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# PERPETRATORS AND PROTECTORS: CENTERING FAMILY RELATIONS IN ADDRESSING VIOLENCE IN POOR NEIGHBOURHOODS





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CENTERING FAMILY RELATIONS IN  
ADDRESSING VIOLENCE IN POOR  
NEIGHBOURHOODS**

PRAXIS PAPER

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# FOREWORD

Working in local communities, it is clear that families occupy a hugely ambiguous role as both perpetrators, victims and protectors of violence. While human rights violations are often recorded as individual violations, families are in as much victims. Families are also the main support base for human rights victims. As such families can prevent violence and they will be the ones picking up the pieces after violent encounters. However, families are also the context of horrible forms of violence – especially against women and children. This leaves families as a central actor in addressing violence.

The research published in this report is prepared by the Global Alliance on Urban Violence. Throughout the life span of alliance (2014 – 2020) a key mode of work has been to create knowledge across three, sometimes all four countries represented in the alliance – Liberia, Philippines, South Africa and Denmark. This has been done by systematically asking questions and produce data across contexts, thus enabling members of the alliance to generate insights, that have both supported them in improving their interventions locally as well as feed into advocacy processes.

The Global Alliance on Urban Violence have published on dilemmas of development and violence in the city, community organizing, psycho-social interventions, social works models, policing and state violence, prevention and rehabilitation as well as advocacy. But while knowledge was generated on individual victims, communities and authorities, the alliance for a long time ignored the family setting. Therefore, the Global Alliance on Urban Violence in 2018 decided to pay more systematic attention to families and kinship relations in poor urban settings. The result of this common effort is the current publication on violence, family and kinship relations. A publication that we in the alliance are quite proud of, both in terms of content and process. Process-wise because the production of this research has been an experience of true collaboration. All partners having contributed to the collection of data, analysis work and writing up of the report in most fruitful ways and fulfilling the ambition of partnership guided by principles of transparency, equality and mutual responsibility. Ideals that sound good but are less easily put into practice.

In terms of content, this research represents the ‘last piece of the puzzle’ in our common knowledge generation efforts on how to counter violence in poor urban communities. Like other publications by the Global Alliance on Urban Violence, the analysis is based on a public health inspired model around understanding the social ecology of violence. Here families are seen as both potential victims, perpetrators and protectors in relation to violence. In the social ecology of violence, families thus occupy a position along with communities, networks and authorities, that can also be both protectors and perpetrators. So, while the family is often lauded as a solution to many problems, it is also clear from the research done, that many families struggle immensely, often in huge conflicts with themselves. Hence, it is imperative that human rights and development organisations, when dealing with violence, find ways of supporting families. Not just as contexts of individual violations but as the primary beneficiary. In the Global Alliance on Urban Violence, we hope that the insights presented on the following pages will be able to contribute to just that.

On behalf of the Global Alliance on Urban Violence – Balay, CSVr, LAPS and DIGNITY,

Mette Møhl Ambjørnsen, DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, we ask ‘How and to what extent do families and kinship relations protect against, perpetrate and/or suffer from violence?’ The concern with understanding how families cope with violence in respectively protective and perpetrative ways emerges out of a partnership between the Liberian Association of Psychosocial Services (LAPS), the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in South Africa (CSVR), the Balay Rehabilitation Centre in the Philippines and DIGNITY-the Danish Institute against Torture. While we have worked with families as a crucial stakeholder in all communities, we have not explicitly explored the ways in which families play a part in protection and perpetration as well as fall victim to violence. Hence, we designed this research project to try to understand families and their struggles to survive in Liberia, South Africa and the Philippines. Conceptually, the project was animated by two bodies of literature – intersectional analyses and ecological approaches – to understand the relationship between families and violence. Empirically, the analysis is based on experiences from past interventions as well as a systematic data collection project among some of the families involved in the interventions. The ambition is not to compare families and violence across different sites. Rather, it is to enable an inductive process of reflection and innovation by putting different contexts into a structured conversation.

Among the important conclusions of the study, families are shown to be gendered and generational institutions that are embedded in a larger ecology of communal, state and non-state authorities. This social ecology is structured by strong normative ideals about what families should look like, what constitutes moral comportment and what forms of violence are perceived as legitimate. In this way, we argue that specific configurations of roles, power and status produce specific forms of normative and practical notions of family life. However, despite the strength of these models, family behaviour often failed to conform to them, leading to significant amounts of tension and violence. Secondly, across all contexts we found that legacies of violence, poverty and marginalisation animated family life and the ability of families to cope. Along with the temporal dimension, the study suggests that we cannot necessarily see internal family violence (domestic violence, intimate partner violence or child abuse) as separate from violence visited upon the family from the outside (vigilantism, extrajudicial killings or torture). Instead, the study illustrates how different domains of violence across the social ecology fold into family life. This analysis led us to explore critically how families perceive the functionality of violence based on a situated consideration and justification of whether it is appropriate, legitimate, or necessary in a non-judgmental way. It was clear from the research that most of the families were struggling – not only to survive and cope with the violence in its different forms, but also simply with being a family.

While all the respondents felt significant pressures and tensions in fulfilling their own expectations of family life, we also identified important instances of bravery, resistance and generosity – resilience in an oft-repeated formulation. However, rather than focusing on these forms of resilience as positive ways of coping, we focused on what families did to survive and to protect themselves and (some of) their members. These practices included exclusion of some members of the family to protect the integrity of the remaining members. In other instances, we noted that violence or the effects of violence were silenced in ways that putatively allowed the family to go on living. Finally, blame for violence was deferred out of the family. In different ways, these practices

worked but they came with a price. They might even have been counterproductive. For instance, by suggesting that the Philippine police had wrongly targeted members of a family, blame was deferred outside while the premise of the war – that drug addicts must be killed – remained largely uncontested. While this is certainly true, it remains equally true that in the circumstances of serious state repression and communal stigmatisation, this was the strategy available – even if it was potentially counterproductive. The same reservations can be made about all the other strategies of protection, even the most violent ones. While they may be counterproductive and violent, they must be understood within the given social ecology.

We did not test interventions or try to compare violence across contexts. Rather, our ambition was to enable conversations across contexts and between partners. This ambition resonates with the vision of the partnership in which we reflect collectively and in collaboration on our practices and contexts. This enabled us to formulate the reflections summarised below that may enrich community-led interventions (our own and those of others), as well as frame advocacy drives around what we could call everyday forms of torture and ill-treatment. Each challenge is formulated with reference to normative frameworks, though admittedly somewhat simplified ones.

- Critical engagement with the binary opposition between protection and perpetration. While interventions often distinguish between good protection and bad perpetration, in everyday life this often boils down to perspectives;
- Understanding the complex structures of local violence that families are caught up in. While frameworks compartmentalise violence, they are often experienced as part of a social ecology of family, communal, state and non-state violence;
- Appreciating how state and communal violence is folded into family life. While family violence is often seen as domestic violence and child abuse, it can seldom be understood without an understanding of how state and communal violence are embedded in family life;
- Understanding the legacies of violence. While monitoring focuses on individual and specific cases, most incidents form part of long-term forms of violence and conflict;
- Factoring in the pervasiveness of everyday violence. While organisations employ terms such as ‘normalisation of violence’, violent practices in families should never be understood as part of a culture of violence. Rather, they should be seen as responses to external pressures;
- Appreciating the gendered hierarchies of victimhood. While human rights monitoring often privileges spectacular forms of violence, often against men, women’s experiences are often reduced to functions of male victimisation or secondary victimhood in ways that invisibilise gendered forms of victimisation;
- Understanding how specific individual violations relate to continuous crisis. Human rights research often focuses on politically motivated violations at the expense of understanding how violations may be related to intimacy, especially in the context of inequality and poverty;

- Incorporating practices of communal stigmatisation. Interested in assigning state obligations, human rights organisations have difficulty in coming to terms with communal forms of stigmatisation and violence that frame the ability of families to cope with violence;
- Understanding normative and practical models of family life. Assumptions about families and households dominate much intervention. However, there is a need to assess existing family models, not least how they work through and reproduce gendered and generational norms despite practical and situated models for family survival; and
- Understanding the complex mechanisms of family survival. While human rights and development organisations often praise and look for resilience – which they understand as positive ways of coping – we need to understand that families often engage in survival practices that silence violations, assign blame outside immediate families and exclude erring family members in order to survive.

These reflections do not constitute a blueprint for interventions. However, they do suggest ways of working with traumatised families. They also outline some of the dilemmas our organisations faced in relation to including families in human rights interventions in ways that take into account local context and the ambiguous relationship between families and violence.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

What is the role of families in state and non-state violence? What happens when we include families in our gaze rather than focusing narrowly on individual victims of violence? Arguably, families occupy a hugely ambiguous role. While human rights violations are often recorded as individual violations, families also experience severe consequences as a result of such violations. Families are the main support base for human rights victims. Families can prevent violence and they will be the ones picking up the pieces after violent encounters. This leaves families as a central factor in any attempt to address violence. However, families are also the context of horrible forms of violence – especially against women and children.

In our work in Liberia, South Africa and the Philippines all these roles – as perpetrators and protectors, and indeed also as victims – are clearly visible. However, despite the work done across the three contexts, it remains clear that the question of how families relate to violence deserves a closer look. Because it appeared necessary on the ground and in the daily work, all organisations participating in this project have worked with families in one way or another. It is this work that we now intend to discuss the strength of through the lens of families. Hence, in this knowledge-generating sub-project under the Global Alliance on Urban Violence, we explore, across three contexts, the role of families and kinship relations in addressing violence in communities to understand how and the extent to which families suffer from, protect against or perpetrate violence. We ask, ‘How and to what extent do families and kinship relations protect against, perpetrate and/or suffer from violence?’

Empirically, the paper is based on two main sources of information: 1) the long-term practice of LAPS (the Liberian Association for Psycho-Social Services), the CSVR (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation) in South Africa and the Balay Rehabilitation Centre in the Philippines, and 2) a more systematic data collection within families in which there have been interventions of a different nature in the past. In this second empirical data set, each organisation identified six to eight families to follow over a period of time to carry out interviews and reflections. We describe the data collection below. Suffice for now to say that we did not aim to compare the different data sets deductively. Rather, our comparison is inductive in that we attempt to create a foundation for reflections about the role of families in relation to authority-based violence in a way that Sian Lazar usefully terms ‘disjunctive comparison’ where we can pose open questions about, for instance, what constitutes a family across different sites (Lazar 2012: 351). The most important reason for this is that the individual organisations, based on their own strategic goals, identified the target groups they wanted to engage with. Hence, in Liberia the target group included families who had lost members to the Ebola virus. In the Philippines, the most pressing concern was to understand how families dealt with extra-judicial killings resulting from the bloody war on drugs. Finally, in South Africa the focus was on families who were still marked by apartheid human rights violations. While these choices were the results of a commitment to engage with the priorities of the organisations, this spread also allowed us to see and explore a number of different and intersecting forms of violence in which families were protective, perpetrative and victims – often in different ways at the same time.

While the three sites are quite different, they share a particular urban form that can be

characterised as peri-urban (Simon 2008); that is, areas that defy neat distinctions between the urban and the rural. Such areas are often marked by marginalisation by and distance from productive networks, high unemployment and varying degrees of social dysfunctionality. Furthermore, they are often marked by high levels of both state and non-state violence. Hence we look at how these families cope with violence in contexts of social marginalisation and poverty where, on the one hand, residents have been excluded from what could be construed as mainstream society, yet on the other hand they are heavily policed.

This report is primarily analytical, and makes no attempt to suggest a blueprint or template for action. However, it does suggest several potential avenues and necessary reflections for working with families and violence in poor neighbourhoods. The concluding reflections are both for internal consumption in the Global Alliance and potentially may provide inspiration for other organisations working with families and violence. They comprise the following ten reflections that potentially transform how we should work with families in relation to state, communal and family violence:

- Critical engagement with the binary opposition between protection and perpetration
- Understanding the complex structures of local violence that families are caught up in
- Appreciating how state and communal violence is folded into family life
- Understanding the legacies of violence
- Factoring in the pervasiveness of everyday violence
- Appreciating the gendered hierarchies of victimhood
- Understanding how specific, individual violations relate to continuous crisis
- Incorporating practices of communal stigmatisation
- Understanding normative and practical models of family life
- Understanding the complex mechanisms of family survival.

What these reflections all suggest is the imperative of withholding moral judgements when working with families in violent and poor communities. Families will often have to engage in practices that may appear brutal, morally compromised and counterproductive. We do not suggest that we should condone such practices, but we must be able to see past them and appreciate the sometimes impossible contradictions that families must deal with.

We organise our analysis in four sections. In Chapter 2, we provide a more detailed account of the ecological and intersectional understandings of violence as well as anthropological and public health literature on the relationship between violence and families globally and in the three empirical contexts. In Chapter 3, we outline



the methodological choices and challenges of the study. In Chapter 4, we introduce the three contexts through the data that we gathered. This includes describing the peri-urban communities, as well as the particular forms of violence that mark the areas and the families in the study. In Chapter 5, we begin by presenting three case studies from each of the three areas. The case studies allow us to explore three specific themes cutting across the three contexts. The themes comprise gendered family relations and hierarchies of victimhood; legacies of violence; and families as protective and perpetrative institutions. These themes have been generated in a grounded, bottom-up approach from the data set. Finally, in a brief concluding chapter, we expand on the implications of the findings for future interventions and ask what we are gaining by focusing on families.



## CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING FAMILY AND VIOLENCE

The analytical focus of the paper is on understanding how families cope with violence and what role violence plays in the reproduction of families. Conceptually, the paper draws on two theoretical understandings of violence – an ecological and an intersectional understanding. We begin by introducing these larger concepts in order to be able to formulate a conceptual understanding of families and violence.

### Social ecology and intersectionality

Ecological models argue that we need to understand violence within a social ecology of families and intimate relations, communities and authorities (Celermajer 2018; Bronfenbruner 1979). The argument that we derive from this is that relations among family, community and authorities can be both perpetrative and protective of groups and individuals at risk. Families are, as we noted, potential victims, perpetrators and protectors; similarly, communities can help out in times of need and protect people or its representatives can perpetrate serious forms of, for instance mob violence; authorities (state and non-state) can perpetrate or prevent torture and other forms of violence. Hence, a central element in the work of our partnership across the different contexts has been to work to improve or strengthen – sometimes establish – sound relations with families, communities, and authorities – cognisant that such ‘sound relations’ are often reproducing and upholding systems of inequality, as we return to below.<sup>1</sup> Hence, we have a particular focus on relations with authorities and communities. This paper will complement this work around the ecological understanding by exploring in more detail family relations with regards to violence and in relation to the other levels of the ecology of violence and protection.

The socio-ecological model is based on the premise that people always find themselves entangled in multiple different environments, both related to their own background and personalities, as well as everyday surroundings, local communities, and institutions of society and state. The ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner 1979 and 1994) organises these different environments, defined as ecosystems, in different levels. In the model, the contexts of the different ecosystems affecting the individual are divided into five dimensions or, in other words, levels of external influence on the individual. The model was originally created to explain how the inherent qualities of a child and its environment interact to influence how it will grow and develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). However, it has also been applied in analyses of domestic violence and the maintenance thereof (Carlson 1984; Heise 1998). Both Carlson (1984) and Heise (1998) argue that intimate partner violence is important to investigate as a phenomenon not isolated to the micro- or macro-levels. Heise (1998) argues that the model can contribute to the understanding of violence against women as a phenomenon unexplainable by single factors. In 2005, the World Health Organisation (WHO) developed a new version of the ecological model to understand the causes of violence against women (García-Moreno et al 2006) with specific focus on intimate partner violence. Thus, this model is well suited to accommodate the aspect of gender when investigating urban violence.

The second conceptual inspiration comes from the intersectional understanding of violence. Intersectionality emerges out of feminist scholarship.<sup>2</sup> This scholarship is interested in understanding the multiple layers of inequality that produce violence against women – class, gender, race, religion and/or disability for instance. This approach has been put to very productive use in understanding violence not only against women but also against migrants, young men, victims of disease and sexual minorities. In this way, this paper takes as its point of departure that family and kin relations exist within the context of inherent gender and power dynamics, which may also have an impact on responses and actions. While a focus on families brings gender and generational conflicts and systems of inequality into especially sharp relief, it is clearly not limited to those two. The family structure is hence conceptualised as a context-specific configuration of roles, power and status. They depend on families' socio-economic background, cultural and/or religious beliefs, family patterns and extent of urbanisation, to mention some of the intersecting systems of inequality.

As a term intersectionality is credited to Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) who used it to demonstrate the multiple intersections of violence against Black women. In her classic text *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*, she argued for a feminist conceptualisation of race, gender and immigrant status as interdependent phenomena as a new approach to analysing the lived experience of African-American women.<sup>3</sup> The point is that while gender is central to understanding violence gender gives us only one perspective in understanding it. To elucidate through example, Collins (1998) details the historical state-sanctioned violence of lynching of African Americans. The lens employed to understand this form of violence was explicitly race based yet one fundamental to men (Harris 1984; Oliver 1994 in Collins 1998: 918). Reserving the lynching metaphor for men, she observes, relegates African-American women to supportive roles within civil society and erases their individual experiences of violence. Employing an intersectional framework, therefore, is indispensable in highlighting the systems of power, violence and inequality that manifest within personal relationships and between family members.

## Violence and family

While models of social ecology and intersectionality provide broad theoretical frameworks, we also need to touch briefly on the conceptual issues of violence and the family as we understand them in this paper. Beginning with violence, within international law violence is understood as excessive use of force that cannot be legitimised as self-defence or is not proportional to the threat that the force employed is set to counter. This 'just war' principle has been and is still dominant as an interpretive model within large sections of society (Balibar 1998), including among many of our informants, who maintained that they understood and expected the violence perpetrated against them or their kin. This leaves violence as the exceptional, the punishable and the excessively destructive. Against this approach to violence, we maintain firstly that violence is not only destructive but also productive of social relations (Das and Poole 2004). This approach draws in part from Walter Benjamin's classic text, *Critique of Violence* (Benjamin 2018) where he distinguishes between law-producing violence and law-maintaining violence. An example of law-producing violence could be revolutionary war since it reconfigures power in new ways. Law-



maintaining violence, on the other hand, protects established systems of power. If we understand this through an ecological and intersectional approach, we see that law-maintaining violence is about upholding systems of inequality. These systems are often intersecting systems of gender, generation, class, race and nationality that cut across different levels of the social ecology, producing networked and ever-shifting relations of power involving patriarchy, autochthony, gerontocracy and racialised superiority. Hence, migrant families may be particularly vulnerable within some of these systems of inequality at the same time as they are organised along internal gender and generational structures that produce violence against women, children and family members with a disability or a different sexuality. Elsewhere (Warburg et al 2018)<sup>4</sup> we term this kind of law-maintaining violence authority-based violence; that is, violence that is legitimised as part of a defence of particular situated moral orders spanning the local and the global. This evidently cuts across family, community, and state. The boundary between state and non-state has been central in many human rights frameworks, including the Convention Against Torture. It is these connections between violence and families that we are able to capture within an ecological and intersectional understanding. However, there is a growing realisation that it is counterproductive and empirically problematic to distinguish too rigidly between these systems of inequality and the violence they produce.<sup>5</sup>

In international law and in many interventions, violence is often compartmentalised in separate domains, for instance state violence and torture, violence against children and women, domestic violence or violence against migrants and refugees. Each of these domains is attached to separate conventions or legal frameworks. However, as Javier Auyero and Fernanda Berti (2016) suggest, these different forms of violence are often folded into one another were for instance state violence or criminal violence animate forms of domestic violence. As an example of this, a mother beating her children may be a way to protect them from greater harm in the form of gang affiliation or state extrajudicial killings emanating from their engagement with, for instance, drugs. This suggests that protection from violence can in some instances be extremely violent. Theoretically, this underlines the importance of understanding violence across the social ecology.

The examples illustrate the importance of paying acute attention to the family as both protectors and perpetrators of violence, as well as being an arena of intense contestation (Auyero & Berti 2015). Taking the family as a point of departure when theorising violence raises a number of analytical considerations; not only the question of what constitutes a family but also how we might understand different configurations of roles, statuses and power within these formations. Examining such questions and contributing knowledge to the study of 'family' as a social institution includes theorists from within the disciplines of anthropology, history, sociology, economics and psychology, as well as public health. Each of these fields has attempted to define the social phenomena under examination in differing ways. Rather than choosing one definition, we consider families as they were presented to us: paradoxically fractured and bounded, violent and protective, traumatised and trauma-producing.

Hence, we subscribe to feminist critics who, during a 'rebirth' (Carsten 2000) of family theorising in the 1980s and 90s, problematised the understanding of families as distinctly homogenous, heteronormative, and bounded units. With the advent of



such inquiry, the offer of gender as a social construction and the reimagination of the family nucleus were propounded, in turn disrupting biological notions of relatedness, once a defining feature of European cultural history. As Gittins suggested back in 1985: 'The first task is to question the assumption that there is, and has been, one single phenomenon that we can call the family. Historical, anthropological and contemporary findings show otherwise... Thus it is essential to start thinking of families rather than the family' (Gittins 1985: 1–2).

Relatedly, more recent theoretical considerations of family have continued within this vein of plurality of forms. Sahlin (2013) highlights its inclusive tendencies and shapeshifting nature in what he terms the 'mutuality of being'. Drawing upon a wealth of ethnographic material, Sahlin offers the term to encompass both the symbolic notion of belonging in families and their formation as distinctly cultural, as opposed to biological. Understanding family in terms of mutuality is helpful in transcending the Euro-American model of blood ties as a marker for relatedness. However, as has been noted by Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern, this somewhat rosy view of the inherent connectedness of families cloaks the more negative qualities of kinship with a 'sentimentalised view of sociality as sociability and of kinship ("family") as community' (2000: 152 in Carsten 2013: 246). Indeed, in this report we not only attend to the more dissentient qualities of families but also acknowledge the capabilities of families to reproduce, condone and at times enforce violence. As such, there is a recognition of families as 'both a site of oppression and conflict and a source of strength, solidarity, and the collective ability to survive' (Osmond & Thorne 2009: 617). Through our data, the family emerges as a strong resource for coping with the effects of violence but also as a perpetrator spawning new forms of violence for victims to endure. Additionally, our data suggests that families are often conceptualised and idealised as one thing, but then almost always turn out to be another.

These conceptual remarks propel us to ask a number of sub-questions that we will attempt to answer in this study:

- How do specific configurations of family roles, power and status produce specific forms of normative and practical notions of family life?
- How do legacies of violence, along with poverty and marginalisation, animate family life and the ability of families to cope?
- How are different domains of violence across the social ecology folded into family life?
- How and to what extent do families both perpetrate and protect against violence?

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this report is to explore the central question ‘How and to what extent do families and kinship relations protect against, perpetrate or suffer from violence?’ Through conceptualising families and violence within ecological and intersectional frameworks, we identified four sub-questions around which the data collection was organised:

- How do specific configurations of family roles, power and status produce specific forms of normative and practical notions of family life?
- How do legacies of violence, along with poverty and marginalisation, animate family life and the ability of families to cope?
- How are different domains of violence across the social ecology folded into family life?
- How and to what extent do families both perpetrate and protect against violence?

To answer the first question, we need to pay attention to how families are structured and organised in different settings. The second question calls for an exploration into how past and present forms of violence are linked and entangled. The third question guides the attention to understanding how different scales of violence – state, communal and domestic – relate to one another. Finally, in the fourth question, we explore how families condone, counteract, enforce or protect against strong societal and communitarian notions of danger and moral decay allegedly caused by individual family members who are part of diverse risk groups.

### Sampling, data collection and analysis

We organised the data collection through and/or parallel to the interventions that were already taking place in the local projects<sup>6</sup> in Liberia, South Africa and the Philippines. The projects have, to different degrees, incorporated families and kinship relations from their inception. Hence, the task of exploring family and kinship relations differed across the organisations. While it is necessary for comparative reasons to establish a common empirical ground that will allow for discussion and reflection across the projects and settings, the purpose is explorative (that is, inductive) rather than to test specific models or theories (deductive). Hence, we are not sampling for comparison on the structures of family and kinship structures across the three contexts. Rather, we want to be able to discuss families’ relations to violence and strategies for coping with it.<sup>7</sup> As we were not aiming for deductive comparison but wanted to enable conversation and reflection across the three projects (explorative, inductive), issues of representivity were less central and cannot be supported by the data or the data collection. This also means that we did not test interventions but aimed to generate innovation.

The sampling was carried out through a process where each organisation selected eight families to be part of a study in which at least one family member was already

part of the intervention. As the three organisations had different priorities, they chose to focus on different violence contexts. In Liberia, we chose to focus on families that in one way or another had suffered in the Ebola crisis of 2014-15. In Balay, the preeminent issue was the war on drugs that had killed thousands of people, not least within the areas where Balay works. In South Africa, the common denominator was that all sampled families had been affected by apartheid violence decades earlier and still suffered from the effects of torture and ill-treatment.

Each of the families was approached and, through a rigorous ethical procedure, asked if they wanted to participate in the study; their rights were comprehensively explained, not least that although the research project ran concurrently with the intervention, the two were in no way linked. In other words, participants could leave the research project at any time with no consequences for their continued enrolment in the intervention. As expected, some of the families dropped out, and in the end six families in each context remained with the project.

The data collection was organised as a series of repeat visits to the families that ran parallel with but distinct from the interventions taking place. How the repeat visits were conducted varied across the three organisations, however; because the interventions were different, they called for different data collection methods. In Liberia, field staff and community mobilisers, in collaboration with the documenting staffs of LAPS, assumed responsibility for carrying out interviews with individuals about their families and family situations. The recruitment took place through vocational training programmes (apprenticeship training) organised by LAPS. In South Africa, participants were recruited among participants in psychosocial counselling that had been ongoing for several years and the data collection was undertaken by a highly experienced social worker. In both South Africa and Liberia, the social workers and community organisers subsequently engaged in debriefings with documenting staff (Cartor Temba and Dominique Dix-Peek). In the Philippines, where there were different forms of intervention, Juancho Reyes, Balay's documentation officer, assumed responsibility for data collection and interviews as well as analysis.

Each of the visits aimed at gathering data on a set of predetermined issues. This began with a thorough profile of each family and a more formalised account of the family history of violence. While local intervention and documentation staff knew about the family histories from the interventions, previous accounts had not been collected with a study in mind. As the data collection took place over a two- to three-month period we also aimed at collecting data on events in the families as they were unfolding. This focus on current events complemented the historical accounts. Together they revealed a picture of the family dynamics. Most families have a clear idea of who should belong to the family, and it is often a nuclear one (mom, dad and children). They often also have strong ideas of what a family should look like as a moral entity. However, many families no longer look like that, even if that is what people say at the initial interview and the filling out of the household roster.

After each visit, local team members wrote notes that constituted a first level of data analysis. Cartor, Dominique and Juancho would subsequently engage with Senior Researcher Steffen Jensen and Researcher Meghan Belcher to discuss the data collection, and this would be followed by new rounds of data collection and clarification. The core of the interviews took place over three months at different

times, depending on the availability of the data collectors and informants, as well as the rhythm of the interventions. These initial interviews were followed up over several months, indeed right into the drafting period, to ensure all details were correct. During the period of data collection, reflections were ongoing and organised as comments in a common document in which all members of the team took part. Themes were identified and analysed from the point of view of individual cases. In this way, data collection and analysis became part of an ongoing conversation of disjunctive comparison. This constituted a process akin to grounded theory, where analytical themes emerged from the empirical material rather than from a set of predetermined indicators.

The drafting took place over a period of just more than one month where members of the drafting team would comment on drafts produced, hence continuing the conversation. While we are not comparing the different cases deductively, each case contributed differently to the formulation of a theme, which in turn served as a point of departure for reflections in other cases at the heart of disjunctive comparison. For instance, Philippine families have strong notions of normative family structures. This allowed us to ask questions about normative family structures in both Liberia and South Africa. The South African case suggested the importance of legacies of violence that could be explored in the other countries as well. Finally, in Liberia many of the informants seemed to have been excluded from families. This allowed us to ask questions about whether, and how, families protect themselves through driving out a member, paving the way for a string of queries transcending binary notions of 'good' protection and 'bad' perpetration.

## Methodological challenges

While the data collection revealed important insights about family dynamics and violence across the three contexts, there were limitations to what the data allowed us to conclude and challenges to the strength of the data.

Firstly, the data does not allow for meaningful comparisons across the three sites, meaning we were unable to compare motivations, practices and effects of violence. This was a deliberate choice. To allow for deductive comparison we would have had to impose much stricter data discipline on already diverse interventions. This was not feasible, desirable or in line with the partnership collaboration in which this study is embedded. Instead, we opted for inductive comparisons in which we may generate new ideas and insights.

Secondly, the data collection was carried out differently and with different skills across the three sites. While this does not have to be a problem given the appropriate training and supervision, it did result in kinds of data that were so diverse it was sometimes hard to use them as part of a conversation, let alone comparison. We tried to mitigate this gap in research capacity by engaging in processes of mentoring, common reflections and coproduction.

Thirdly, data collection was embedded in interventions. This always raises concerns around the ability of researchers to navigate proximity and normative intervention ideals. These are real concerns and we attempted to mitigate them by constantly

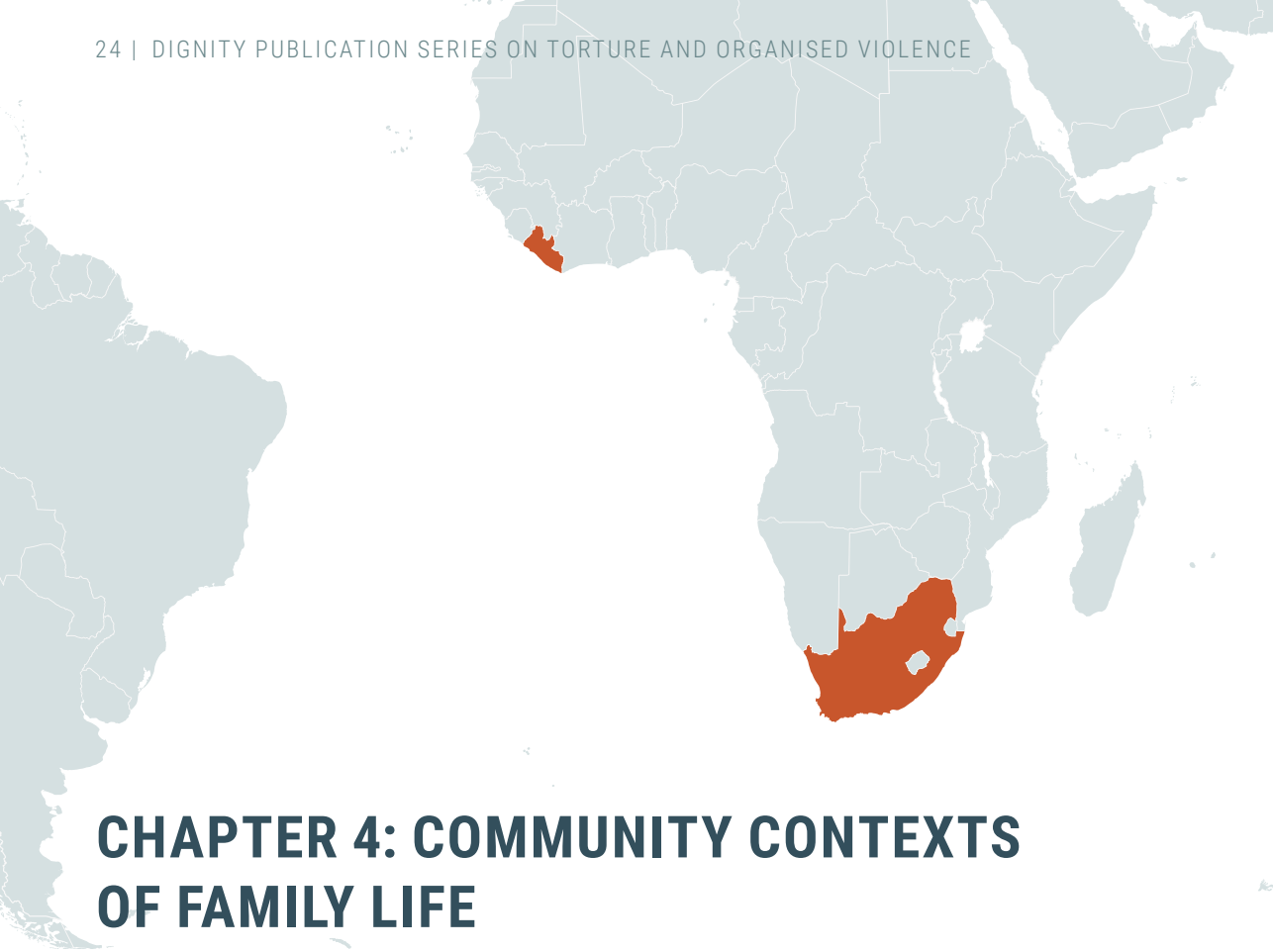
reflecting across the cases, questioning logics and trying to understand connections. However, being embedded in an intervention is not inherently bad. On the contrary, it can generate insights at a much deeper level if team members manage the risk responsibly and reflexively. It also potentially allows for ownership of data and analysis when interventionist organisations engage in coproduction of data and analysis.

Fourthly, and related to the previous challenge, data collection was embedded in different interventionist modalities. In South Africa, an experienced trauma counsellor generated sets of data embedded in psychosocial language, whereas in Liberia the data collection was carried out by community development facilitators using a very different conceptual language. Finally, in the Philippines, the data collection was carried out by the documentation officer on the back of an effort to organise survivors in families victimised in the war on drugs. This resulted in quite diverse data. Again, we attempted to mitigate the challenges by engaging in constant reflection across the three contexts.

Finally, data collection and analysis were to some extent removed from each other. While the Copenhagen-based staff had prior knowledge and research experience in the different sites, the data collection was twice removed in the sense that data was transferred from primary data collectors to nationally based documentation officers (with the Philippines as an exception) who then transferred data onwards to Copenhagen, where it went through first-level analysis. The distance was partly mitigated through ongoing conversations within and between research team members, who all took part in drafting sections of the report.

In summary, while there are real methodological concerns to be raised that affect the conclusions we can infer from the study and the comparisons we may draw, the study does provide useful and unique insights into how families relate to and cope with violence.





## CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY CONTEXTS OF FAMILY LIFE

In this chapter, we will briefly introduce the community contexts that structure the lives and experiences with violence of the respondents in the study. Each of the sections focuses on one urban context in which interventions took place and data was collected. The aim is not to compare kinds of violence across contexts. Rather, we seek to locate our analysis of family life and violence in the specific contexts in which the violence occurs and which the families have to cope with. Each section consists of three elements. First, we introduce the community setting, its history and its people. Secondly, we describe the specific forms of violence – the war on drugs in the Philippines, apartheid violence in South Africa, and Ebola in Liberia. Each of these forms of violence are embedded in larger structures of violence and form part of them. Finally, we describe in more detail the participating families and respondents in terms of violent history, socioeconomic status and family composition. The chapter concludes that while there are huge, predictable differences, several questions are relevant in different ways across all contexts. These questions include how families are normatively structured and what models of family life have developed; how legacies of violence animate present violence and crisis, and whether families cope with the violence in perpetrative or protective ways.

We have changed the names of the individual sites to protect the participants. As mentioned above, while the sites are different, they do share a particular form of marginalisation, a function of their more or less peri-urban status (Davis 2008). They are heavily policed, far from important economic and social networks, poor, and often characterised by high levels of state and non-state violence.



## Bagong Valencia, the Philippines

Bagong Valencia, located in the northern part of Metro Manila, was constructed in the early to mid-1980s as a resettlement site for slum dwellers in Manila during the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos. It was part of his campaign to beautify Manila and make way for other economic and infrastructural projects, largely funded by international donor agencies (HUDCC 2011). In 1984 the National Housing Authority claimed to have resettled 68,688 families into the region (Karaos 1995: 125). Over the years, some 250,000 people have come to live in Bagong Valencia.

In official discourse, relocation was offered as a chance for slum dwellers to begin anew. However, the volume of human displacement, coupled with the volatility of governmental 'flushing out' methods, only served to reproduce the precarity of community life from the very beginning. The coercive manner in which residents were removed from Manila and forced to navigate their sources of livelihood anew meant that the everyday forms of violence present within the previous urban setting remained largely unchanged (Jensen et al 2013).

Socioeconomic levels are below the national poverty line and unemployment rates are approximated at between 45% and 65% (Jensen et al 2013; Jensen & Hapal 2014). Furthermore, the area's high population density has translated into situations of increased precarity. As the demand for space has grown, more and more residents are forced into so-called excess lots, that is, informal housing near and on creeks, the graveyard, and near the Marilao River. This has made for perilous and unhealthy living quarters where residents must struggle for space in competition with other residents, with the dead and with nature in the form of the ever-present danger of floods. As such, 'new society' sites have failed to accommodate the significant housing needs of the poor. The built environment reflects these inadequacies, with buildings propped atop stilts too frail to support their weight long-term. These are the living conditions families in Bagong Valencia face day in and day out.

Thus, simply sustaining a living is the most pressing daily concern for most families in Bagong Valencia. Owing to the lack of educational opportunities, as well as the distance from the formal economy, most adults have limited engagement with the formal economy. Instead, they employ themselves in an informal economy that pays little and demands long workdays. This affects the quality of family life in various ways. The potential for young people to enter schooling, to eat enough nutritious food to ensure health, to access quality health services and to stay safe from environmental and anthropogenic hazards are major concerns, but they are not the only ones.

Long-term exposure to such living conditions has led to many families being indebted to loan sharks and powerful families. Thus, families must often rely on what is known colloquially as *diskarte*. This term refers to social navigation that displays grit and perseverance, whereby one must be resourceful in dealing with situations that appear hopeless or impossible to solve (Galam 2018: 1056). Often, however, the gap between circumstance and need compels *diskarte* into illicit forms. One such form is involvement in the illegal drug trade.

## The War on Drugs

Since 2007 Balay has worked in Bagong Valencia and has gathered anecdotal notes relating to the trade across different stages in time. They have observed that selling illegal substances has become a significant means of livelihood for all ages in the community (see also Kusaka 2017). Thus, adults and children alike engage in the trade not only as a source of income but also as users. The stimulating properties of narcotics are deemed advantageous when conducting labour over several hours. Staying awake and alert for long periods, for example, is valuable for maximising income – tricycle drivers can make multiple trips and labourers are able to cover additional hours. For those not yet in the labour market, for instance youth and children, drugs are associated with coping with the insecurity and precarity of their social environments. However, while drugs clearly affect families in Bagong Valencia, leading to what Nicole Curato has called ‘latent anxieties’ (Curato 2016), seen from a global perspective, the Philippines does not have a substantial drug problem (Dignity/ Balay, 2018). The drug crisis was, in many ways, a constructed crisis that legitimised a war on predominantly poor areas like Bagong Valencia.<sup>8</sup>

Nationally, under the Rodrigo Duterte administration more than 7,000 deaths have been connected to the ongoing ‘war on drugs’ since 2016 (Simangan 2018: 68). With no statistical signs of the slowing of vigilante killings, this state-sanctioned violence has led some to identify the war as a genocide (ibid) and ‘an impending public health crisis’ (Macarayan et al 2016). This ‘spectacle of violence’ (Reyes 2016) is couched in state rhetoric of protection, its law-abiding citizens notionally defended against non-human criminals by police and vigilante groups who systematically clear societies of alleged drug dealers in the absence of due legal process (ibid). As part of the national campaign of the ‘war on drugs’, current policing efforts to curb the use and spread of illegal drugs has been markedly violent, constituting an unprecedented attack on communities like Bagong Valencia. As an area of intense campaign focus shown by documentation efforts by other CSOs and the academe alike<sup>9</sup>, Bagong Valencia has been subject to multiple extrajudicial killings, illegal arrests and detentions, as well as harassments and extortions. In the first nine months of the drug war from mid-2016, Balay documented more than 100 deaths in the area of Bagong Valencia, where the organisation works (DIGNITY/ Balay 2017).

In practical terms, the drug war policy works through ‘watch lists’, compiled by intelligence personnel of the Philippine National Police with inputs from local government officials and residents. Subsequently, police officers will visit the homes of suspected drug personalities to advise them to surrender. However, these watch lists often turn into kill lists (Warburg 2017), creating a ‘climate of fear’ as few residents know who are on the lists, who put them there and what the result may be.

It is within this context of state-sanctioned extrajudicial killings, historical forms of displacement and violence that families in this study struggle, many having lost family members through their perceived association with the drug trade.

### **Profiling families**

Within the seven families involved in the project, seven adult males and two male school students were killed for their alleged connection to illegal drugs. Some were the victims of summary executions inside their own homes, witnessed by their families. Described by their surviving family members as ‘obedient and responsible’, having either ‘no known involvement’ in the trade or having used a substance recreationally in the past, with ‘no public image’, these men have been characterised as respected by their communities and the victims of tragic circumstance. Some of the surviving family members work within the psychosocial intervention project at Balay. Whether or not these men are implicated in the crimes for which they lost their lives is not the central concern of this paper. The arbitrary nature of these killings has made it difficult to ascertain causes and motives. However, the effect the loss has had on families as victims has been severe in the form of lost income, truncated possibilities and resulting trauma.

The families in the study have an average number of eight members living in the household, with the largest having 15 in the limited space. Other relatives occasionally sleep in for a short span of time add more to this whenever they need to. This household setup is customary with cultural undertones. It is common in the country to accommodate members beyond the immediate family, with several permutations to the setup. Frequently, sons and daughters with children still live with their parents and other siblings. This holds true for all the families involved in the project aside from two of them. Most of the occupants of the household – around 70% during field visits – are either children or youths.

The average monthly income of the families in the project was reported to be 5,000 Philippine pesos. The economic development authority of the country states that for a family of five to live decently they would need roughly 42,000 Philippine pesos a month.<sup>10</sup> This is unachievable for a huge proportion of families in the Philippines. Those who earn even Php 20,000 a month lament that although it might be enough to sustain daily needs it leaves no cushion for long-term necessities, periods of illness, or sudden unpredictable circumstances.<sup>11</sup> The discrepancy with the actual amount that families in the project subsist on illustrates the enormity of their daily struggle. The killings have further compounded these struggles as families have lost income and incurred extra expenses for funeral arrangements (See also Coronel 2017). Consequently, some have indebted themselves further and even had to pull their children out of school. In summary, such living circumstances and the constant violence – even before the onset of the anti-drug campaign – put huge strain on families and their ability to function.

## Mzinti, South Africa

Mzinti, where we collected data for this study, is a large township falling under the City of Tshwane in the Gauteng province of South Africa. It lies in a remote corner of Gauteng near the border with Mpumalanga to the east. In many ways, it embodies a typical South African history. It was planned in the early 1980s at the height of apartheid on the border between the erstwhile Transvaal province and the Bantustan homeland of KwaNdebele. In 1984, the East Rand Development Corporation began construction of Mzinti as a central element in the industrialisation of KwaNdebele and the East Rand. Mzinti was originally planned to house about half a million people in 2010, not least to address overpopulation in faraway Soweto and to function as a labour reserve for renewed growth (Morris 1984; Tomlinson 1988). These original intentions are still visible, for instance in the ethnic composition of Mzinti. Hence, the most common languages are isiZulu (33.4%), isiNdebele (28.6%) and Sepedi (15.2%). However, the apartheid dream of development – always callous and violent in how it displaced people – did not go as planned. Today, Mzinti is best described as a peri-urban township, accommodating people stuck somewhere between urban dreams and imagined rural pasts. Rather than being a labour reserve it has now joined multiple other South African peri-urban sites in its accommodation of surplus people, that is, people with little or no stake in the formal economy of the country (Ferguson 2015). In this way, it resembles Bagong Valencia and Marchland locations in the Philippines and Liberia.

According to the census in 2011, Mzinti had a population of 48,493 - a far cry from the industrial future imagined in 1984 – with an almost equal distribution of males to females (48.5% and 51.5%). Most people in Mzinti have some secondary school education or have completed their matric (34.3% and 33.3%). Most (53%) are in an employment-active age group (20-65 years), but 12.5% earn no income and 28.5% earn under R20,000 per month. While it is unclear from StatsSA how many people live off social grants each month in Mzinti, the socio-economic structure suggests it is a sizeable share of the population, whether old-age pensions or disability or child support grants.<sup>12</sup> While there have been critiques of the grants, they have bankrolled poor families in urban and rural areas since their inception (Ferguson 2015; Natrass & Seekings 2008).

Given its recent development and sizeable infrastructural post-apartheid investments, much of the infrastructure in Mzinti is reasonably modern, with 78% to 90% of households using electricity for cooking, heating and lighting. Almost all the water (98.5%) comes from regional water schemes, with 46.4% of the households using flush toilets, 18% pit toilets with ventilation and 30% pit toilets without ventilation. However, the household infrastructure varies depending on income levels of the people living there, with reasonably modern and large houses in some areas, and shacks and informal dwellings in other areas, testifying to the constant influx of informal settlers. The people CSVR works with are among the more vulnerable and live in small houses or shacks.

## Apartheid (structured) violence

While the war on drugs in the Philippines represents contemporary state violence, South Africa is still struggling with the violent effects of the apartheid regime in ways that are evident in Mzinti. The township emerged as a result of a policy that featured forced

displacement of millions of people, homeland policies (stripping further millions of their rights within white South Africa) and influx control mechanisms designed to keep black Africans out of metropolitan South Africa (Beinart 2001). Despite significant policy changes since 1994, places like Mzinti remain at the bottom of one of the most unequal and violent countries in the world.<sup>13</sup>

Several influencing factors have resulted in a decline in family support and a high number of single-parent families (Berman & Berger 1988: 194), not least capitalist penetration into local societies, the migrant labour system, long periods of urbanisation and increased population. Furthermore, the apartheid system used economic migrants and forced labour for certain categories of work, particularly domestic work and mining. This meant that families were often separated: parents left to work in South Africa, leaving their children to be brought up by gogos (grandmothers). Such large-scale separation has had a profound impact on the family, particularly how child-raising is carried out.

We can see the remnants of this family system reflected in Mzinti, where 38.5% of households are female-headed. While this is not a problem in itself, many observers and parts of the general public see it as an indicator of the troubled South African township family. Another indicator of families in trouble is the horrendous level of gender-based violence - 41,498 rapes were recorded in the 2018-2019 reporting year alone. What is more disturbing is that these exorbitant rates are believed to be vastly under-reported; according to the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation only one in 20 rape cases is reported to the South African Police Service (Naidoo 2013: 210). Mzinti more or less followed the national average with 52 reported rapes in 2019, up from 36 in 2018.

Murder rates (as an indicator for violent crime levels in general) also remain high, with 20,938 murders in 2018/2019. While murder rates in Mzinti are slightly below the national average with 12 in 2018 or about 24 per 100,000 (against a national rate of 36 per 100,000<sup>14</sup>), they remain high.<sup>15</sup> Hamber (2000) and Machisa (2010) argue that the 'normalisation' of violence is a direct result of the high levels of violence under apartheid, whereby the cycle of violence was perpetuated. They posit that this 'normalisation' has resulted partly from the structural forms of violence of the political and the economic system.

An additional contributing factor for the normalisation of violence must be located with the history of policing in South Africa (Brogden & Shearing 1993; Hornberger 2011; Jensen 2014), not least the counter-insurgency war that the apartheid regime waged in the dying days of the era (Sparks, 1990). Some of the most brutal fighting took place on the East Rand in places like Thokoza, Tembisa and Katlehong between 1986 and 1994. Third force operations by the police and military fuelled incipient conflicts between township and hostel dwellers in so-called black-on-black violence, leaving thousands dead (Mamdani 2018; Jensen & Buur 2007). While Mzinti was not on the map to the same extent, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission dealt with amnesty cases from the region including bombings and murder of activists. As illustrated below, apartheid violence was not limited to these singular events but included ordinary, everyday forms of repression as well. This weaving of both structural and direct political oppression fundamentally destabilised both families and communities in places like Mzinti.



## Profiling families

As detailed in the methodological section above, participating families were mainly accessed through a psychosocial wellness programme offered to community members in Mzinti. This programme aims to focus on the healing of members of the community by helping them to better understand their own traumas and how it affects their current lives and relationships. Through this, they may be better able to react and relate to their families and wider community members, with the ultimate goal being that they are less likely to use violence (verbal, emotional, physical etc.) as a coping mechanism.

Six families were included in this case study. The number of members in the family ranged from three to ten people, with a total of 36 people and an average of six people per household. The structure of the families varied, with three including both parents, two having single parents (both female), and one family comprising a man and his niece. Children and dependents ranged from one to six biological children (average of three per family, mode is one), one family with a stepchild, siblings of the parents (three people) and their children (four people), grandchildren (six people), and parents of the parents (one person). Inclusion of extended families in the primary or nuclear family structure is common in South Africa, often with nieces, nephews, siblings and grandchildren treated as nuclear family members (brothers, sisters, daughters, sons, etc.). Hence, the family structure among the respondents did not comply with norms about nuclear families.

The families in the study have experienced a wide range of traumas, but in all families, at least one member was tortured during the apartheid era. While some of the family members did not (want) to elaborate on their past torture experiences, others did share details. One was tortured by the police at 14 years old for being involved in political activities. The police subjected another to sexual and other forms of torture. The mother of one family was tortured by the police and subsequently killed by 'necklacing' (a murder method that involves putting a tyre around the neck of a person, dousing it in petrol and setting it alight) for other political activists to locate another family member. In yet another family, a member was tortured alongside his brother. The brother's torture was so extensive the family could not identify his remains. In the final family, one member was arrested and forced to sleep on a concrete floor while pregnant. In addition to the torture experienced by the family members during apartheid, the families have additionally experienced both direct and indirect traumas, including police violence as well as systemic and everyday structural violence. This undoubtedly affects their daily lives, as well as their ability to function as a family.

## Marchland, Liberia

Marchland, where the study was carried out, is situated north of the Monrovia City centre, off UN Drive. It was established in the mid-1980s as Monrovia began to grow. Before this, the area was agricultural land. As the city began to expand, free land was converted into settlements. In the early years, farmers turned landlords rented out land to newcomers, thereby creating a community socially stratified along the lines of property ownership. As the community continued to grow, not least due to civil wars between 1990 and 2003, settlers moved further and further into the wetlands to the rear of the original community. The golden rule for ownership dictated that if people could dry out the land through landfills, they attained the right to occupy. However, settlers who live in the wetlands are extremely vulnerable to floods. This has resulted in yet another social stratification between those who stay on (relatively) dry land and those whose livelihoods and health are perpetually endangered by floods.

The growth of Marchland intimately relates to the displacement following the civil wars between 1990 and 2003. Much has been written about the Liberian civil war, particularly its lasting impact and widespread brutality. Quantitatively, the civil war saw 8% of the population, or some 200,000 people, killed in fighting or massacres (Allen & Devitt 2012). Over half the population were displaced as refugees to bordering countries and a staggering 75% of women (some estimates reaching 90%) were victims of conflict-related rape (Cohen & Green 2012). Monrovia, and places like Marchland, grew exponentially during the war, as it was one of the safer places owing to the presence of peacekeeping forces stationed there. Hence, while not solely attributable to the civil war period, Monrovia grew from 80,000 in 1966 to 1.1 million people in 2015. Consequently, the city's infrastructure has been incapable of matching the population growth and places like West Point (the oldest informal settlement in the city) and Marchland suffer constant floods that compound existing health hazards.<sup>16</sup>

The civil war period has had lasting effects on Liberian society. In Liberia, young adults born during the 1990s have spent nearly half of their lives with war around them, and so may be more familiar with violence than with peace. Studies confirm that the trauma of these wars has been vernacularised into the everyday life experiences of Liberians, with over half the nation reporting significant levels of PTSD symptoms (Johnson et al 2008). This has meant that the impact of collective trauma is still palpable over a decade later (Kelly et al 2018: 9). Furthermore, many Liberian youth still struggle to cope with war-related mental health problems, not least because former combatants and child soldiers constitute a large percentage of the population (Gausman et al 2019: 113; Borba et al 2016). Further studies have drawn lines between the trauma of war and substance abuse (Prust et al 2018) as well as rates of IPV (Kelly et al 2018) pointing to the multifaceted and long-term effects of the war on the continuous practices of violence. Many young Liberians have lacked good role models on which to base their own relations, as their parents became parents at a very young age or themselves suffer from negative mental legacies of conflict such as a predisposition to use violence to solve problems.

Moreover, strikes and violence are frequent in Liberia as people attempt to bring attention to the lack of educational opportunities, jobs and potential for upward mobility within society (WHO 2017: 15). These strikes, the local term for demonstrations, often relate to the transport sector and the informal and often illegalised motorbikes on the

road, which are usually ridden by young men. Such demonstrations are often directly linked to the right to movement in the city: they are protests against a particular form of police corruption where police 'arrest' bikes; that is, impound them to extort bribes from already poor slum dwellers (Larsen et al 2018). Strikes as a form of violence constitute one of three kinds of local violence in Liberia documented by Blair et al (2017): collective violence, characterised as violent strikes or protest; interpersonal violence, including rape, murder and aggravated assault; and extrajudicial violence, including trial by ordeal. Each is a defining and ubiquitous form of violence that Liberians live with every day (ibid).

In Marchland, LAPS and their partners report the existence of all these forms of violence. What is more, it is common for people to share videos and photos of graphic expressions of violence via social media. This means that violent imagery is often in circulation, contributing to further normalisation of violence within community consciousness.

## Ebola

While life was certainly challenging and often violent, there seemed to be a certain political stability in Liberia up until 2014, when Ebola struck. The Ebola crisis devastated Liberia. Clearly, Ebola does not constitute violence in the same way as apartheid or the war on drugs. However, the social consequences of Ebola were extremely violent. While statistics show that 4810 people died in Liberia (CDC 2019), this tells us little about the wider psychosocial and structural concussions that befell Liberians as a result. Along with the catastrophic effects on the country's economy, health, education systems and local revenues (WHO 2017: 12), the anguish of even more loss has contributed to significant collective trauma and psychological problems among the population (Rabelo et al 2016). Many Liberians spoke about Ebola in the language of the civil war: it was imagined as a battle to fight against, and one that cost the lives of many (Venables 2017: 39). Additionally, the epidemic produced what Van Bortel et al deem a 'cyclical pattern of fear' among communities (2016: 210), with the ferocity of Ebola's spread and highly contagious quality throwing people into a cataclysm of suspicion and distance. Stigmatisation and blame stalked communities, causing them to fracture and break (ibid); survivors, perceived as contagious, faced rejection from their families, professions and social circles (Venables 2017; Rabelo et al 2016; O'Brien & Tolosa 2016).

The mental distress for both survivors and those never infected cannot be overestimated. Symptom severity, as well as mortality rates, are testament to the horrifying nature of Ebola's course, and individuals would go to great lengths to protect themselves. Moreover, those affected are likely to experience psychological trauma due to both the terrifying nature of the sickness and their proximity to death. 'Flashbacks' are commonly cited psychological symptoms associated with Ebola exposure, and many experience painful feelings of guilt and shame due to potential transmissions (Rabelo et al 2016).

Due to its poverty, density and unsafe health conditions, Marchland faced specific problems in dealing with the epidemic. Recuperation after the epidemic was difficult. Indeed, each of the participant families in the study, many having spent time in Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs), experienced difficulties returning to the lives they left before Ebola, their experiences very much echoing the abovementioned social consequences

of stigma and isolation. During a 2016 visit, one young woman who had been confined in an ETU reflected on the Ebola crisis to members of the research team: ‘During the civil war, you could run as a family. During the Ebola crisis, everybody was on their own.’

## Profiling families

As mentioned in the methodology section, the families that are part of the study were identified through LAPS’ vocational training programme. Other than one respondent, all participants had complicated and conflicted relations with their families, regardless of whether biological or extended. Most of the respondents circled in and out of the family units that they considered primary, sometimes living alone or with other dependents and sometimes living with extended family units loosely connected through blood. Most had children but, except for one respondent (who in general proved atypical), they were single parents, often with multiple dependents. While some of these dependents were biological offspring, this was not to be taken for granted. One young woman was even accredited with some form of parental responsibility for someone almost double her age. We will return to this in the next chapter, where we discuss family structures.

The primary respondents were mostly young, often female, and each had lost someone during the Ebola crisis. For the younger women, this was often their primary caregiver – aunts, mothers or fathers. As a result, they had been isolated in an ETU for 21 days of observation. Because of the internment and their proximity to death, their remaining families often ostracised them or, if not totally, allowed only limited entry into new family constellations. Several of the primary respondents had also been victimised during the civil wars, including witnessing the killing of close kin or having been violated themselves.

All families in the study struggled economically, including the one family that is in a slightly more advantageous position. They survived by selling goods at the market and, importantly, had access to remittances from a relative in Europe. Most of the female respondents engaged in commercial or transactional sex. This resonates with several studies finding that families commonly pressure girls to engage in transactional sex to generate resources for the family (Gausman et al 2019: 111; Atwood et al 2011; Okigbo et al 2014) and that in Monrovia, 70% of girls and 50% of boys reported having had sex for money (McCarraher et al 2013). Most of those engaging in transactional sex also report having issues with drug and alcohol abuse (see also Petruzzi et al 2018).

## Summary

In this chapter, we have described in some detail the contexts within which the study was conducted, as well as the families and respondents interviewed. As emphasised above, we do not aim to compare the different contexts. Rather, we aim to establish a framework within which to explore the overarching question of how families cope with violence and how and to what extent they are protective or perpetrative. Despite the differences, there are important points of convergence. All three communities accommodate marginalised people with problematic and often violent relations to the rest of society. They have often been displaced from elsewhere, be that because of war as in Liberia, economic development and gentrification as in the Philippines or apartheid as in South Africa. Hence, while the causes or motivations for displacement varied,

the effects of marginalisation are comparable. Economically, all families struggled to make ends meet, although on scales reflecting the socioeconomic development of their respective countries and the marginalisation of the peri-urban areas.

As explained in the methods section, in each context we focused on different processes of violence. The participants from South Africa had all experienced violence from the apartheid state. In Liberia, all informants had lost family members to the Ebola epidemic. Finally, in the Philippines all families had members killed in the war on drugs. Hence, the forms of violence varied substantially and in differing time periods, making direct comparison difficult. However, what the cases illustrate is how each form of violence was embedded in a longer legacy of violence, including forms of structural violence, social marginalisation and gendered and generational power differentials within families. Hence, while our informants in Liberia fought the effects of the Ebola crisis, they all had traumatic experiences from the civil wars. While the participants from South Africa still reeled from the effects of apartheid violence, new forms of violence – police, communal or familial – added to the stress. Lastly, while the summary killings from the war on drugs in the Philippines is a relatively recent phenomenon, the effects of it are compounded by longstanding forms of violence within families.

In sum, from the relatively stable families in the Philippines to the complex familial networks in South Africa and extended families suffering from recent years' turmoil in Liberia, families displayed both cultural characteristics and their own unique dynamics. However, despite their differences and similarities, they are both essential institutions in survival and central to the conflict in the study. Furthermore, while blood relations do play a role in the functioning of families, kin relations cannot be reduced to nuclear families, even if that is often the ideal model. Hence, the chapter raises important questions about family structure, about the legacies of violence and about how families cope with conflict and the extent to which they are perpetrative or protective. This will be the topic of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5: FAMILY AND VIOLENCE

In this chapter, we explore the relationship between family and violence through three case studies from each site. These cases were chosen not necessarily for their representational merit but rather because they allowed us to explore our central questions, namely how normative and practical models of family life unfold, how legacies of violence and state violence weave themselves into family life, and how aspects of both protection and perpetration present within familial constellations. We begin by introducing the case families in empirical detail before we explore these more analytical questions.

### Case Studies

Before embarking on an elucidation of our cases we briefly revisit some of the challenges touched upon within the methodology section. It is important, for instance, that owing to both the varying methods of data collection and fundamental differences in family constitutions across contexts, there are marked differences in the kinds of content provided in each of our cases. The material gathered in the Philippines, for example, was explicitly family focused and was able to get closer to participant reflections on this matter than, for example, our Liberian families. This was perhaps due to the intimate nature of the mapping exercises (detailed below) undertaken by our Filipino researchers but could equally reflect the wider privileging of the family as an institution in the country in general. In our South African data, owing to its elaboration through process notes, we are able to gain more visibility between and among family members and observe some of the mental processes that occupy the ruminations of our participating families than in Liberia, for example where, owing to the separation of individuals from their families, it is more of a challenge to build a holistic picture of relations as they currently stand. However, what we do gain from this context is a historicisation and sense of social precarity in the narration of violent events. Thus, suffice to say that, while distinct in composition, we hope the following cases will provide a basis for the reader to gain a closer understanding of the kinds of compromised conditions our families face across our research sites.





## The Philippines

### Family AS

Li, 53, had 11 children. She shares a household with her husband Da and all the children, except one who has moved out with his family and one who died. Two children in the household have families of their own, bringing the total in the household to 15. The two children with families of their own occupy a partitioned area of the house that they loosely refer to as their own space. They take care of the expenses associated with their own families but also contribute to the general expenses of the wider household. Da has a reasonably stable job as a foreman for a construction firm. Of their 11 children, Li and Da's eighth-born son was killed during the war on drugs. He was a student who was recognised in the neighbourhood as having 'no negative public image.' The second eldest son was a victim of torture and police brutality in 2009.

When speaking of her family life, Li expressed strong ideals regarding normative aspects of its constitution: that it begins with the commitment of two individuals and that family is what fundamentally shapes both community and society. Eventually, the role of children shifts as they get older, gaining more responsibility over time. Despite her description of family as an institution based upon mutual support, several ruptures to this ideal surfaced during Li's interviews. In talking about her life through a 'river of life' exercise,<sup>17</sup> she addressed a number of pivotal moments that have influenced her life so far. She pointed to a period of infidelity by her husband as well as an engagement in a sorority by her daughter as particularly difficult junctures. In happier times, she attested to both the financial and relational support she had always felt from her in-laws and the assistance they gave her, particularly in the early years of her marriage.