masculinities that overemphasise their vulnerability. I investigate the many actors and factors that feed and perpetuate the ‘crisis’ narrative, including the role of development organisations in shaping such narratives. Here I refer to multilateral and national NGOs working in South Africa that attend to diverse social issues, including violence. I present an ethnographic study of migrant men who spent time hanging out on street corners in Johannesburg’s inner city, including Uncle Kofi’s Corner, the main ethnographic site where I worked for nine months, and Tino’s Corner, my cousin’s mobile hair salon where I also spent a significant amount of time.

Most of my interlocutors were men who had migrated from other African countries, mostly from Zimbabwe, my country of origin, and the group was ethnically diverse. A few had migrated to Johannesburg from other parts of South Africa, including rural areas in KwaZulu Natal and Limpopo, they were also included in the study because they frequented the street corners where I conducted research. Following migrant social networks, they had settled in the inner city where they lived together in relative comity, albeit plagued by chronic poverty, joblessness and a pervasive state of desperation. While all of them fell within the economically productive age group (15–64 years), many were marginally employed or unemployed. Others engaged in small-scale entrepreneurial projects that blurred the lines of legality and criminality. I explore how such economic and social marginalisation intersected with normative ideas of masculinities in shaping the everyday lives of these migrant men (and women) in inner-city Johannesburg.

Normative ideas of masculinities and associated expectations are rooted in the patriarchal system that predominates in South Africa and that finds expression through social structures, such as the family and religion, and in institutions including government (Wilson 1969; Connell 1987; Jewkes et al. 2011). According to feminist scholars, these structures have also given birth to the stereotype of the ‘traditional’ man as one who is misogynistic, violent, sexually voracious and resistant to change (Morrell 1998; Mangezvo 2017). In South Africa, the traditional man is said to have failed (or refused) to embrace the legal, political and economic environment that became institutionalised with the new democracy, resulting in a post-Apartheid crisis of masculinity (Adamson 2017). This crisis is characterised by violence against women and the spread of HIV, with men engaging in risky sexual practices to assert their otherwise threatened masculinity (Morrell 1998; Jewkes et al. 2010).

Failure or refusal to embrace change may also be associated with migrant men from elsewhere in Africa, who come to South Africa with their own ideas of masculinity (and gender), and who are expected to adjust to the often stringent legal, social and economic environments in South Africa. In that scenario, violence might be seen as a justifiable means for men to deal with such challenges. But based on the insights from my ethnographic research, I question the simplistic assumption that violent behaviour can be explained by the perceived failures of men within the larger crisis of masculinity. I argue that this assumption relies on an understanding of masculinity as fixed. However, in everyday contexts, men are often forced – in unpremeditated ways – to shift their ideas of masculinities and their practices in response to the lived reality of being cornered. The resulting shifts are more varied and unstable than suggested by the ‘masculinity in crisis’ frame (Hamber 2010; Dube 2016). Observing the varied ways that my study participants navigated and negotiated their precarious lived realities, a process they termed *‘kukiya kiyi’* – meaning trying various keys to open doors, and being willing to enter a door and seize opportunities – I have come to understand masculinities as fluid and plural by definition, consisting of a set of ideas, behaviours and practices resulting in unstable subject positions in the process of being and becoming (Nilan 1995; Hall 1993; Fast and Moyer 2018).

*‘Kukiya kiyi’* is used to explain the multiple forms of indeterminate and risk-taking ingenuity employed by men to manoeuvre within and out of corner spaces. This framing opens up the possibility that masculinities can be contested, redefined, altered or reconstructed in different spaces and times in response to the lived realities of being and becoming cornered. Understanding masculinities in this way helps us to move away from frameworks that are limiting and that fail to capture the open-ended and nuanced ways in which gender unfolds in the context of everyday life.

## Study questions

The principal question I set out to answer in this study is what happens when normative ideas and practices of masculinity encounter corner spaces that limit their expression or realisation? I divided this question into four parts, each of which is addressed in the four empirical chapters that follow.

First, how do migrant men understand their marginalisation in relation to their ideas and practices of masculinity? To answer this question, I explored how marginalisation emerging from post-migration contexts leaves men with limited options, so that they end up, in their words, 'becoming cornered'. While such spaces could be read as forms of structural violence, men used the same cornered spaces as springboards to redefine their perceived identities as men. My analysis advances discussions about structure and agency in relation to specific migration contexts (Muzondidya 2008; Chiumbu and Nyamanhindi 2012; Landau and Freemantle 2010), by attending to the meanings that the men themselves accord to such structures and agentic efforts. Instead of limiting my analysis at how structures inhibit men, I highlight how men view such structures as shaping their identities as men. An example of this is men redefining masculinities in the context of perceived failure, such as a man enduring unemployment and resisting criminality in order to be considered morally respectable. Another instance is a man engaging in multiple income-generating schemes, including unscrupulous ones, and is deemed a 'man with a plan' who makes things happen through '*kukiya kiyā*'.

Second, how do cornered migrant men who supposedly subscribe to 'traditional masculinity' position themselves within the narrative of the 'new man' or 'positive masculinity' as advocated by the development world? To respond to this question, I explored the origin of the 'crisis of masculinity' narrative within the development world and how men from marginalised communities become the targets of behavioural change interventions. I complicate the linear behaviour or identity transformation implied by some gender-based interventions, by illustrating the iterative and open-ended negotiations that take place in the unfinished process of transformation.

Third, how do corner spaces spawn violence in its multidimensional forms, including gender-based violence? In addressing this question, I departed from the 'crisis of masculinity' concept to examine how cornered migrant men find themselves in paradoxical positions where they fall within both the hegemonic group of men and the subordinated group of those on the margins. I illustrate the difficulties of qualifying men's reported experiences of violence as gendered because the official definitions of gender-based violence have already named such violence as against women, thereby excluding men's experiences.

Fourth, how do men compensate for their perceived failures without or in addition to resorting to violence? For this question, I moved away from the conventional association between violence and crisis, to highlight alternative ways that men might respond to corner spaces. My analysis acknowledges the dangers of a single story by paying attention to alternatives, which often fall between the cracks of totalising claims and theories (Mkhwanazi 2015).

The main contention of this dissertation is that violence cannot and should not be the only lens through which we frame the experiences of men in socially and economically precarious contexts. In the remaining pages of this chapter, I provide the context for this study and situate it in relation to the current discussions on masculinities, violence, marginalisation and migration in post-Apartheid South Africa. I begin by providing a background to problematic masculinities and crisis in migration narratives. This is followed by an overview of the relevant literature and a detailed description of the context and study site.

## **Situating the study and its contribution**

While this is an anthropological inquiry into gendered violence, I draw from the disciplines of public health, sociology and psychology, which to date have contributed immensely to theorising masculinities in South Africa and particularly problematic masculinities. Within the development world, gender-based violence has been understood as a public health issue emanating from unequal gender relations. Similarly, migration and the risks associated with it have been understood in public health and human rights terms. In the four empirical chapters that follow, I answer the questions I raise above, responding specifically to assumptions posited by dominant theories in masculinity studies. My interlocutors' experiences are somewhat different from the experiences of those men who have typically provided the empirical basis for theories of problematic masculinities, for example, South African men in townships or HIV-positive men in behavioural change programmes.

I use the next two chapters of this thesis to situate my study within the field of anthropology and masculinities, at methodological and conceptual levels, respectively. In Chapter 2, I situate myself as a female migrant researcher trained in demography conducting an anthropological study on a well-researched topic in a relatively dangerous setting. Building on my previous experience working as a quantitative researcher in the NGO world, focusing on gender-based violence as a bounded research object, in this dissertation I examine the same research subject using a more open-ended approach. Rather than approaching the field as a 'data collector', and examining gender-based violence as a public health issue,

I thought of myself as a fisherman-like anthropologist, availing myself of whatever my interlocutors offered to me as I paid attention to what they said and did in relation to their gendered subjectivities (Ferguson 1999). As Ratele (2017, 6) writes, 'oppressive notions of gender are reinforced, nurtured and mobilised, or threatened, frustrated and undermined while we are talking about other social or personal issues, writing about other topics, that is to say, while we are focused on other, apparently unrelated, areas of life, such as discussing the laws of the country, parenting or God'.

In Chapter 3, I acknowledge how masculinities scholarship has evolved and how research from South Africa critically shapes this scholarship in international debates in conversation with dominant theories emerging from the global north. However, international migrant masculinities are hardly addressed in current discussions and theorisations. To advance my arguments, I bring together literature from critical studies of masculinities and the anthropology of becoming (Biehl and Locke 2017), which focuses on how individuals deal with structures in their everyday life, and anthropological work on 'frontier' Africans (Nyamnjoh 2015), which relates to identity formation in post-migration contexts in urban Africa. I join my voice with scholars refuting the presentation of Africa as a place of perpetual deficiencies and crises (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Nyamnjoh 2015; Vigneswaran 2013).

## **The double crisis: masculinities and migration in post-apartheid South Africa**

Statements such as 'South Africans are violent', 'migrants are virus carriers', 'HIV is rampant in South Africa', and 'men are trash' were commonly overheard in the streets of Johannesburg during my ethnographic research. But we cannot overlook the role played by scientific studies and the NGO world in triggering and/or perpetuating these narratives. One of the objectives of this study was to investigate the various (f)actors that feed and perpetuate the 'crisis' narrative, including the role of the development world in shaping such narratives. In this section I examine the origins of the 'problematic masculinities' narrative within the development world and how migrant men are positioned within such narratives.

To describe problematic masculinities, feminist scholars have coined the term 'crisis of masculinity' (or 'crisis in masculinity') in order 'to draw attention to problems confronting men in the face of changing work and family structure' in contemporary times (Dube 2016, 73; see also Adamson 2017; Morrell 1998; Jewkes and Morrell 2010). The crisis of masculinity narrative has been used specifically to explain the high levels of recorded violence in South Africa, with

scholars linking South Africa's staggering rape and murder statistics to the changing legal, political and economic landscape that emerged in the country after the end of apartheid (Adamson 2017; Dube 2016; Morrell 1998; Jewkes and Morrell 2010; Hamber 2010). In addition to being labelled as the 'rape capital' of the world (Wilkinson 2014), South Africa is also said to have the highest prevalence of HIV and AIDS (Avert 2019), which is associated with pervasive sexual violence.

According to the SAPS Crime Statistics Report of 2019, 41,583 cases of rape were reported for the period of 2018/19, translating to an average of 114 rape cases being reported every day. In their analysis of the statistics released by Stats SA and SAPS, Africa Check reported that in the year 2018/19, one woman was murdered every three hours, while one man was murdered every 30 minutes (Wilkinson 2019). Ratele (2017), drawing on findings from previous years that show that the homicide rate for men is nearly six-fold that for women, brings attention to the disproportionate vulnerability of men to violence in South Africa. This reality has been overshadowed by 'problematic masculinity' narratives that position men as inherently violent. As glaring as the gap (the statistical difference in violence experienced by men and women) is, it is well documented that articulating it has often attracted rebukes from feminist activists who argue that pointing out men's experience of violence risks impeding efforts towards achieving gender equality. For example, the hashtag movement in South Africa used slogans like 'men are trash', which provoked reactions of 'not all men' or 'some men are trash'. Pointing out that not all men are perpetrators of violence sparked backlash from some feminists who stated that such claims took away the spotlight from women's experiences by focusing on men.<sup>2</sup> While not all men perpetrate violence and some men are at risk of experiencing violence, saying so may be read as insensitive in the context of the high levels of gender-based violence and HIV prevalence disproportionately affecting women (Jewkes et al. 2010; Morrell and Jewkes 2011).

The peak of HIV incidence, both in South Africa and globally, coincided with the advent of the country's new democracy in the early 1990s and was exacerbated by increased immigration flows into South Africa, calling for a global response to the epidemic (Lurie 2006; Wyrod 2016). The global response, mainly driven by development actors from the United States and Western Europe NGOs, led to a focus on African sexuality and masculinity. According to Wyrod (2016, 15), there was an 'unparalleled effort to survey, quantify and modify the sexual behaviour of African men and women, such that it can now be difficult to discuss sexuality beyond the frame of HIV and AIDS'. Scholars in South Africa and around

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<sup>2</sup> This was a contention I struggled with throughout this research project given my position as a female researcher who has worked for gender activist organisations. See, for example, the article 'Twitter- trending hashtag 'MenAreTrash' proof that men centre themselves on feminist issues', available at: <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/opinion/menaretrash-trending-twitter-men-detail-feminist-issues/>

the globe moved beyond studying HIV solely in relation to individual traits such as sexuality or masculinity, and situated individual practices and experiences within wider structural, political and economic contexts (Farmer 2004b; Campbell 1997; Hunter 2010; Ratele 2013, Mfecane 2011). One critical finding from this research was that unequal gender relations, compounded by economic and racial inequalities, contributed to the spread of HIV and the impact of AIDS, disproportionately affecting (black) women. As important as such studies have been, by foregrounding the intricate association between HIV and gender-based violence particularly in black communities, they have contributed to crafting and popularising a crisis discourse of problematic masculinities in the same communities (Izugbara and Egesa 2019; Lorist 2020; Peacock, Khumalo, and Mcnab 2004; Jewkes et al. 2011).

Migrant men in particular have been entwined in the problematic masculinity narrative, primarily because circular migration has been established as one of the drivers of HIV transmission in Africa (Brummer 2002; Lurie et al. 2003; Campbell 1997). Furthermore, migration has been framed as a crisis through the discourse of the mainstream media and in political spheres. For example, in 2016, Statistics South Africa reported that an '*uncontrolled influx* [of migrants] comes at a high cost for the poor masses expecting improved standards of living from the present government' (Community Health Survey 2016, 2, emphasis added). Similar sentiments were shared by some of my interlocutors and on social media during the course of this study. For example, on 26 September, 2018, an article in *The Citizen*, an online South African newspaper, was titled 'Foreign migrant influx straining Gauteng's resources – govt report'.<sup>3</sup> Through such representations, migrants have largely been configured as the 'cause of crime, people that spread HIV/AIDS, "stealing" jobs, housing, education and health-care from ordinary South Africans and promoting poverty and moral-cultural decay in urban dwellings' (Vanyoro and Ncube 2018, 6; see also Landau and Freemantle 2010).

Despite being identified as a 'key population' at greater risk of HIV infection and transmission, migrants are not adequately covered by the public health system of South Africa (Vearey et al. 2017; Vearey 2018). Migrants' limited access to health care is further exacerbated by prevailing antagonistic sentiments against migrants (Hickel 2014; Landau and Freemantle 2010; Beremauro 2013). This has given more impetus to NGOs claiming and seeking to address the government's gap in service delivery to migrant populations. Organisations such as the Consortium of Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA) have emerged to address the plight of migrants in South Africa. Some of the NGOs within this consortium specifically reach out to migrant populations to raise awareness about HIV and gender-based violence, framing the two epidemics as emerging from

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3 <https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/2013876/foreign-migrant-influx-straining-gautengs-resources- govt-report/>

gender inequality and identifying gender-equality interventions as the solution.

A number of NGOs, exemplified by the #Not in My Name NGO mentioned in the opening to this chapter, have been established to 'intervene' through the 'engagement' of men (Graaff 2017, 2). A few have employed gender transformative approaches that seek to make gender relations more equitable by calling into question and transforming destructive gender and sexual norms among both men and women (Dworkin, Fleming, and Colvin 2015). Among other things, this approach entails getting men to attend awareness-raising events, teaching them to recognise the negative effects of violence, and encouraging them to embrace alternative or positive masculinities that are framed as nonviolent and gender equitable.

To become targets of development and health interventions, men and masculinities must be conceived as problematic or in crisis. The rise in NGOs and interventions aiming to 'fix' men entailed a proliferation of this crisis discourse on billboards, conference papers, NGO reports and scholarly publications. In these discursive spaces, the marginalised black man has become the face of problematic masculinities, while (African) women are framed as at risk of being harmed by such masculinities, which is then backed up by selected and sometimes self-generated statistics. Burchardt, Patterson, and Rasmussen (2013) describe such representations as 'extraversion', with African states and civil society highlighting topical social problems in a display of desperation and deservingness of donor money. Owing to their social, economic and often legal position in society, migrant men and women are disproportionately targeted by these interventions because their cornered subject positions prove the 'deservingness' of NGOs that engage them. This deservingness is further augmented by studies that highlight migrants as high-risk populations (Campbell 1997; Lurie et al. 2003) in regards to negative health outcomes such as HIV and gender-based violence. Marginalised migrant men are paradoxically positioned within the development world in South Africa: framed as problematic (masculinities) or as victims of structural violence, depending on any given project's agenda. In addition, some interventions focus on promoting change at the individual level, overlooking the structural issues or cornering factors that are key contexts for both violence and risky sexual behaviour (Cornwall, Edstrom, and Greig 2011).

In this dissertation, I approach the disproportionate targeting of specific groups men by NGOs for behavioural change interventions as a kind of symbolic violence. As Pakasi (2018, 180) puts it, symbolic violence, as a form 'everyday violence, operates through hegemonic discourses such as depictions of oppressed groups as dangerous, as well as through mundane rituals of humiliation and violence'. I take 'hegemony' in this context to mean 'the ability to impose a particular definition on a situation' (Ratele 2017, 11), for example the

development world's over-signification of crisis in the problematic masculinity narrative, or the establishment of cornering categories that present individuals as either this or that – 'men who care' or 'violent men' – thereby failing to capture the process of negotiations in between. I argue this is symbolic violence because not only is it invisible but it also shrouds the inherent power imbalances between development practitioners and the men they target (Lorist 2020). Further, neither party may be conscious that they are submitting to or wielding specific power. Like structural violence, symbolic violence is, as Bourdieu writes, 'a form of internalised oppression or humiliation, the legitimisation of inequality, and hierarchies of expressions of class power that could take on many forms, such as sexism, heterosexism, racism and xenophobia (as quoted in Pieterse, Stratford, and Nel 2018, 33). Lorist (2020, 83) terms this specific violence within the development world 'epistemic injustice', defining it 'as power imbalances between knowledges'.

In this dissertation, I move away from this over-signification of crisis in relation to both migration and masculinities, and especially the unidirectional outcomes associated with it. Firstly, instead of 'crisis', I borrow the phrase 'becoming cornered' from my study participants to refer to forms of social, legal and political marginalisation that result in 'limited options' for survival. Instead of focusing on violence as an obvious and only outcome of becoming cornered, I explore the myriad ways that differently positioned migrant men with limited options live up to, or fail to live up to, self and societal expectations. I particularly emphasise how migrant men slipped in and out of different subjectivities, claiming and taking up different identities in different spaces and times, making it difficult to come up with stable and exclusionary identities. I turn now to literature relevant to this aspect of the study, highlighting the associations between corner spaces and gender-based violence, and ask: is violence the only frame to understand the experiences of cornered men?

## **Masculinities, crisis and gender-based violence in South Africa**

As explored in the preceding section, both migration and masculinities have been framed in relation to crisis. The crisis of masculinities in particular has been identified contributing to gendered violence in South Africa. Though focusing my analysis on the crisis of masculinities, I depart from the assumption that violence by men emanates from a place of gender domination. By highlighting the paradoxical position of migrants as both hegemonic and subordinated, I opt for an open-ended understanding of violence that acknowledges the multidimensional manifestations of gendered violence. I particularly highlight

how becoming cornered undermines migrant men's dominant position, thereby complicating their capacity to perpetrate violence.

Questions regarding the relationship between masculinities and violence have long interested scholars from various disciplines, some of whom have documented how masculinities shift following migration or in the face of a changing political and economic landscape (Morrell 1998; Breckenridge 1998). For example, in South Africa, scholars have theorised a relationship between black masculinist violence and the dominant form of urbanisation that unfolded in the 1950s during Apartheid, which relied largely on male migrant labour from within South Africa and other African countries. Most such studies have focused on internal migrants (Breckenridge 1998; Gibbs 2014; Morrell 1998), with only a few recent studies focusing on migrants from other countries (Mangezvo 2015; de Jong 2018; Matshaka 2009). Morrell (1998, 630) suggests that the shift from being a respectable ruler (traditional man) in a rural area to being a jobless man in the city has led to men's violence, especially gender-based violence, presumably to compensate for their failed masculinities (see also Dube 2016 and Jolly 2010).

Following the same structuralist strand of argumentation are a number of studies focusing on masculinities and violence, particularly gender-based violence (Dunkle et al. 2004; Jewkes et al. 2010). However, with the exception of a few ethnographic studies (e.g., Wood et al. 2008), most of what is known about gender-based violence comes from household surveys or from psychological and sociological studies focusing on violence against women (Dunkle et al. 2004; Jewkes et al. 2010; Abrahams, Jewkes, and Mathews 2010). In these studies, which may be considered a genre of sorts, South Africa is routinely reported to have a high prevalence of gender-based violence.

A study by Jewkes and colleagues (2001), carried out in 1998, established that one-in-four women in the provinces of Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape reported being physically assaulted by a male partner over the course of their lifetime. Subsequent studies established that more than three-quarters of women in Limpopo had experienced some form of violence (Machisa et al. 2010, 2013; Musariri et al. 2013, 2014). The most recent study conducted by a group of research institutes in Diepsloot, an informal settlement of Johannesburg, showed that more than half (56%) of men had raped or beaten a woman in the 12 months preceding the interview (Sonke 2016).<sup>4</sup> Such studies, largely undertaken by gender activists and feminist scholars, have admirably helped to make violence against women visible, and presumably knowable, while simultaneously making a strong case against problematic masculinities, providing evidence for policy making, public health interventions academic analysis and theoretical contributions to the study of masculinities and violence.

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4 For detailed statistics on various forms of gender-based violence in South Africa, see studies conducted by the Medical Research Council and Gender Links from 2010 to 2013, as well as a study by Sonke Gender Justice Network, University of the Witwatersrand and the Medical Research Council in 2016.

Before embarking on my PhD studies, I had worked for feminist organisations that sought to address gender inequality in Africa with a focus on gender-based violence, and so I was familiar with and had contributed to both the research and the narratives outlined above (see, for example, Musariri et al. 2013). As quantitative data analyst, I was well aware of the different categories and forms of gender-based violence. But like many other scholars and activists I also wondered why, despite many interventions, gender-based violence appeared to be on the increase. Frustrated with my failure to get satisfactory answers from household surveys, I embarked on this PhD study, using an anthropological approach, with the intention to investigate further why men in South Africa were violent towards women. Employing an open-ended approach, I was overwhelmed by the many forms of violence I encountered, both directly observed and in the day-to-day stories that did not always neatly fit in the existing pre-identified categories of gender-based violence. In the inner city, like many other areas in Johannesburg, interpersonal violence may include different forms of male-on-male violence, self-violence, and sexual and physical violence against women. These different forms of violence appear intertwined and yet also gendered in that they manifested and affected men and women differently, thus challenging the notion of gender-based violence being synonymous with violence against women, as I had previously understood and as suggested in development interventions that present women as victims and men as perpetrators (Ratele 2013a; Vetten and Ratele 2013b).

The ubiquity of violence in the inner city and other low-resource settings led me to widen my scope and consider framing the experiences of my interlocutors within a 'continuum of violence', an approach suggested by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004); I explore this further in Chapter 6. This approach enabled me to 'account for the interconnectedness of all forms of violence, from the invisible/structural violence to the visible/every day micro-violence, to extraordinary/reasonable/public violence' (Accomazzo 2012, 547). This allowed me to grasp better the paradoxical position of perpetrator/victim to which my study participants were subjected in relation to violence. Migrant men fell within the broader group of men to the extent that they considered themselves superior to women. However, simultaneously, as migrants they were also victims of violence perpetuated by other men and, on occasion, by (South African) women from higher class positions. The continuum of violence frame made it possible to conceptualise the intersecting vulnerabilities of migrants, including their lack of legal or official documentation, unemployment, homelessness, criminality and interpersonal violence, including violence against women and xenophobia. These interconnected violences, conceived of as existing along a continuum, can be understood as contributing to the feeling of being cornered, as regularly reported among the men I studied.

## Masculinities, crisis and alternatives to violence

While violence was undisputedly an everyday reality, my interlocutors did not make it the context for everything else. They also engaged in other activities and convivial relationships in their everyday lives in ways that were not exclusionary. Therefore, in this study, I also asked: how men might compensate for perceived failures without (or in addition to) resorting to violence? This question spurred me to examine other aspects and experiences of migrant men in Johannesburg that are usually overshadowed by problematising narratives. Such an analysis allows us to move from essentialising frameworks and theories that present violence as inherent. Pasura and Christou (2017), researching masculinity among African men in the United Kingdom, demonstrate the many ways that men negotiate and perform respectable masculinities despite the precarity of their everyday lives. When men experience a rupture of their masculine identity, when gender roles are overturned or undermined, they prefer to negotiate new modes of respectability rather than turn to violence. For example, men may embrace changes when they take on gender roles historically considered to belong to women. At times, as well, they might rather go back to their home countries in an effort to restore their status. Gibbs (2014), researching the taxi industry of South Africa, deviates from the predominant narrative that portrays 'failed men' as 'violent men'. While he acknowledges the turbulence and the general violence that characterise the taxi industry, he argues that kinship, prestige and respectability are critical in shaping migrant masculinities. In this dissertation, I follow Gibbs, examining how kinship and interdependencies play out among migrant men in Johannesburg, while countering the assumption that marginalised men fail to build positive relationships. I focus, therefore, not only on violence but also on other possible outcomes that emerge when men are cornered. I specifically examine localised scripts on how to be 'good and responsible' men, scripts that enabled the men I studied to avoid violence and criminality.

In my efforts to situate the experiences of my interlocutors within the scholarship of masculinities in post-apartheid South Africa, I found an emerging literature on 'alternative masculinities', working as a counter-narrative to that of problematic masculinities. The concept of 'alternative masculinities' emerged from development activists and feminist scholars, many of whom worked in South Africa, in response to high levels of violence against women (Kimmel 1987; Barker, Ricardo, and Nascimento 2007; Peacock, Khumalo, and Mcnab 2004). They foregrounded the need to transform traditional men into 'new men'. In describing the new man, Morrell (1998, 7) writes: 'Although a caricature, it is helpful to identify some of his features: introspective, *caring*, anxious, out-spoken

on women's rights, domestically responsible. The new man also turned his back on competitive sport, sexist jokes, violent outdoor pursuits' (emphasis added).

Most studies of alternative masculinities to date have come from the fields of public health and sociology, and they continue to underscore a double binary within the context of a gender-transformative framework, one that pits biological men against biological women and gender-equitable men against gender-inequitable men. For example, Morrell and Jewkes's (2016) study on 'fathers who care and those who do not' leaves no room for men like those in my study who straddled such categories. Morrell and Jewkes (2009) and Peacock and colleagues (2006) examine masculinities that they label as 'counter hegemonic', such as men engaging in childcare, caring for the sick and supporting gender equality. However, my research documented men's care work that did not necessarily go against hegemonic masculinities intentionally. These men often did care work out of necessity and the same men condoned some forms of sexual violence, for example marital rape. Based on Morrell and Jewkes's (2011, 7) study on the association between care and gender equity, men in my study who engaged in some caring practices while simultaneously upholding 'traditional' masculine understandings of gender roles could be identified as reflecting a 'benevolent patriarchy'. While acknowledging the positive impact that such caring practices may have in the processes of identity and value transformation in the broader society, the scholars still warn against the dangers of characterising such men as 'caring' and 'good men', as doing so may reify this kind of masculinity and undermine the efforts to attain gender equality (Morrell and Jewkes 2011, 9).

However, the framing of masculinities as either problematic or positive limits our understanding of the nuances of the hybridity and negotiations that fall in between. Nyamnjoh (2015, 10) calls on academic scholars to adopt conviviality in the intellectual claims they make about individuals and societies, in 'recognition and provision for fact or reality of being incomplete'. It is not only a recognition but also a celebration of incompleteness. I use Nyamnjoh's (2015, 11) concept of conviviality to refute gender frameworks that favour 'conversion' over 'conversation', and to propose an understanding of identities and masculinities as 'open-ended pursuits' that are manifested as cornered men engage in *kukiya kiya* endeavours.

## **Migrant men's contribution to masculinity scholarship in South Africa**

The invisibility of (international) migrant masculinities within the broader masculinities' scholarship in South Africa is quite glaring. Mbembe and Nuttall (2004, 364) assert that beside the migrant (man) being 'the one beneath the city',

he has been outside of its 'orders of visibility' even during colonial times. Despite the current emphasis on the importance of work and money in shaping masculinities, those who migrate internationally with the aim of fulfilling the breadwinner role are little researched in this respect. And despite migration having been understood as a largely male phenomenon in South Africa, research on migrant men has hardly been incorporated into current theorisations of masculinities in South Africa (Mbiyozo 2018).

A number of studies have documented shifting gender dynamics following migration in South Africa, with several focusing on internal migration. Breckenridge (1998) provides an insightful historical analysis of how migrant labour shaped gender dynamics in the early 20th century. Focusing mostly on violence within the racialised masculine hierarchy, he posits that the ideals and practices of masculinity that dominated South Africa in the 1900s 'emerged on the mines' with migrant men (Breckenridge 1998, 669). While acknowledging the presence of migrants from other African countries, his study focused on isiXhosa migrant men from the Eastern Cape who had worked at the Witwatersrand mines between 1920 and 1939.

Similarly, commenting on the rural-urban migration in the 20th century, Morrell (1998) posits that the patriarchal system that shaped gender relations in the rural areas remained entrenched in the belief systems of those who migrated to urban areas, resulting in the traditional rural masculinity becoming hegemonic. While traditional rural masculinity was centred on family and homestead, the disruption of family life following migration and as aided by the repressive laws of apartheid meant a rupture in traditional masculine norms within urban communities. Upon men's return to their rural homes, their perceived status was further ruptured as they discovered that women had assumed men's roles and moved on with their lives, Pyke (2020) argues, and further asserts that men resorted to violence as a means to control women and their families, in order to restore their 'lost' reputation. Again, this study focuses on internal migrants. Gibbs (2014) too, in his study of retrenched labour migrants in the minibus-taxi industry of South Africa, focuses on internal migrants of isiZulu descent. He explores how migrant men responded to declining industrial employment in the 1980s and 1990s by entering the informal taxi industry, which was fraught with violence. Despite the quality of this historical research, not much is known about the migrant men from other African countries, particularly before 1994 when apartheid formally came to an end.

Recently, a few scholars have examined masculinities among international migrants of specific descent, for example de Jong (2017) studied Congolese men in Johannesburg's inner city, and how they use fashion and music to respond to marginalisation resulting from xenophobia. Using Soukous music and the activities of the Society for Ambieners and Persons of Elegance (SAPE), both of

which were dominated by men in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Congolese men in South Africa constructed themselves as respectable and proud men who were better than South Africans. Matshaka (2010) and Mangezvo (2016) conducted studies on masculinities among Zimbabwe men. Both established how Zimbabwean men in the Western Cape of South Africa responded to marginalisation, including xenophobia, by presenting themselves as hardworking and more desirable than their South African counterparts.

Although some internal migrants were included in my research, the primary focus was on international migrants. In my analysis, I attempt to move beyond migrant masculinities as they relate to xenophobia and to engage with the broader scholarship on masculinities, gendered violence and positive masculinities in post-apartheid South Africa. My aim is to show how migrant men's experiences are relevant to current theorisations of masculinities in Africa that have predominantly focused on South Africans. I argue that migration impacts gender dynamics, identities and practices in multiple ways that are not predetermined as men adapt to new circumstances and negotiate new identities in post-migration contexts (Musariri and Moyer 2020). This line of argumentation contributes to the growing number of studies that highlight the variability of the migration experience among men and that emphasise notions of masculinities beyond violence and crisis in South Africa (Jong 2017; Mangezvo 2016; Matshaka 2010) and globally (Montes 2013; Batnitzky, McDowell, and Dyer 2009; Datta et al. 2009).

## **Study context: masculinities in Johannesburg's inner city**

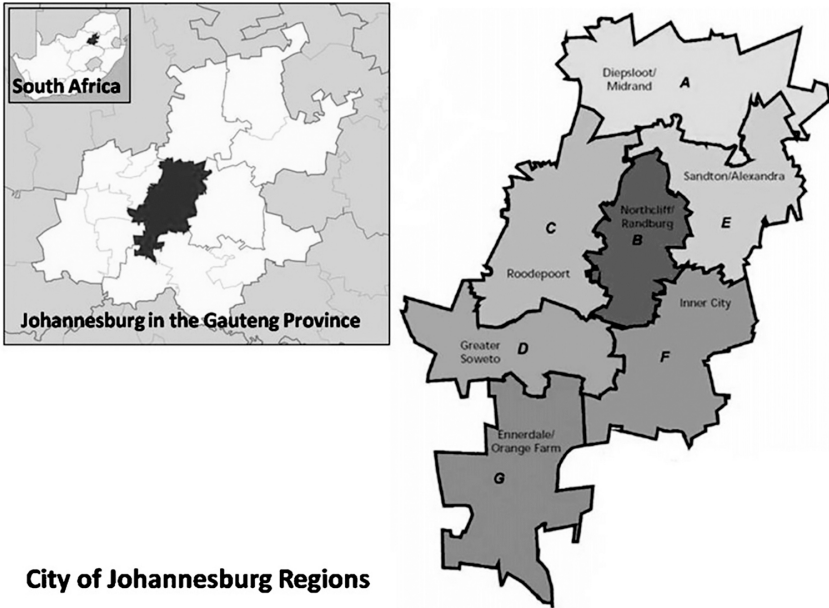
Given its historical and contemporary significance as the 'region's sole metropolis', its function as the city's social and economic hub, and its label as the epicentre of violence, Johannesburg's inner city provides a relevant site to investigate how marginalisation intersects with gender and migration (Landau and Freemantle 2010, 377; see also Mbembe and Nuttal 2004). The abolition of the apartheid system in the early 1990s led to the lifting of repressive laws that were used to systematically discriminate against black South Africans, including controlling their movements within the country. The newly legalised freedom to move resulted in more black people migrating into Johannesburg's inner city, which had been predominantly inhabited by white migrants, many of whom were the descendants of those who had come from Europe at the peak of gold and diamond mining in what was then Witwatersrand (Crush, Williams, and Peberdy 2005; Vigneswaran 2013; Stadler and Dugmore 2017). After 1994, many economically marginalised black people left the black townships and reserves to which they had been assigned during apartheid, moving to the inner city so they

could live closer to places of work. At the same time, many wealthier white people moved out of the inner city to the spacious outskirts, where they established gated communities. The degentrification of Johannesburg's inner city was compounded by urban decentralisation, which saw the emergence of business centres in other parts of the city, particularly the northern suburbs and more recently the western suburbs.

The end of apartheid coincided with a period of turmoil in several African countries that were simultaneously facing crises related to demographic pressure, economic decline and inequality, civil conflict, societal deterioration, famine and war; these crises were instigated or catalysed by economic structural adjustment programmes and climate change (Beremauro 2013). Lax migration laws at the start of the post-apartheid period coupled by rapid incorporation into global capitalism meant that South Africa opened its doors not only to the international community but also other African countries, especially those that had become part of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) in 1994. The Community Health Survey, conducted by Statistics South Africa in 2016, records that four of the 15 SADC countries – Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho and Malawi – continue to be among the top five sending countries, with Great Britain being the fifth (Stats SA 2016). Proportionally, Gauteng received the most migrants, followed by the Western Cape. Further analysis by Vearey and colleagues (2017) shows that the majority of migrants, both internal and international, are concentrated in cities such as Johannesburg and in certain inner-city neighbourhoods. Within inner-city neighbourhoods, migrants have settled in clusters according to nationality, forming boundaries of belonging distinguishing insiders and outsiders. However, as Matsinhe (2011, 297) puts it, members of the insider-outsider groups 'have no visible skin colour or socioeconomic status differences', but may have commonalities in ancestry, traditions, languages and colonial histories.

As a port of entry for both internal and international migrants, the inner city presents itself as a source of hope – hope for economic opportunities – and simultaneously as a place where hope is crushed due to the social, political and economic inequalities that continue to resound from the colonial and apartheid eras. The inner city provides an interesting case study for practices of masculinity because of its paradoxical position as a kind of sanctuary for marginalised people, including migrants, a place of kinship and friendship, as well as a place of poverty, violence and disease (Stadler and Dugmore 2017). Since the late 1880s, migration has played a critical role in shaping life in the mines and in shaping practices of masculinities. Men came to Johannesburg to work in the mines, where they had little interaction with the few migrant women who were present (Breckenbridge 1998). The scarcity of women saw men engaging in activities such as commercial sex work with hired females and excessive drinking; this still characterises these neighbourhoods (Stadler and Dugmore 2017).

The inner city has also become a place for female migrants. The feminisation of migration after apartheid has led to a shift in gender dynamics, as more and more women occupy spaces that were traditionally thought of as belonging to men in the labour market. With women earning incomes, there has been a shift in gender and family relations that has disrupted the patriarchal household structure and roles. Men have been forced to come to terms with these adjustments. The feminisation of migration has been associated with high levels of violence against women, gang violence and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS, particularly in the inner city. The decline in industrial labour resulted in the rise of crime and corruption and the informal sector (Briggs 2016). To this day, the inner city is characterised by a vibrant informal sector in which most of my study participants were engaged.



**Regions of Johannesburg including the inner city**

Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Regions-of-city-of-Johannesburg-including-Alexandra-E-Region-and-Soweto-D-Region\\_fig1\\_257739461](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Regions-of-city-of-Johannesburg-including-Alexandra-E-Region-and-Soweto-D-Region_fig1_257739461)

## Study sites

The inner city is part of Region F, one of the seven administrative regions of Johannesburg. The area is heterogeneous and includes neighbourhoods with large migrant populations surrounding the central business district. As the area is known as the epicentre of violence and crime, I was a bit anxious about conducting my study there. I named this space Uncle Kofi's Corner after Kofi, a 42-year-old shoe maker of Ghanaian descent, who in the last decade had managed to build up a small enterprise of various services, anchored in shoe repair. The most recent investment in his business was an ice cream-making machine and a phone shop. Uncle Kofi's Corner is situated on the premises of a Christian church and is graced by people from different backgrounds, including women and children. The 'corner' itself however is predominantly male, leading to my conceptualisation of 'becoming cornered' as gendered. Several men who frequented Uncle Kofi's Corner discovered an urban oasis, after they had first approached the church to find accommodation. They came to the church because they had limited options; they were 'cornered'. Upon arrival, however, they found people in similar situations and began forming affective connections and sharing strategies about how to behave and survive inner city life.

Although most of the material I use in this study came from my interactions and observations at Uncle Kofi's Corner, spending time at my cousin Tino's mobile hair salon also shaped my study significantly. Tino's Corner is situated a few streets away from Uncle Kofi's Corner and it captures the idea of reconfiguring urban space quite well. Tino, who at the time of my research was 36 years old, is a Zimbabwean man who specialises in braiding hair in his open-air salon, which is situated by the traffic lights of one of the busiest streets in the inner city. Women flocked to him to have their hair twisted. Men, mostly Zimbabweans, regularly came to chat with Tino over a bottle of beer or smoke as he went about his business. Tino preferred this corner as his salon, rather than an indoor shop, because it served as a space for both leisure and business. Because it was mobile, Tino did not have to pay anyone rent or buy any furniture. And it was social: he could do business as he chatted with his friends. I always passed by Tino's on the way to and from Uncle Kofi's Corner. At times he accompanied me to Uncle Kofi's Corner; at other times I would just greet him and proceed on my own.

## Chapter outline

This dissertation is divided into two parts: the first describes my study context geographically and conceptually, and the second contains four empirical

chapters. These are followed by the summarising conclusion. Chapter 2 describes the geographical space and the social, legal, political and economic context of my study. I also present my methodology for conducting the study, paying particular focus to my positionality as a migrant woman studying migrant men in precarious contexts. Then, in Chapter 3, I outline the concepts and theories that are central to this dissertation, in order to situate my interlocutors' experiences in relation to the broader scholarship of masculinities in post-apartheid South Africa. I outline the dominant approaches to the study of masculinities that are relevant to my research while advancing my concept of cornered masculinities.

In Chapter 4 I delve into the concept of 'becoming cornered' and link it to structural violence. With this chapter, I engage with the question on how cornered men respond to normative ideas of masculinities. Following the journeys of migrant men who find themselves at Uncle Kofi's Corner, I present the corner as an intersectional space where ongoing trajectories meet up. This space illuminates how bigger structural factors such as inequality affect individuals. From this space we see how, when migrants are excluded from the system, they form their own spaces in their quest to belong. When the formal economy denies them admission, they enter vibrant informal economies. Limitations become crossroads where new possibilities are imagined and explored, and identities are redefined.

Chapter 5 traces the origins of the current narratives and assumptions around masculinities that I observed. Similar to Chapter 4, I answer the question of how cornered men respond to normative ideas of masculinities, but this time as these are advocated for by the development world within the 'new man' paradigm. In particular, I take up the contribution of NGOs engaged in gender-transformative interventions in shaping the narrative around masculinities in South Africa, and consider how migrants position themselves within such interventions. I present the narrative of problematic masculinity on which NGOs draw as a form of symbolic violence or a form of cornering disproportionately targeting marginalised black men, including migrants. I argue that migrants, as frontier beings (Nyamnjoh 2015) find their way through this seemingly hegemonic structure using *kukiya kiya*, assuming multiple subjectivities with the aim of tapping into the benefits that come with such positionings.

Chapters 6 and 7 explore the complexities of two possible outcomes for cornered migrants – violence and care as identified by the gender-transformative framework. In Chapter 6, I answer the question of how corner spaces spawn gendered violence among migrants by exploring the multifaceted forms of gendered violence in the lives of cornered migrants. Building on the concept of hegemonic masculinity in marginal spaces or on the periphery (Ratele 2017), the chapter shows how migrant men, like many other men, benefit from the patriarchal dividend irrespective of their migration status (McKay, Messner, and

Sabo 2000). At the same time, because of their marginality associated with migration, they also find themselves bearing subordinated masculinities.

With Chapter 7, I seek to answer the question: Apart from violence, how else do migrant men react to being cornered? I show how cornered migrants, from a place of incompleteness and inadequacies, form and/or alter convivial networks such as friendship and kinship to cushion themselves. In such relationships care is a currency that cements bonds. In the act of caring, (hegemonic) masculinity is disrupted as gender roles shift. However, this shift should not be read as a transformation.

In Chapter 8, I summarise the main themes coming from this study and highlight the key concepts of becoming cornered and *kukiya kiya*. Framing becoming cornered as a spatial metaphor for marginalised men, I propose looking at masculinities as a space under construction, one that is never finished but is in the process of becoming. Because this space is open ended, it captures the multiple creative contingencies – the *kukiya kiya* – that individuals and institutions (usually framed as structures too) engage in.