Life beyond murder: exploring the identity reconstruction of mandatory lifers after release

by

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List of abbreviations:

AA: Alcoholic Anonymous

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

CRB: Criminal Record Background

GLM: Good Lives Model

HMI: Her Majesty's Inspectorate (Part of HMPPS)

HMP: Her Majesty's Prisons

HMPPS: Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services

MAPPA: Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements

MIP: Murderer's Identity Paradox

MLS: Mandatory Life Sentence

NA: Narcotic Anonymous

PICS: Post-Incarceration Syndrome

PO: Probation officer

ROTL: Release on Temporary Licence

Abstract

Soon after release, mandatory lifers are on a 'mission' to reconstruct their lives: at the heart of such a project of reconstruction is their identity. Despite a general interest evidenced in desistance literature on the importance of identity reconstruction for general ex-offenders, there is a paucity of studies that explored the ways in which mandatory life sentenced individuals reconstruct and negotiate identities post-release. This is problematic, considering that people who committed murder have been found to confront a specific 'offence-crime nexus' (Wright, Crewe, and Hulley 2017), so their adaptation to the index offence and imprisonment may lead to maladaptive behaviors post-release. In addition, the following gaps were identified: (1) the type of murder committed had not been seriously considered in how homicide offenders make sense of their own identity post-release; (2) research tends to focus on retrospective accounts of desisting versus non-desisting individuals as opposed to using longitudinal designs. A longitudinal narrative interview was conducted with five mandatory lifers (11 interviews in total) who committed different types of murder (revenge, random, financial gain, and intimate partner feminicide, see Brookman, 2022) over a period of two years. It was found that released mandatory lifers negotiate ethical identities in the interview context by constructing hierarchies of moral abomination as well as through problematizing their involvement in the murder through employing a 'Splitting Narrative'. The latter represents the first internal narrative of desistance for people who committed murder in criminological research. Beyond these discursive elements, the thesis evidenced that soon after release, mandatory lifers need to negotiate their identities against a series of 'push-pull' forces which either constrain or enable the development of pro-social identities (the role of the family, employment, consumer culture, and supervision are discussed). Finally, the thesis provides a set of practical recommendations for criminal justice organisations and the charity sector working with released mandatory life sentenced individuals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the thesis

1.1. Introduction

This thesis aims to explore the ways in which people who committed murder reconstruct their lives post-release. What follows is therefore an exploration of the resettlement experiences of five individuals who committed the most serious crime of all - murder. The thesis follows these five men after they have served their respective prison sentences and are now in the process of reintegrating into society. These men are at different stages of this process and have all received a mandatory life sentence (MLS) or 'Custody for Life'. Typically sentences of this kind are directly imposed on individuals who have committed murder, and therefore serve to differentiate these men from those who have committed other forms of homicide. This thesis is not principally concerned with aetiologies of murder, but rather it explores the ways in which the men reconstructed and negotiated identities after their prison sentences.

This introductory chapter will initially explore the mandatory life sentence. A brief historical account of the murder and life licence will be provided, and I will then explore policies pertinent to various mechanisms of the life licence, including 'recall'. The chapter will then outline the rationale of the research and offer some brief, preliminary literature to contextualise the research question, aims, and objectives which follow. An exploration of the thesis's methodological and theoretical affinities is also provided. Lastly, the introduction provides a brief overview of the thesis.

1.2. Exploring the Mandatory Life Sentence in England and Wales

'Homicide' is an umbrella term which is used in much criminological literature. As Brookman (2022) states, the term 'homicide' refers to the killing of another human being, irrespective whether this is lawful or unlawful. As this thesis is focused on unlawful forms of homicide, a crucial distinction needs to be made at this point. Under English and Welsh jurisprudence, the principal distinction made is between infanticide, murder, and manslaughter (Brookman, 2022) and a conviction of murder requires proof that there was intent to kill. Manslaughter, on the other hand, refers to instances of unlawful homicide where there was intent to kill but a range of mitigating circumstances were also present (voluntary manslaughter), or there was no intent to kill (involuntary manslaughter) (Brookman, 2022). These distinctions are important for the main arguments of this thesis. Most criminological research on the resettlement of life-sentenced offenders have not considered these distinctions in their analyses (Appleton, 2010

in the UK, Liem 2016, 2017; Liem and Garcin, 2014 in the US). This will be explored in more depth in chapter two.

Life imprisonment is understood as "a sentence, following a criminal conviction which gives the state the power to detain a person for life, that is, until they die there" (Van Zyl Smit and Appleton 2019:35). However, as it will be discussed below, this is not necessarily always the case across European jurisdictions, and it is certainly simplistic in reference to current life sentencing in England and Wales. In fact, the laws that govern life sentencing practices in England and Wales originate in 1957. Before the salient Homicide Act 1957, the verdict for murder was an automatic death sentence, usually by hanging (Mitchell and Roberts, 2012). Later, section 1 of the 1965 Death Penalty Act suspended capital punishment for all those convicted of murder.

The nature of the mandatory life sentence has since been further considered by politicians. In 1983, the Home Secretary of the time, Leon Brittan, explained that an initial fixed term in the management of the life sentence is passed for retribution and deterrence. This period is known as 'the tariff'. After this time individuals would be eligible for parole and then released on a life licence (although this does not mean they are automatically paroled). Specific types of murders would attract distinct tariffs. For example, for "murdering a police or prison officer, terrorist murders, sexual or sadistic murders of children, murders by firearm in the course of robbery, the tariff would be at least 20 years" (Mitchell and Roberts, 2012:37). The remainder of the life sentence is aimed at protecting the public. There is no limit to this period, they are to be detained: "for as long as [is] necessary' (i.e., until they are no longer a risk or threat to the public) (Ministry of Justice, 2010, para. 3.1 in Crewe et al. 2020:7).

Currently, when a person is convicted for murder, the judge is required to impose a sentence for mandatory life imprisonment. There are some exceptions. For example, section 259 of the Sentencing Act 2020 states that those offenders who commit murder when under 18 are detained at Her Majesty's Pleasure (see UK Public Acts, 2020). Alternatively, where the offender was between 18 and 21 at the time of the murder, the sentence received is 'Custody for Life'. In fact, the perpetrator's age is significant in sentencing guidelines. Schedule 21 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 sets out the basic starting points: adults aged 21 years or older can receive a whole life order, 30 years, 25 years, and 15 years tariffs. For those 18 – 20, there are three starting points: 30 years, 25 years, and 15 years. Lastly, for youths there is a 12-year starting point (Crown Prosecution Services, 2019).

Once released, the mandatory lifer is bound by several release conditions. These are again targeted as a means for further monitoring and to also provide "after release assistance that offers adequate social support to all former life sentence prisoners" (UN, in Zyl-Smit and Appleton, 2019:275). The Council of Europe reinforces the requirement for attention to be placed upon the needs these individuals have in the community to ensure successful resettlement (Zyl-Smit and Appleton, 2019:275).

As Crewe et al. (2020) remarked, the number of life-sentenced prisoners have risen dramatically since the imposition of MLS. The dramatic increase culminated in 1979 with the numbers rising to 1322, accounting for a tenfold increase in over two decades. By the end of 2019, there were 7046 individuals serving life sentences in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2019a in Crewe et al. 2020). The average tariff has also increased exponentially since the imposition of MLS. For example, tariff length for murder in England and Wales has increased from 15.3 years in 2003 to 21.3 years in 2016. The significant increase is due to several factors, chiefly amongst these – a new discourse of risk and punitiveness which started to legitimise punishment and sentencing (Pratt, 2000a; Hallsworth, 2002; Feeley and Simon, 1992; Nash, 2005; Werth, 2011, 2013).

A recent House of Commons Briefing Paper (2021) mentions that as of 30th of June 2020, there were 6,480 individuals imprisoned for homicide. Of these, 5,626 committed murder, and 854 committed manslaughters. Only 355 were female. There were 666 convicted homicide offenders by September 2021, representing a 1% decrease compared to the previous year. When the Gray lorry incident was excluded, the homicide rate of 2021 represented a 5% increase compared to previous years. On the 23[rd of] October 2019 a refrigerated lorry containing the asphyxiated dead bodies of 39 Vietnamese nationals was found in Essex (BBC, 2020). Later, two men were imprisoned for their manslaughter.

Most perpetrators and victims of homicide are male. Brookman (2022) found that for the 11 years period between 2008 – 2019, males comprised 91% of offenders and 68% of victims of homicide in England and Wales. Male victims tend to be killed more commonly by a friend or stranger, whereas female victims by their partner or ex-partner (ONS, 2021). Age is also an important demographic in making sense of homicide; young men aged 20 - 29 are the most common age group to commit homicide, followed by those aged 30 – 39 (Brookman, 2022). Most tend to be unemployed at the time of the homicide (54%). The majority of those employed is represented by manual workers.

1.2.1. Reconviction and Recall

The Recall, Review and Re-release of Recalled Prisoners Policy Framework sets out the recall process and criteria for indeterminate sentenced prisoners, including mandatory lifers. In this sense, mandatory lifers are subject to licensed supervision and can be recalled to prison by the probation service in certain situations: (a) they have breached a specific condition of their licence, or (b) the behaviour being exhibited, is sufficiently concerning to indicate that the risk they pose is assessed as no longer safely manageable in the community (see Ministry of Justice, 2021). It is the responsibility of the National Probation Service to initiate the recall, where Community Offender Managers must evidence a "causal link" in 'current' behaviours which were also exhibited at the time of the index offence (Ministry of Justice, 2021:6).

Data suggests that life sentenced individuals do not pose a significantly higher threat to the community than most offenders once they are released (Liem et al. 2014; Bjørkly and Waage, 2005; Roberts, Zgoba, and Shahidullah, 2007; Neuilly et al. 2011). The trend is thought-provoking given the implicit connection being made between long-term sentences and risk and may be seen as a "reaction to the stigmatised 'other' [which] is arguably about imposing a morality script rather than about protecting the social body from imminent physical harm" (Munn and Bruckert, 2013:117). Between April 2009 to March 2020, a total of 38 individuals who had been imprisoned for homicide ended up killing again. Of these, 7 committed their second homicide after release (House of Commons Briefing Paper, 2021).

Most homicide offenders are recalled for breaching the conditions of their life licence and committing crimes other than a further homicide. For example, in England and Wales, Coker and Martin's (1985) pioneering study followed up two samples of lifers consisting of 239 individuals between 1960 and 1974. They found a recidivism rate of 29% overall, with two individuals having committed a further homicide. The reconviction rates for serious offences were over 10%, out of which 6% presented violence. The authors report no significant differences in rates between homicides and non-homicides (92% of the sample committed homicide). Interestingly, irrespective of the group of offences, over half of the men committed their further offence within two years of release. Later, McCarthy et al. (2001) followed up 53 (46 men, 5 women) individuals who committed parricide (a term used to describe fatal violence exerted by children of all ages against their parents) and 71 stranger killers (66 men, 5 women) who were discharged from Broadmoor. All were subject to restrictions orders under the Mental Health Act 1983. Overall, the reoffending rate was low, with 8% and 15% of the parricide and stranger group respectively being convicted of a further crime. None committed a further

homicide upon release. Interestingly, although not statistically significant, acquaintance with the victim influenced the eventual life course of the participants. In her analysis of risk factors associated with the recall of discretionary lifers, Appleton (2010) reported that 37% of those convicted of a sexual index offence had been recalled to custody, whilst for all other cohorts was less than 23% of the overall sample of 36 discretionary lifers. Importantly, she has found closeness to the victim (meaning how well they knew each other) as an important indicator of recidivism, with 39% success rate compared to 64% where the victim was not a stranger. Nevertheless, the author did not clearly distinguish sexual offences from sexual homicide.

The latest joint inspection of life sentenced prisoners conducted by HMI Probation and HMI Prisons (2013) highlights that once released, mandatory life sentenced prisoners are successful at reintegrating into society with 2.2% reoffending in any way, compared to 46.9% of the overall prison population. The same report has found that there was scant attention paid by probation services to life sentence prisoners as a distinct group. Despite the low specific recidivism of this group of offenders compared to short-term prisoners, there are distinctive societal reactions to the release of individuals who have committed murder.

1.3. Reactions to the mandatory lifer's release

Penal practices are said to reflect the desire of the public who attach differentiated levels of moral blameworthiness to different types of murders and the context in which they occurred (see Mitchel, 1998). Indeed "the experience of stigma for perpetrators of homicide cannot be separated from their social context" (Ferrito et al. 2020:15) and this is ultimately relevant to the conditions of their release. Without question, releasing someone who has committed murder can elicit emotive responses in our society. This is understandable given the high profile of such cases and the enormity of their crime. Nevertheless, as explored above, specific recidivism (that is, committing a further homicide) is not as prevalent as it may be perceived (see Hollway and Jefferson, 2000 for a discussion on fear of crime). Notwithstanding, there are a series of sensibilities around the release of homicide offenders.

The release of Colin Pitchfork in 2021 has reignited the public 'motion' that 'life should mean life', meaning that a life sentence should be spent behind bars, until the natural death of the offender. However, as explored above, this is not the case under English jurisprudence. Pitchfork had received life imprisonment after raping and strangling 15-years-old Lynda Mann and Dawn Ashworth in 1983 and 1986 (BBC, 2021). Both the type of murder committed and his age at the time of killing emerged as significant factors in his public denunciation. In this

sense, the sexual nature of his murders alongside the fact that he was 'mature' when he killed the two young girls secured him a special place on the public's hierarchy of moral abjection. In the wake of the recent public scandal, the print media reminded their readers of an incident which would stand as proof of his capacity to deceive and manipulate (BBC, 2021). The story details that while he was still in an open prison and waiting for his release, Pitchfork had lied to a female shop worker about his marital status, telling her that he was married when he was not, while on a temporary release from prison. Of course, marital status confers one a sense of identity, even more so, the appearance of credibility and stability, but such issues relating to identity as he might have experienced it have not appeared in popular discourse.

1.4.   Research Rationale, Aims, and Objectives

The thesis aims to explore the ways in which people who committed murder reconstruct their lives post-release. More precisely, it is interested in exploring the lived experiences of identity construction, management and maintenance for people who committed distinct types of murder and are now reintegrating into society. Critically, as discussed previously, released mandatory lifers operate under the conditions of a life licence; they are requested to routinely visit their probation officer whose role is to supervise them in the community. It is imperative, given their constant supervision, to critically consider the extent to which formal and informal mechanisms of support/surveillance of people who committed murder constrains or enables pro-social identity reconstruction post-release. Ultimately, the thesis aims to provide a set of recommendations that would lead to the improvement of the resettlement experiences of mandatory lifers.

The thesis aims to find an answer to the following research question: *How do people who have committed murder negotiate identities post-release*? The research process is guided by the following aims and objectives:

- Explore the lived experiences of identity construction, management, and maintenance for people who committed murder;

- Develop a conceptual model that captures the significance of specific factors in identity reconstruction of people who committed murder;

- Critically consider the extent to which formal and informal mechanisms of support/surveillance of mandatory lifers constrains or enables pro-social identity reconstruction post-release; and

- Develop a set of appropriate recommendations for state, voluntary and private sector organizations in and around the criminal justice system to promote better outcomes in working with released individuals who committed murder.

The need for the current research is dictated by the paucity of studies on the resettlement experiences and desistance of long-term prison sentenced individuals generally, and those who committed murder in particular in the United Kingdom. With few exceptions (Appleton, 2010 in the UK, Liem and Colleagues in the US – see chapter two), literature did not consider people who committed murder in their resettlement and desistance-oriented analyses. Further, most research on the experience of people who have killed is confined to prison (Adshead, 2011; Adshead, Ferrito and Bose, 2015; Crewe, Hulley, and Wright, 2020; Ferrito, 2020; Ferrito et al. 2012; Wright, Crewe, Hulley, 2017; Sapsford, 1978, 1983; Munn, 2011; Brookman, 2015) open prisons (Clifford, 2010), or have not considered this group of individuals as distinctive in their own right post-release (Appleton, 2010 in the UK; Liem and Richardson, 2014, Liem, 2016; Liem and Garcin, 2014 – for US based studies). Other accounts were journalistic (see Parker, 1991; Heinlein, 1975). Also, much of the research which explored the resettlement experiences of homicide offenders (for example Appleton, 2010 in the UK; Liem, 2016, 2017 in the US) tended to be retrospective studies (see Nugent and Schinkel, 2016) where identity reconstructions could not be captured 'in the now' (see Brookman, 2015) and followed up in a qualitative longitudinal design (an exception is Liem and Garcin, 2014 in the US but the study explored the narratives individuals convicted for second-degree murder or (in)voluntary manslaughter). Although existing research hints at a distinct re-entry pathway for mandatory lifers, no research has considered the type of murder committed as bearing on any importance on the re-entry experience. A detailed overview of gaps in the literature and contextualisation of the current research is found in section 2.5 and 2.6.

1.5. Methodological Approach

To reiterate, this thesis explores the ways in which 5 released mandatory lifers reconstructed and negotiated their narrative identities at different stages of their re-entry journeys. A three-stage longitudinal narrative interview was conducted to collect data. In total, 11 in-depth interviews were undertaken with these 5 individuals over a period of two years. The men were selected with a specific interest in the type of murder committed (they committed revenge, financial gain, intimate partner femicide, and random homicides; See Brookman, 2022) as well as their stages within the resettlement process (early release, or veterans of life outside). The

type of murder that the men committed was an important element in the selection process; the exploratory nature of this thesis demanded an approach which allowed for the exploration of idiosyncratic resettlement experiences of mandatory lifers who committed different types of murders. A snow-balling sampling was initiated after accessing several gatekeepers at a prison where I used to work during my first two years of the research (for an extended outline of sampling approach see chapter four). I have also accessed participants through personal connections developed at my university. An outline of the men's index offence and a short synopsis of each case is also provided in chapter four.

My interest in narratives and whole life stories emerged out of an affinity to several theoretical frameworks. The concepts of narrative identity and narrative reconstruction resonate with narrative psychology (Bruner, 1986 Polkinghorne, 1988); narrative criminology (Presser, 2008; 2009); desistance research (Maruna, 2001; Vaughan, 2007, King, 2013); and rehabilitation theory, especially the Good Lives Model (Ward and Stewart, 2003). At the heart of the narrative conceptualisation of identity is the idea that "an individual constitutes herself as a person by coming to organise her experiences in a narrative self-conception of the appropriate form" (Schechtman, 1996:134 in Kruegar 2011:37). Those writing from within a desistance paradigm draw from narrative identity theory to propose that offending stops when individuals re-interpret their life story in such a way that offending is no longer seen as an option, or compatible with their new self (see Maruna, 2001). Narrative criminologists draw from ethnomethodology (see Verde, 2019) to make sense of the ways in which narratives promote behaviours; stories are used by offenders to perform better selves, or identities, to an audience. These theoretical perspectives provide the theoretical tools to explore the factors that allow mandatory lifers to reconstruct and maintain identities post-release. What is also crucial, as well as novel in this approach is that attention is paid to the role that the type of murder that has been committed plays in this process.

Nevertheless, post-release identities are not reconstructed in a vacuum. "It's not as if we had on the one hand an individual equipped by nature with certain drives and on the other, society as something apart from him" (Fromm, 1941:12). This is particularly true today - in a society based on consumption where "to 'have' is to exist and therefore to have nothing is to be nothing" (Presedee, 2004:280). As such, the fabric of these stories is imbued with the complex interaction between existing socio-economic systems, structures, pressures, and available ideals of success. In this sense, the thesis draws from some elements of ultra-realist thought

(Hall and Winlow, 2015) in considering such forces, among other theories which offer similarly useful tools to make sense of the world and data.

1.6. Thesis overview

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis explores existing literature pertinent to the research question and to the aims and objectives outlined above. The first two chapters are dedicated to this desiderate. Chapter two will initially define the concept of identity and then explore the relationship between identity and the desistance process. The chapter will then explore current debates within desistance literature by specifically focusing on the agency versus structure divide, as well as their interaction. Ultimately, the chapter will suggest that mandatory lifers are a neglected population who require special attention due to the idiosyncratic pains that they experience both as 'barriers post-release', and as a consequence of their adaptive responses to imprisonment and index offence.

Chapter three represents a continuation of the second. It explores the main barriers to reintegration that long-term offenders face. In this sense, the chapter is split into a progressive, 'chronological order'. It firstly considers whether adaptations to the pains of long-term imprisonment have deleterious effects on release. Specific attention is placed here to the 'offence-crime nexus' relevant to people who committed murder. The chapter will then explore barriers to resettlement by focusing principally on issues around stigma and the labour market as well as probation.

Chapter four outlines the methodological approach to the study. It takes a top-down approach in exploring underpinning metaphysical considerations and their links to ways in which the research was conducted. In this sense, the chapter outlines sampling and data collection strategies, ethical considerations in working with vulnerable populations, data collection method, data analysis, and the role of reflexivity in making sense of the research and participants' lives.

Chapters five to ten represent the findings and discussion of the thesis. These are constructed to provide rich descriptions of participants' experiences in light of the research question and the objectives of the thesis. Chapter five, six, and seven focus on the content of the men's stories, exploring the significance of specific factors in the identity reconstruction of people who committed murder. These are especially pertinent to tackling the aims of the research: "Develop a conceptual model that captures the significance of specific factors in identity

reconstruction of people who committed murder" and "critically consider the extent to which formal and informal mechanisms of support/surveillance of homicide offenders constrains or enables pro-social identity reconstruction post-release".

Chapters eight, nine and ten focus on the ways in which the men constructed ethical selves in interaction, in the interview context. The focus is on the function of the men's stories (in other words, the findings/discussion of the thesis focus on both the 'whats' and the 'hows' of the men's stories, see Gubrium and Holstein, 2008; Frank, 2010).

To reiterate, mandatory lifers negotiate their identities against a series of 'push-pull' forces which either constrain or enable the development of pro-social identities. For example, the role of prisoners' families and employment in early resettlement will be explored in chapter five. The ways in which the men negotiate identities in the context of the post-Fordist economy and consumer culture is explored in chapter six. Further, the role of the probation service in interpellating (Althusser, 1971; Frank, 2010) the men as risky is outlined in chapter seven, and issues around 'complicated redemption' and generativity in chapter eight.

Chapter eight, nine and ten draw from ethnomethodology to explore the ways in which the men reconstructed their identities in the interview context. Chapter eight tackles issues around 'complicated redemption' experienced by people who committed murder and generativity as a performance of ethical selves. Chapter nine suggests that despite the remorse shown by the men for what they had done, they relativise their involvement in the murder scene through employing a 'Splitting Narrative' aimed at denying agency. This serves the role of solving a paradox: the Murderer's Identity Paradox (to be guilty of a crime on did not fully commit). Lastly, chapter ten further explores the ways in which the lifers negotiated ethical selves through constructing murderer hierarchies of moral abomination. Chapter 11 concludes the thesis and draws practical recommendations for criminal justice organisations and the voluntary sector.

1.7. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of some of the key issues pertinent to this thesis. In this sense, it provided an outline of the key stages of the research. The introduction highlighted, *inter alia*, the research aims and objectives as well as research question, some preliminary issues pertinent to the methodology, including theoretical affinities, as well as brief overview of the following chapters. The chapters that follow will provide an overview of desistance

research and will problematise the absence of mandatory lifers' voice from existing literature. This discussion will then be further contextualised within a discussion around pains and imprisonment to justify the need for research with mandatory lifers.

Literature Review

Chapter 2: Identity, desistance, and the mandatory lifer

2.1. Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, one principal domain relevant to the successful resettlement of ex-offenders generally, and mandatory lifers in particular, is whether they still reoffend after release (see Leverentz, 2014). Perhaps this should be taken as a 'narrow' definition of successful resettlement and reintegration (Andersen, et al 2020), but one which is indispensable to any more complex conceptualisations that could potentially ensue. Once released, long-term ex-offenders are on a 'mission' to reconstruct their lives: at the heart of such a project of reconstruction is their identity. In fact, criminological research has found that a process of identity change stands behind individuals' movement away from crime (or 'desistance', to use the academic jargon). The chapter will initially briefly explore the concept of identity as imagined by philosophers and social scientists, specifically by focusing on symbolic interactionism and narrative psychology/criminology. The overview presented below is by no means exhaustive; the selection criteria for the theories and perspectives on 'identity' is based upon their direct relevance to the research question of the thesis.

The second part of the chapter discusses the importance of identity reconstruction in the desistance process. It will initially explore current debates around defining desistance, particularly focusing on 'desistance as termination event' and 'desistance as a maintenance process'. It is argued that the latter perspective is more suitable to exploring the ways in which 'would-be desisters', in this case, mandatory lifers commit to pro-social identities and thus achieve identity desistance (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016) post-release. The chapter will then outline some of the most important theories of desistance, particularly by focusing on the importance of identity change in the desistance process. Consequently, the point that will be made is that mandatory lifers are a 'neglected' population within desistance research, especially due to the idiosyncratic pains that they experience both as 'barriers post-release' and as a consequence of their imprisonment and their adaptive responses to their index offence.

2.2. Identity, the loudest talk in town

In the collective vernacular of contemporary society, identity is once more the "loudest talk in town" (Bauman, 2004:16). A resuscitation of interest in identity may have its origins in the precarious dimension of the concept in a post-truth, post-political liberal world, where individuals are seen to construct and reconstruct their identities continuously (Gergen, 1991). Whether this latter conceptualisation holds true is a matter of scholarly debate, and therefore the term is not without equivoque. One principal problematic aspect of the concept is captured in semantics - as identity is 'what you make it to be'. It can be used in reference to "my sense of self", others' "perceptions of me", or "my reactions to others" (Lawler, 2014: 7). Identity represents "people's conceptions of who they are", of what sort of people they are, and "how they relate to others" (Hogg and Abrams, 1988:2).

Although the unremitting debate has traversed from the critique of Cartesian western metaphysics - influencing pragmatics to the endlessly performative and fractured self of postmodernism - identity has evolved reaching 'everywhere', leading some theorists to contend that "if identity is everywhere, it is nowhere" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000:1). However, in the absence of entirely different concepts to replace this terminology, what one can do is to "continue to work with them – albeit now in their detotalized or deconstructed form" (Hall, 1996:1). As mentioned above, identity is a concept over which there is little agreement. Solving this unremitting debate is beyond the scope and capacity of the current thesis. Nevertheless, some important positions are outlined.

Theoretical perspectives of identity are not always clear cut, and it may be useful to categorise these as pertaining to essentialist and non-essentialist views. The former imagine identity as somehow residing within the individual as a 'thing in itself' containing some form of essence. In other words, these perspectives have a 'realist stance' (perhaps the most naïve of realists) assuming that the 'self' exists independent of language/culture in an inner domain (see Crossley, 2000). The category of 'personality types' is such an example (see McCrae and Costa, 1987; Costa and McCrae, 1992). Due to advancements in neuroimaging techniques, researchers today are mapping personality traits to specific patterns of brain (in)activity (see Nostro et al. 2018). Evidently, according to this perspective identity (or, rather, personality) is seen as residing within the neural activity of the brain. Such essentializing approaches are reducing humans to their biology (although see Elder-Vass, 2012 on essentialism for a more sophisticated view). More complex conceptualisations of the relationship between the real of

sciences (such as neuroscience) and the 'human realm' are also available (Hall, 2012a; Žižek, 2006; see Hall and Winlow, 2015 for a brief overview). In the ultra-realist framework, the subject is non-essential, as subjectivity is conditioned by the socio-symbolic order one transposes into their materiality (see Hall and Winlow, 2015).

Some non-essentialist positions accept that identity emerges through various subject positionings in ideology and discourse (see Althusser, 1971; Hollway, 1989; 1984) or positioning within day-to-day interactions, at micro-level (see Davies and Harré, 1990, Harré and van Langenhove, 1999), and generally understand the role of language as creative in the process of identity construction (see Burr, 2002; 2015). These perspectives are generally social constructionist. The most radical of social constructionists believe that all objects of our consciousness are constructed through language, including our identities (Burr, 2015).

However, the individual as imagined by social constructionists is devoid of subjectivity (see Burr, 2015; Crossley, 2000; Hall, 2012a); there seems to be very little to individuals beyond their illusory discursive interaction and positioning. Then the question is: "what is going on inside human beings when they use discourse?" (Parker, 1992:83). Gadd and Jefferson (2007:43) asked: "Why do particular subject positions make sense to some men but not to others? Why for example, do only some men identify with the 'hard man' or the Casanova?" (Gadd and Farrall, 2004). The framework does not allow one to "get any sense of why individuals might take up (or identify with) particular subject positions" (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007:43). It was suggested that attention should be paid to the histories of individuals in discursive positioning (Hollway, 1984:237-238 in Hollway and Jefferson, 2005:149; for a critique see Wetherell, 2005). Some psycho-social authors combined psychoanalytic thought with discourse to bridge this subjectivity gap (see Parker, 1992, Frosh and Baraitser, 2008 for a Lacanian perspective; Jefferson, 2008 for a response), leading to a "narrative psycho-social criminology" (Verde, 2021:42) without overtly falling into essentialism.

Nevertheless, the emphasis seems to be placed on the extremes of either structure (epitomised by the 'death of the subject' see Lovile, 1992:120 in Crossley, 2000:26) or on agency. Both 'macro' and 'micro' versions of social constructionism fail to provide the individual with subjectivity and seem to fall onto dichotomic perspectives of the agency/structure debate. Social constructionists are yet to solve this theoretical conundrum. Nevertheless, symbolic interactionism and narrative approaches seem better equipped to analyse the interaction between individual and society, while maintaining the focus on the crucial importance of

language and interaction in the construction of identities (see Hall, 2012a:105 for a critique of symbolic interactionism's "non-dialectical dualism"). For Presser (2009), narratives are 'the hinge' between individuals in society and as Fleetwood (2016:186) said, "analysis of narratives can trace social structures, and examine how they structure action through narrative". These two perspectives considerably influenced desistance research.

These metaphysical considerations explored above have a direct implication to studying the lives of homicide offenders. These inform the ways in which research questions are framed. For example, some research focused on the measurable effects that long-term imprisonment has on the 'sociability', motivation, and affective flatness of homicide offenders (Sapsford, 1978). Of course, such an approach is overly simplistic and does not uncover identity as experienced by participants. In this sense, we may need to qualitatively explore homicide offenders' subjective experience of life post-release and the ways in which they make sense of the life and world.

2.2.1. Symbolic interactionism and the multiplicity of selves

For traditional philosopher and psychologist Williams James, "a man (sic) has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind" (James, 1890:294). For symbolic interactionists, the self emerges as a social construction, shaped by symbols and linguistic exchange (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Baldwin, 1897 in Harter, 1999). Specifically, the Meadian (1934) self emerges in social interactions, where 'role-taking' is the primary mechanism that 'produces' dichotomy between the 'I' and the 'Me', with the latter having a strong social origin. Selfhood is in continuous construction, and identity then, is "never gained nor maintained once and for all… it is constantly lost and regained" (Erikson, 1959:118). Cooley (1902) proposed that individuals internalise what 'others' believe of them, in a process summed up as the 'looking glass self'.

Imagining how one is perceived and judged whilst acknowledging the emergent guilt, or shame stemming from these operations are all parts of the Cooley's looking glass self (Scott, 2015). This stands as confirmation for the self as a dynamic process; one does not simply have selves, but rather one is continuously constructing, or 'doing' identity through constant reflection (Scott, 2015). However, the 'self' in this sense should not be envisioned as over-socialized (Jacobs, 2006 in Wiley, 2009), as individuals have the ability to simulate and thus manipulate the opinions of others, to the extent of creating a 'flattering looking glass' (Wiley, 2009). Criminological literature is saturated with work stemming from this tradition (see Becker 1953;

Lemert, 1967; Schur, 1971 for exponents of the labelling perspective). In particular, authors writing from within a desistance paradigm have long ago acknowledged the effect of a 'Pygmalion effect' (Maruna, et al. 2009) on reintegration post-release.

Goffman's (1959) work on the presentation of self has influenced penological research, especially due to his conceptualization of dramaturgical performance. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Strategic Interaction, and Stigma*, he imagined individuals as dramaturgic agents. This strategic manipulation is seen as dependent on social contexts - similarly to theatrical performances on a stage. The stage metaphor is employed to allude to the importance of societal structure on identity performance. Nevertheless, one should not misread Goffman (1959), as the performative nature of identity, epitomized through the metaphor of 'wearing a mask' should not be taken ad litteram. Individuals' identities are represented by these masks which themselves have a strong social origin. Like Lacan's version of masks, where the truth has the structure of fiction (Žižek, 2006), they represent the identity of the individual and should not be rendered a simulacrum (although this is also possible). Again, penological research on identity is imbued with this perspective (Schmid and Jones, 1991; Wheeler, 1961; Goffman, 1959; Jewkes, 2002, 2005; Jacquelyn and Gull, 2015; Toyoki and Brown, 2014; Giordano et al. 2002). These studies highlight the salience of identity reconstruction and negotiation once one reaches the prison gates as adaptive mechanisms (also see Warr, 2019 on narrative labour). This process occurs as the new prisoner attempts to adapt to the hyper-masculine environment of the prison system (Jewkes, 2005).

Several symbolic interactionists propose that different identities are drawn from social roles - for example, mother, sister, criminal. Considering that individuals have a multitude of roles and characteristics, identities are seen as organised though a hierarchical scale. The concept of 'identity salience' (McCall and Simmons, 1978; Stryker and Serpe, 1982) is therefore referring to those identities that provide the most reward and which could be enacted to a higher extent in different social contexts; in other words, individuals might commit themselves to some identities more than to others. Stryker and Serpe's (1982) view over commitment is represented by the probability that a certain identity is invoked across different social contexts. This would explain experiencing the murderer stigma as 'master status' (See Clifford, 2010; Becker, 1963).

The self is multiple, especially in late-modernity (Giddens, 1991) and post-modernity (Gergen 1991). Managing such multiplicity could make all the difference in the successful re-entry of homicide offenders post-release (see Clifford, 2010), especially if we consider that "in

moments of tension it is easy to revert to previous patterns of behaviour" (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011:272). Mandatory lifers have spent many years inside prison and managing their identities in the period immediately after release (and not only) may thus prove crucial.

A further layer of complexity needs to be added when exploring such complex issues post-release. Success is a vague concept; ego-ideals (Lacan, 2006 in Winlow and Hall, 2009b) are influenced by underlying socio-economic and political systems as much as by one's biography. These are important elements which may act as barriers, or at least influence the ways in which individuals negotiate and reconstruct identities post-release. The present thesis takes both the men's biographies and social structures seriously in the ways in which identities are constructed and negotiated on release. An appropriate framework for tackling the research question needs to consider the importance of participants' biographies in investing in certain identities post-release, and to consider the importance of culture as much as of underlying socio-economic systems in the process (see Hall and Winlow, 2015; Raymen and Kuldova, 2020; Winlow, 2013). Then, the process of identity reconstruction post-release for mandatory lifers cannot simply be a personal project. It is a project which needs to account for a society in flux and which exerts a series of pressures and barriers to the newly released mandatory lifer.

2.2.2. The narrative perspective of identity

The narrative perspective of identity became preeminent around the 1980s. It was around this time that philosophers (MacIntyre, 1981; Ricoeur, 1984), and social scientists (Bruner, 1986, Cohler, 1982; McAdams, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1988) underlined that people make sense of their lives through self-defining self-stories that reconstruct the past and provide expectations for the future (see McAdams, 2006). It is through this mechanism that individuals provide life with identity, coherence and meaning (McAdams, 2006). Put simply, the essence of narrative approaches is that 'oneself' is created/constructed by narratives. Most such approaches agree that human experience is structured as stories and that one's individual and cultural reality is inextricably linked to narrative (see Smith, 2016).

The 'Narrative Turn' emerged as a challenge to the predominant realism and positivism that has traditionally dominated social research (Riessman, 2008). Somers (1994) argued that while older interpretations of narrative were limited to that of representational form (in form of history or literature), these new approaches conceptualise 'narrativity' as concepts of social epistemology and ontology. It is through 'narrativity' that one comes to understand the social

world that they navigate, the various experiences of life and how we make sense of them - "it is through narrativity that individuals constitute their social identities" (Somers, 1994:606). Stories are not a form of representing knowledge, but rather, stories are guiding action; people construct identities by representing themselves in a plot. Individuals make sense of experience through integrating these in a coherent story (Somers, 1994). It is assumed that we behave in particular ways because not doing so would violate our very sense of existence at times and spaces (Somers, 1994). McAdams (2006:113-114) made a similar remark:

> "Narrators cast themselves as protagonists in the stories they tell to explain their lives and to make meaning of their own thoughts, feelings, desires and behaviours extended over time. If a life story is to make psychological sense, then, it must explain how a person came to be, and who a person may be in the future." (McAdams, 2006:113-114)

Others view narrative identity as a polyphonic novel (Hermans, 1996), or as a bildungsroman (Bruner, 2004) that gives expressions to the many voices of the self (Bamberg, 2011; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2007). There are a variety of ways in which one can conceptualise narrative research, each modality being bound up with one's theoretical predisposition and "subordinated to [your] personal theoretical inclinations" (Goodley, 2004 :105). For example, Clendenin (2013) argued that narrative inquiry is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience as narrative phenomenon, but also reminds us that narrative inquiry is an exploration of the social and the cultural. For Presser (2009; 2010), a constitutive view over narrative simply intertwines narratives with experience and these are used interchangeably. The narrative perspective has had much traction in social and criminological research. A whole body of literature explored criminality and desistance from crime through the lenses of narratives: these studies can be said to fall under the banner of 'narrative criminology'.

2.2.3. Use of narrative in criminological research: Narrative Criminology

Sandberg and Ugelvik (2016) trace the debut of narrative criminology to the 1950s, around the time Sykes and Matza (1957) were concluding that 'delinquents' used 'techniques of neutralization' to morally justify their behaviour. The stories that these young individuals used served specific functions, including that of negotiations of more positive identities. Later, Katz (1988) studied the ways in which crime can represent a form of hedonistic behaviour which is intrinsic to narrative scripts. Presser (2009) has conceptualised narrative in contrasting ways, each representative of different ontological and epistemological traditions. In this sense, in narrative as record, stories simply document 'what happened' and are therefore considered

ontologically realist (Presser, 2009). Alternatively, narrative as interpretation is expectedly related to the meaning and interpretation that individuals attach to stories.

Finally, narratives are constitutive; here, Presser (2009) juxtaposed narrative and experience, and highlighted that experience is always acted upon. The latter view, then, suggests that individuals guide their actions through the stories that they say (or produce) – they are not simply representational, but constitutive of action. Hence, desistance stories are indispensable to individuals' cessation of criminal behaviour (see Maruna, 2001). This approach has led to some controversies. By adopting the constitutive view one can make the postmodern claim that crime is simply discursively created (Henry and Milovanovic, 1996 cited by Presser and Sandberg, 2015). By privileging speaking over doing (see Aspden and Hayward, 2015:240), one runs the risk of turning narrative themes in "meta-commentary", simple "post-structuralist language games" (Fleetwood, 2016:174). The opposition between structure and agency as imagined by narrative criminologists (such as some of the accounts below) was challenged by Fleetwood (2016). Her account captures the interplay between individuals and social structure in relationship rather than opposition. To achieve this goal, Fleetwood (2016) added to Bourdieu's social theory and developed the concept of narrative habitus.

To reiterate, narrative criminology is closely linked to desistance research in attempting to understand the role of language and narrative identity in the construction and maintenance of desistence narratives (Fleetwood, 2016; Presser and Sandberg, 2015; Maruna, 2001, Vaughan, 2007). To be able to stay away from crime, ex-criminals need to reconstruct their narrative identities and live by 'redemption scripts' (Maruna, 2001; Maruna, Wilson, and Curran, 2006; Gadd and Farrall, 2004; Stone, 2015). Whether desistance narratives resemble external reality is not necessarily crucial. Taken together, the work understands the self in a psychological sense – it is seen as an internal process, working individually despite external reality (Fleetwood, 2016).

In their review of narrative criminological influence on desistance research, Maruna and Liem (2020) remarked how internal narratives of desistance are important for social and psychological reasons. Firstly, desistance narratives are useful in negotiating acceptable identities with conventional society after release; ex-prisoners have the difficult role to convince others of the legitimacy of their reform as well as to portray themselves in an empowering light. This would ultimately assist with the accrual of social capital on release as well as with 'correctional supervision' (see Maruna and Liem, 2020). A series of studies have

explored this phenomenon in depth (Covington, 1984; Scully and Marolla, 1984; Hudson, 2005; Presser and Sandberg, 2015; Presser, 2008, 2012; Hochstetler, Copes and Williams, 2010 Copes, Hochstetler, and Williams, 2008;). Violent offenders' narratives (Hochstetler, Copes and Williams, 2010), and those of murderers (Brookman, 2015) have been found to be directed at creating a moral distance between authentic violent offenders and participants' good core selves, which were incompatible with such descriptions. Identities were therefore constructed synchronically (Bamberg, 2011), by comparing their authentic selves, seen as diametrically opposed and more nuanced than those of intrinsically flawed authentic violent criminals.

Nevertheless, this process seems to be significantly more difficult to certain types of offenders who have a difficult time in finding a 'suitable other' upon which to project their 'abominable character' (see Verde, 2021; Victor and Waldram, 2015). Murderers may well fall under this category due to the irreparability and enormity of their crime, but very few research has seriously explored the narratives of such offender's post-release. Secondly, an internal narrative of desistance has been found to assist with the effort of desistance in the face of structural barriers and disappointments post-release (Vaughan, 2007).

Recent research by Warr (2019) evidenced how lifers need to engage in 'narrative labour' to showcase their change to authorities and secure release. Other research on lifer populations (also see Liem, 2016; Liem and Richardson, 2014; Herbet, 2018 mostly in the USA) remarked how individuals express that there is a fundamental difference between their current self and their criminal self, or the people who they were at the time of the homicide. These identities are discarded in favour of new, pro-social identities post-release. These techniques, then, apart from maintaining an internal narrative of desistance, perform the role of negotiating acceptability at a discursive level. The ways in which people who committed murder utilise an internal narrative of desistance to manage (or contain) internal and external stigma and perform a moral self despite the enormity of their crime upon release has not been considered by previous research. The importance of the type of murder committed remains virtually unexplored. As evidenced above, identity is a concept that runs through much criminological research, and which is especially pertinent to studies that explore individuals' movement away from crime. As this thesis is concerned with the re-entry and desistance narratives of homicide offenders, the chapter will move on to explore issues around desistance and identity in more depth. This chapter used the concept of desistance without clearly defining it; the role of the next subsection is to solve this issue.

2.3. Identity and desistance: defining desistance

Desistance scholarship has conceptualised the term as proclaiming the termination of one's criminal career, generally resembling "an end state or an event" (Roque, 2017:55; also see King, 2014). For example, Sampson and Laub (2001:11) distinguished between 'cessation' and 'termination' and defined desistance as the "causal process that supports the termination of offending". Initially, Maruna (2001) also imagined desistance as a 'termination event' – it involved an individual's abstinence from committing further offences. However, Maruna has questioned the actual momentum at which this can be fixed. For example, "a person can steal a purse on a Tuesday morning then terminate criminal participation for the rest of the day. Is that desistance?" (Maruna, 2001:23). Other theorists have attempted to determine an exact time frame of abstention which would resemble 'desistance', and some argued that less than one year (Loeber, et al. 1991) or 1 year (Warr, 1998) to be sufficient.

Conceptualising desistance as a 'termination event', alongside its fixed timeframe is unsophisticated and sterile in acknowledging it as a process (Bushaway et al. 2001), with its own setbacks, in need for a 'maintenance process' (Gadd and Farrall, 2004). As Kay (2016) has observed, the way one defines desistance simply changes the way the notion is operationalised. Rather, "the study of desistance might be best construed as the study of continuity rather than change - continuity of non-deviant behaviours" (Maruna, 2001: 27). In a later article, Maruna and Farrall (2004) drew from literature on criminal aetiology, namely from Lemert's (1948:27) concepts of primary and secondary deviation to construct a more nuanced understanding and definition of the desistance process. Rather than a 'termination event', the new conceptualisation included a two-dimensional, perpetual process, that of primary and secondary desistance. Primary desistance represents "any lull or crime-free gap in the course of a criminal career" (Maruna and Farrall, 2004:4) whilst secondary desistance announces a fundamental change to the personal, identity level of the individual who becomes a "changed person". The transition is possible when the individual finds a source of communion and agency in activities at odd with 'criminality'. For example, individuals may commit to a new, meaningful job, or a new pro-social passion (Cf. King, 2014).

Nevertheless, King (2014) highlighted that this seemingly smooth transition between primary and secondary desistance may be more difficult to operationalise and substantiate than initially thought. In reality, most existing studies tend to be retrospective accounts of individuals who desisted for long periods of time (for example Maruna, 2001) which were inadequate in

rigorously capturing such an elusive, subjective transition. Several authors have attempted to provide explanations for the 'scaffolding' which takes place in transitioning between primary desistance to the commitment to pro-social identities, represented by secondary desistance (see King, 2014; Healy and O'Donnell,2008; Healy, 2012). Nugent and Schinkel (2016) proposed that individuals who are 'non offending' engage in 'act-desistance' and reserved 'identity desistance' to signal the appropriation of a non-offending, pro-social identity. Relational desistance represents the public recognition of this important, new change by others (see McNeil, 2012), at different levels of human interaction (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016; Bottoms, 2014).

To reiterate, there seems to be a consensus among desistance scholars that personal identity changes and cognitive transformations are fundamental to any serious, long-term, and perpetual commitment to conventional/non-criminal lifestyles (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009; Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; also see Bachman, et al. 2016; Aresti, Eatough, & Brooks-Gotdon, 2010; Healy, 2013; King, 2013; Opsal, 2012; Stevens, 2012). Agency in the initial stages of the re-entry as well as motivation were found as critical for prospective success (LeBel, et al., 2008; Liem and Richardson, 2014). This is an important consensus but one which needs to include 'structure' as an important enabling or constraining 'variable' to identity change. Interactionist theorists agree that both personal agency and structure have immutable effect on a successful desistance from crime and a successful re-entry into society (see Albertson, Philips, and Fowler, 2020; Giordano et al., 2002; Vaughan, 2007; King, 2013c; 2014; Weaver, 2019; Farrall et al., 2011; Farrall and Bowling, 1999; Farrall and Calverley, 2013). By structure, one refers to the ways in which social, economic, cultural, as well as political processes affect desistance (see Farrall, 2019). Nevertheless, these theorists differ in the dosage as well as in how agency interacts with social structures. Farrall and Bowling (1999:58) summarised a traditional divide:

> "The empirical research on desistance from offending has treated individuals as either 'super-agents' who are free to act as they choose and can directly influence the outcome of their lives through their decision making, or as 'super-dupes' who react to wider social forces and situations rather than helping to create these situations through their own actions."

More recently, calls have been made for desistance research to seriously consider socio-economic, and cultural systems (see Farrall, 2019). The "scholarly tug of war" (Roque, 2017: 115) continues to persist in the field as desistance theories do not always fit within strict categorisations. King (2014) distinguished desistance literature in three broad theoretical

categories: structural, agency-oriented, and integrated. Others differentiate between biological theories; cognitive maturational; rational choice; personality and psychosocial perspectives. Added to these, there are cognitive transformation, narrative, and identity theories (Roque, 2017). Further, Maruna (1997) and Barry (2010) separate between individual and agentic; social and structural; and interactionist as well as situational approaches (see Weaver, 2019; Bottoms, 2014). Nevertheless, what many of these theories have in common is a commitment that identity change is an important precursor of long-term desistance. Nevertheless, theorists differ in their decision to allow personal agency the front seat in this process. Before moving on to discuss desistance research and homicide offenders, it is necessary to provide a brief account of the desistance theories in academia.

2.4. Sociogenic approaches to desistance

Structural, or sociogenic theories explain desistance with reference to salient life-course events such as marriage, employment, and parenthood (see King, 2014). The emphasis here is on the importance of structure in movement away from crime. Identity change is seen to occur within the favourable structural conditions and do not necessarily involve the individual as an active participant; rather, a process of "desistance by default" takes place (Laub and Sampson, 2003:278-79). Longitudinal studies in this tradition found that salient life events, such as domestic unions, employment, or military experience, referred to as 'turning points' are crucial in crime trajectories (see Glueck and Glueck, 1950; Sampson and Laub, 1993, Laub and Sampson, 2003; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 2016; Maruna and Roy, 2007; Sampson, Laub and Wimer, 2006). Such salient life events offer a new sense of identity and increase the social capital of desisting individuals (Sampson and Laub, 2005; Albertson et al. 2020). this sense, this theory of desistance should be placed on the 'structure' continuum of the debate (Bersani and Doherty, 2018); subjective change is seen as "below the surface of active consciousness" and does not involve "purposeful identity change" (Sampson and Laub, 2016:328). Most research in this tradition draws from Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969) to make sense of the desistance process.

Studies have systematically emphasised the importance of family and employment on post-release reintegration/re-entry and identity reconstruction (see Aresti et al. 2020; Andersen et al., 2020; Berg and Huebner, 2011;; Uggen, 2000; Opsal, 2012; Berg and Huebner, 2011; Visher and Travis, 2003; LeBel, et al. 2008; Visher, Debus-Sherill, Yahner, 2010; Visher, 2013; Giordano et al., 2002 on the 'respectability package', Irwin, 1970; Uggen, 2000; Morizot

and Le Blanc, 2007; Cf. Skardhamar and Savolainen, 2014; Tripodi et al. 2010). It is now accepted that the quality of the workplace alongside individuals' subjective attachment triggers desistance and produces social identity change, and not work in and of itself (see Weaver, 2019). Family ties facilitate emotional support and identity transformation (Berg and Huebner, 2011). They can also act as a bridge to the job market (Glaser, 1964 in Berg and Huebner, 2011; also see Uggen, Manza, and Behrens, 2004).

Investing in marriage (Laub and Sampson, 2003) may also lead to desistance (Bersani et al. 2009; Horney et al. 1995). For Laub and Sampson (2003) marriage represents a control mechanism as well as a facilitator of new routine activities. Nevertheless, some of these spectacular effects may be hampered when ex-offenders marry criminal partners (van Schellen, 2012).

Social and structural approaches to desistance are useful in exploring the ways in which social institutions exert their influence on 'desisting' individuals but fail to seriously consider the subjects' interaction with such forces. Gadd and Farrall (2004) made the points that criminal career research disregarded the meaning attached to these social controls. These structures may be irrelevant in the absence of some motivation to change on the offenders' part (Giordano et al. 2002). In other words, as LeBel (2008:155) remarked, it may as well be that "subjective changes may precede life-changing structural events and, to that extent, individuals can act as agents for their own change". This apparent need to contain the 'beast within' (Hall, 2012a:117) in the absence of which crime is imminent, as presented by control theorists discussed above, disregards individual agency in personal change. Also, sociogenic approaches to desistance cannot explain how individuals who have limited interactions with others, including severed ties with their families and no employment prospects continue to desist by isolating themselves from others (see Nugent and Schinkel, 2016; F.-Dufour, Brassard, and Martel, 2015; Liem and Garcin, 2014 on homicide offenders). Such limited relationship with families and significant others seems to be the reality of most released homicide offenders' accounts in in available research (see Liem, 2016; 2017, Liem and Garcin, 2014 in America, or Appleton, 2010 in the UK) and thus research failed to identify the factors which support such offenders in their re-entry efforts.

2.4.1. The importance of Social Capital

As briefly referred to earlier, desistance literature started to consider whether successful desistance is conditional on the ability to develop social capital (see Fox, 2016). The

significance of wider relational factors in supporting individuals moving away from crime has been an important conversation in the desistance literature (Farrall, 2004; McNeill, 2006). The term social capital has been generally used to describe resources that reside in social networks (see Albertson and Hall, 2020) and that such resources are important for successful desistance. Desistance scholars cite an inability to accumulate, or access pro-social capital resources as hampering the decision process (see Albertson, 2021 for a review). Kay (2020) conceptualised desistance as the reorientation of anti-social capital to one which instils pro-social capital. In their Sheffield Desistance Study, Bottoms and Shapland (2011: 69-70) pointed to an interactive picture to account for the early stages of desistance for their sample of young offenders. In this sense, the complex picture includes elements such as the importance of criminal history and habits, fresh employment status and personal ties, "all held together by the individual agent" (also see McNeil et al. 2012; McNeil, 2006; Farrall, 2002; 2004 in McNeil et al. 2012; Fox, 2016). Studies highlighted the role of prisoners' families as social capital (Wright et al, 2014; Mills and Codd, 2008; Farrall, 2004). Calverley (2013; 2019) found that UK desisters from different cultural and ethnic provenances dispose of varied levels of social capital post-release.

For example, Indian families were found the most potent in identifying jobs for their released children, and on numerous occasions this meant working for the family business (ibid). Overall, as Farrall (2004) remarked, low levels of social capital are what stands at the heart of the problem facing probationers on release. Social capital may well be the personification of potential social identities which can promote the initiation in the desistance process post-release (see F.- Dufour, 2015). These indicate that social capital can act as a "sociological superglue" (Putnam, 2000:23) meaning that a diverse set of relationships post-release have the potential to place homicide offenders in positions which subsequently allows them to scaffold into new identities or strengthen existing pros-social ones.

2.5. Identity change and desistance: The self and society

In contrast to the sociogenic perspectives explored above, some authors value an initial identity change, or cognitive shift as the precursor of desistance. As mentioned in section 2.2, an important argument proposed by narrative criminologists is that identity influences behaviour. Then, narrative criminologists attempt to understand the role of language and narrative identity in the maintenance of a 'crime-free life' via desistance narratives (Fleetwood, 2016; Presser and Sandberg, 2015; Maruna, 2001, Vaughan, 2007). Researchers are yet to reach a consensus as to whether identity change is purely an individual project, or one which is

constrained/affected by societal structures (or emerges in their interaction). Some theorists propose that individual motivation is indispensable to any level of identity change and subsequent desistance. For example, Paternoster and Busway's (2009:1111) theorization purports that individuals have multiple identities – "a sense of who one is." Although social processes are seen as important, the authors give primacy to the individual cognition and self-change; social networks are sought and valued only after the emergence of a new identity. Having reached 'rock bottom' (epitomised by a 'crystallization of discontent') the process of imagining a new, possible self takes place. Maruna (1995, 2001) argued that instead of creating new identities, offenders reinterpret their past to account for a new self which is incompatible with offending. At the heart of the new narrative is a redemption script which enacts a sentiment of a newly found sense of agency and generativity (also see King 2013a, 2013b).

Interactional theorists conceptualise desistance at the interaction between agency and structural factors post-release (see LeBel, 2008 for a discussion on the interplay between agency and structure). As Weaver (2019) remarked, research in this tradition tends to draw from narrative accounts of individuals who seek to adapt and/or alter their socio-structural contexts based on their daily realities and vary in the degree of agency they assign to desisting actors (see Albertson et al. 2020). Some argue that these frameworks have predominantly focused on individual offenders and their internal dynamics of desistance rather than on social, economic, cultural, or political processes (see Farrall, 2019; Cf. Farralll, et al., 2014).

Farrall and Bowling (1999) drew from Gidden's (1984) Structuration Theory to illustrate how agency and structure are interrelated dialectically to promote identity desistance. In this sense, would-be desisters reproduce social structures, whilst taking on already existing social forms. For them, "the process of desistance is one that is produced through an interplay between individual choices, and a range of wider social forces, institutional and societal practices which are beyond the control of the individual" (Farrall and Bowling, 1999:261). King (2013a) remarked that most conceptualisations of agency in desistance research are too vague to account for the role of structure in conditioning agency. He drew from Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) framework on agency to explore how would-be desisters navigate institutional uncertainty and structural barriers to achieve their desired selves (which reflects their projective orientation to agency) post-release; in critical situations would-be desisters fell back onto habitual action and possibly crime. Then, the logical deduction is that social structures and changes in social situations are important because they can either enable or constrain agency (Farrall, Bottoms, and Shapland, 2010). But, as Burnett and Maruna's (2004) suggested,

without some initial hope, success is difficult to achieve post-release, but hope was found to shrink as the number of problems encountered after release rose for the participants.

Bottoms et al. (2004) warned that agency should be conceptualised within the limits of and not disembedded from social context; he employed Bourdiou's habitus to argue that the social context is indispensable in any transitions out of crime. New identities are often communicated through social roles (Healy, 2013); once released, to desist from crime, offenders decide that they would like to put a life of crime behind (LeBel et al., 2008). This would be mainly achieved through building a family or re-connect with families and therefore regaining a status of the 'family man', to get a steady job or simply to be a good person. Theorists are inclined to foreground the agent as evidenced above, but they "tended to hold constant the issue of structural variation in processes of desistance" (Farrall, 2019:4).

Somewhat more closely to the structural view, Giordano et al. (2002), underlined that individuals in the process of cognitive transformation need to attend to the structural possibilities that Sampson and Laub were alluding to. However, the change process has primacy, as opposed to occurring "without the offenders even realizing it" (Laub and Sampson, 2003:278-9). In this sense, there needs to be some initial openness to change to attend turning points, or 'hook for change'. These must produce a cognitive transformation and initiate a process of envisioning the future through an appealing 'replacement self'. In other words, the hooks proffer the opening or a new identity, but it is the cognitive shift, not the mere presence of the control aspect that led to desistance. On the structure agency debate, the authors position agency in the middle of a continuum. The meaning attached and the cognitive transformations that the hooks attract is more important than their mere presence (also see F-Dufour et al. 2015). In a later refinement of the theory, Giordano et al. (2007) have considered the importance of the emotional factor of change. Complementing Giordano et al. (2002), Harris (2011) argued that for cognitive transformation to occur, social support is essential. Perhaps this explains the recent focus of much desistance research on ex-offenders' social capital as a precursor to successful re-entry. Farrall (2011) contented that desisters may need to rely on their personal agency and recalibrate their identities and values based on their social surroundings and given structures (see Farrall, et al. 2014).

As can be observed from the above, desistance literature stemming from an interactional approach has yet to reach consensus on the primacy of the 'chicken or the egg' (LeBel, et al. 2008) as the catalyst of desistance. Whilst we begin to understand the role of personal agency

and structure (and their interaction) in the desistance process, it is not clear as to how these interact in the lives of those who have been inside prison for long-term sentences. Much of the research discussed above is derived from research with short term offenders. It is also not clear as to how the 'type of structure' homicide offenders interact with post-release hampers or assists with their reintegration efforts. The homicide offender will invariably encounter a set of obstacles post-release and surmounting and/or reacting to such difficulties is hypothesised to be difficult for those with little human or social capital (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011), but very little research explored these possibilities.

2.6. The bottom line: Mandatory Lifers as a neglected population in desistance research

Considering the above, there is a degree of consensus across the desistance literature that social networks, friendships, marriage, and meaningful employment all have an important role to play in "variously constraining, enabling, and sustaining" desistance" (Weaver, 2019: 650). Nevertheless, most studies discussed so far have focused on general prison populations and general offenders, incarcerated for relatively short periods of time (also see Liam and Garcin, 2014). This is a fundamental methodological issue: long-term offenders, and lifers generally, spend significant proportions of their lives in prison. This methodological and theoretical conundrum echoes across continents. For example, Kazemian and Travis (2015) described long-termers and lifers in the United States as a neglected population and unfortunately very little has changed since the publication of their article in 2015. The difficult reality is that the correlates of desistance which act as vehicles for identity reconstruction (such as family formation, employment, or parenthood), may not apply to mandatory lifers' lives post-release. The reasons for this have been captured by Flanagan (1979:234) who remarked that "family members and friends who can (and often do) wait for three years cannot (and often do not) wait for thirteen years".

Research on homicide offenders has supported this hypothesis. Liem and Garcin (2014) explored the narratives of 64 homicide offenders who were either re-incarcerated (mainly due to parole violations) or currently out on parole in Boston. They found that interviewees did not attribute their success on release to social ties; in fact, such ties acted as negative influences rather than pro-social forces but to their own 'self-efficacy' on release. Homicide offenders go to prison in their 20s and 30s which coincides with a time when most such social transitions into normative roles take place. They were at risk of "missing the boat" (Liem and Garcin,

2014:801) as their parents were deceased by the time of release, and the prospects of a new and meaningful career was not readily visible on the horizon. Some homicide offenders' families simply sever ties to avoid sharing stigma with the perpetrators (see May, 2000). In fact, Goffman made the point a long-time ago: "The loyal spouse of the mental patient, the daughter of the ex-con, the parent of the cripple, […], are all obliged to share some of the discredit of the stigmatized person to whom they are related" (Goffman, 1963:43). Ultimately, this could lead to abandonment of the offender. For example, research conducted by Liem and Weggemans (2018) found that the partners and families of high-profile ex-offenders such as homicide offenders, paedophiles, and terrorists break-up contact with the perpetrators. This is partly due to the length of ex-offenders' sentences as well as the enormity of their crime which ignites strong media coverage. Of course, the separate crimes reminded above attract different levels of social unrest; one professional participant in their study has vividly made the point:

> "When a convicted murderer comes to live next door, well, people probably do not like that. But it is a whole less problematic than when someone has a history as a sex offender" (Liem and Weggemans, 2018:484).

Given the above, it is surprising that research did not consider the type of murder committed as having relevance in the resettlement process of the perpetrator post-release. In fact, the ways in which homicide offenders make sense of their homicide have been considered in a handful of published work, which mainly focused on imprisoned individuals (Adshead, 2011; Adshead, Ferrito, and Bose, 2015; Crewe, Hulley, and Wright, 2020; Clifford, 2010; Ferrito, 2020; Ferrito et al., 2012; Wright, Crewe, Hulley, 2017; Sapsford, 1978, 1983), and the type of murder committed had rarely been central to the analysis (see Sapsford 1978; 1983, for prison-based exception and Griffin, 2018 for professionals' views on the issue).

Long-term sentences are 'dislocations in time' (Jamieson and Grounds, 2005; Cohen and Taylor, 1972) and resuming ties with children after such dislocations may be a complicating factor rather than an enabling one. Building romantic ties was constructed as a "catching up" on lost time and was constructed negatively rather than as a positive outcome (Liem and Garcin, 2014:808). Similarly, Liem (2016) found that for homicide offenders in the US domains typically considered representative of support such as intimate relationships and parenthood did not elicit support on release; in contrast, they symbolised areas of additional challenge. Many participants conceived children while in their teens, and thus, re-assuming a parental role was not generally applicable. Due to their situation, participants did not have pre-existing families and children did not represent a 'returning point'; they were vehicles for

further marginalisation. Such issues have been systematically recounted in criminological literature. After imprisonment a major obstacle encountered by long-term prisoners is finding and keeping a workplace (Jamieson and Grounds, 2005; Appleton, 2010 for UK context), but the 'felon label' (Liem, 2016) is a significant deterrent of employment for homicide offenders. In fact, employment has been found to be meaningful only if it offered opportunities for 'professional ex- roles' (see Liem 2016, 2017; Liem and Garcin, 2014).

This is not to say that similar effects of imprisonment have not been observed on other types of life sentenced offenders, but that they are magnified for mandatory lifers because of the stigma of their offence, media attention to the case, and the institutional arrangements that they face (see Griffin and Healy, 2019). This has led Liem and Garcin (2014) to argue in favour of a purely 'intra-individual' rather than sociogenic explanation of desistance and success for homicide offenders. The difference between reincarcerated homicide offenders and those desisting in their study was related to differences in 'self-efficacy'. While both groups distanced themselves from their old selves, the non-incarcerated group believed in their powers as agentic individuals and evidenced a clear perspective of the future where they had an active role.

Nevertheless, the ways in which an internal narrative of desistance is constructed, structured, and performed by mandatory lifers given structural impediments that they face post-release remains unexplored. Such an analysis should also consider differentiating between 'homicide' as an umbrella term which includes manslaughter and mandatory life sentence, which is a sentence automatically given to people who murder under UK jurisprudence (see chapter one). Research to this date has not considered this fundamental distinction in offence type which is hypothesised to be crucial in the process of making sense of one's past and index offence as well as in interactions with others post-release. Also, much research which explored the resettlement experiences of homicide offenders (for example Appleton, 2010 in the UK; Liem, 2016, 2017 in the US) tended to be retrospective studies (see Nugent and Schinkel, 2016) where identity reconstructions could not be captured 'in the now' (see Brookman, 2015) and followed up in a qualitative longitudinal design (an exception is Liem and Garcin, 2014 in the US but the study explored the narratives of individuals convicted for second-degree murder or (in)voluntary manslaughter).

As mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, as a society we have different sensibilities and emotional reactions to the constituent elements of a murder, including who the victims were

and in what context the murder occurred. This was observed by Griffin (2018) in her study on parole board members constructions of different types of lifers based on the type of murder committed (including the circumstances surrounding the commission of the offence and the relationship between the offender and victim). The members considered those who committed 'crimes of passion' such as domestic murders (see Brookman, 2022 for a distinction) 'low risk'. In contrast, gang-related murder, or organised criminal activity would constitute a high-risk category. The extent to which such constructions at the hand of criminal justice agencies affect mandatory lifers post-release remains unexplored.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief account of realist and constructionist conceptualisations of identity as imagined by philosophers and social scientists. The brief section explored 'language' as a vehicle that reveals human inner core, or, alternatively, as a constitutive system of the self and of social action. This distinction was important, especially in relation to the research question of the thesis: "how do people who have committed murder negotiate identities post-release?". It was suggested that the question excludes naïve realism and directs attention to constructionist approaches which are better equipped to explore 'negotiations of identity' via language (this is discussed in depth in chapter four). Nevertheless, the relativism which characterises much constructionism is premised upon a problematic conceptualisation of human subjectivity. It is problematic through its absence. Symbolic interactionism and narrative criminology while retaining constructionist assumptions provide some limited ways out of this conundrum. In fact, these frameworks are popular in desistance literature. There seems to be a consensus amongst desistance scholars that identity change is fundamental to any serious and long-term cessation of criminality and successful re-entry post-release. The chapter then moved on to consider identity in the context of desistance research.

Sociogenic approaches to desistance were invoked to highlight the importance of salient life events or 'turning points' (Sampson and Laub, 1993; 2003) such as family formation and gaining meaningful employment in individuals' pathways to desistance from crime. One potential way that turning points have such a strong influence on individuals is because they provide a 'stake into conforming' to a pro-social life. Further, salient life events provide clear opportunities to identity change. The narrative approaches explored, such as the one proposed by Maruna and colleagues present desistance in a much more agentic way where individuals choose to reconstruct their identity and then desist from crime as a consequence. However,

research started to explore the interplay between these salient events and the individual who needs some level of initial motivation to engage with and even contribute to emerging opportunities in their lives. In other words, the interplay at work is between the individual agent and their projection of future identities, and available opportunities within their immediate social context to achieve and perform such identities (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011). This interplay between agency and structure has received much traction in academic literature and has been generally coalesced under the banner of 'interactional approaches' (see Weaver, 2019).

In considering this critical point, the chapter highlighted a series of barriers to the resettlement of long-term offenders as described in penological literature while introducing mandatory lifers as a neglected population in the field. While the concept of 'pains of imprisonment' is among the most prominent in the study of incarceration (Haggerty and Bucerius, 2020) and thus deserving of a separate chapter, a bridge between such barriers to reintegration and desistance literature was critical to be introduced at this point. This was because previous research, especially stemming from the US had presented 'usual' correlates of desistance (Farrall, 2004) such as family formation and employment generally unadaptable to the realities of homicide offenders' lives post-release. For Liem and colleagues, what distinguished successful homicide offenders (and they were successful because they were still released) to reincarcerated homicide offenders (Liem and Garcin, 2014; Liem, 2016, 2017) was self-efficacy. The study's neo-liberal, 'responsibilizing' message of cherished individualism seems almost too good to be true.

A range of methodological and theoretical gaps in the literature were highlighted. Amongst these, (1) research has not distinguished between homicide and murder as important in influencing the ways in which internal narratives of desistance are constructed and performed in interactions. Further, (2) the type of murder committed had not been seriously considered in how mandatory lifers make sense of their own identity post the index offence as well as in bearing any influence on the way mandatory lifers are managed on release. Lastly, (3) research tends to focus on retrospective accounts of desisting versus non-desisting individuals as opposed to using longitudinal designs which can evidence change in narrative identity and interactions with individuals' social situations post-release. The next chapter will explore added barriers to reintegration to contextualise these gaps and justify the rationale of the thesis.

Chapter 3: Barriers to resettlement: exploring new pathways for mandatory lifers

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided an outline of the concept of identity and explored its use in desistance research. It then outlined a series of definitional issues pertinent to the process of desistance and continued with an overview of the main theories and debates in the desistance literature. One preliminary consensus evidenced was that *sine qua non* a fundamental, subjective identity change, long-term desistance is difficult to achieve. Although an initial discussion about mandatory lifers' barriers to reintegration (and desistance) has been explored in the previous chapter, the current chapter explores these barriers in more detail. Particularly, it draws from 'pains of imprisonment' literature to suggest that homicide offenders' adaptations to long-term imprisonment may be maladaptive to their reintegration efforts post-release. In other words, it is suggested that the very coping mechanisms that protect against such pains are not suited to life outside prison walls. Adding to this point, the chapter explores a series of 'pains of release', especially focusing on stigma and the precarious nature of the post-Fordist economy. The dissolution of traditional sites of identity construction representative of the post-industrial society (Hall, 1997; Young, 2011) represents a further impediment to the identity reconstruction of the newly released mandatory lifer in pursuit of a new, successful life. Given this hypothesised deadlock, the chapter concludes by reiterating the research question: "how do people who have committed murder negotiate identities post-release?"

3.2. Adaptations to pains of imprisonment: the case for long term offenders

Effects of long-term imprisonment have been traditionally conceptualised as carrying irreparable damage to those who have been incarcerated; this has been succinctly described by Caird (1974:98) in his autobiography: "Prison obviously has its effects on people's minds. If you set up a twenty-foot fence around a man's (sic) body, it would be naïve to say: But I didn't mean to affect his mind".

The deprivations that have been considered to accompany a prison sentence are varied. In his classical work, Sykes (1958) identified several 'pains of imprisonment' that inmates suffer while serving their prison sentence. In this sense, he identified loss of liberty, loss of goods and services, deprivations of heterosexual relationships, loss of autonomy, and security as the main

hardships with which prisoners must endure. Amongst these, "the worst thing about prison is you have to live with other prisoners" (Sykes, 1958:77). Significantly, these dispossessions were seen as directly affecting prisoners' sense of identity. For example, considering the state of Western culture where material possessions are critical in one's construction of identities, to lose one's goods may represent an attack to the "deepest layer of personality" (Sykes, 1958:68). This view is closely similar to that of more recent accounts of cultural criminologists (Presdee, 2004:280) who argue that in a consumerist society such as the one today, "to have is to exist: to have nothing is to be nothing" (for a discussion around consumerism and life post-release, see chapter six).

The absence of heterosexual relationships represented a further attack on prisoners' identity; in the absence of any contact with the opposite sex, individuals' self-image is rendered in danger of becoming half-complete. Significantly, it was in the context of these hardships that the 'inmate society' of the prison emerged as a natural manifestation aimed at alleviating adversities. Through the loss of autonomy, the prisoner is fundamentally reduced to the "weak, helpless, dependent status of childhood" (Sykes, 1958). Much of Sykes' original highlights were further developed by Goffman. In his book, *Asylums* (1961), the concept of 'mortification of the self' was used to emphasise prisoners' metamorphosis of identity which would be initiated the moment they walked through the prison gates and start to experience a series of 'degradation ceremonies' (Garfinkel, 1956). These are specifically designed to strip their sense of self. The old identity is thought to be replaced by the new identity of being a prisoner (Goffman, 1961).

Therefore, the fundamental sense of existence, that of a father, husband, or worker, are partly stripped by the sentence, which is thought to ultimately lead to the construction of a new, alternative identity (Jewkes, 2002). More recently, Warr (2016) remarked that degradation ceremonies occur much earlier than Goffman suggested - from the time of arrest. Admittedly, the ways in which the prison system exercises its power has changed since the workings of Sykes or Goffman. Its relative anonymity, its non-corporeal nature, and pervasive reach of the late-modern prison has been related to forms of adaptation that directly affects identity deconstruction and reconstruction in institutional contexts in a Kafkaesque manner (see Crewe, 2007, 2011).

Cohen and Taylor (1972) have provided a more sophisticated account of 'doing time' compared to the liberal approaches discussed above. Their long-term offenders experienced

prison hardships as pertaining to ways of 'doing time', maintaining relationships with others, and engaging in the process of counteracting the insidious processes that attack personal identity. Normally, 'shattering events' affect one life domain; this essentially means that other life domains can be employed to transgress tragedy. However, the long-term prison is not allowed such 'luxuries', Cohen and Taylor (1972:43) stated:

> "[…] he (sic) is starting a new life, one in which the routines which previously obtained in every area will be transformed. He faces two decades inside, two decades away from home, wife, children, job, social life, and friends"

This stands as evidence for the fundamentally distinct experience of imprisonment between long-term imprisonment, especially indeterminate sentences, and short-term sentenced prisoners. Furthermore, compared with those who were forced to migrate in times of war, the authors argue new prisoners are expected to assume and confront new routines, they must absorb new norms, and discover adaptive mechanisms for the new situation (Cohen and Taylor, 1972). Irwin and Owen (2005), argued that long-term imprisonment affects personality in significant ways, including loss of agency, attacks on the self, and sexual orientation. The authors built a case around the effect of the strict schedule which prisoners must respect daily; in prison, everything is planned to the minute, and this ultimately leads prisoners to lose the capacity of exercising power. The authors argue:

> "Years of following repetitive, restricted routines and of being regulated by an extensive and somewhat rigidly enforced body of rules steadily erodes the skills prisoners will need to cope with life in the outside world [...]" (Irwin and Owen, 2005:100).

Attacks on the self are represented through a continuous lack of privacy, which, it is argued, is paramount for the integration of feelings and ideas that impinge on their consciousness. Since Sykes' and Goffman's work, academic work stemming from a 'pains of imprisonment' theoretical framework has expanded exponentially. Haggerty and Bucerius (2020) conducted a thematic analysis of over 50 publications on 'pains of imprisonment' published between 1960 and 2019 and managed to identify four trajectories in the penological literature: (a) additional pains to Sykes' influential study, (b) disaggregated pains (referring to the apparent uniformity in which the study treated its prisoners), (c) pains beyond the prison walls, (d) distinctly modern pains. Arguably, the appetite which has sustained over 60 years the 'pains of imprisonment' research testifies to its continuous relevance. The additional pains to Sykes' study indicate that some fundamental shifts both in the prison system's practices and prisoners' responses to such practices had taken place. Despite the age of some of these studies and their American

ethnocentrism (which will be discussed in the next subsection), these studies indicate that long-term imprisonment has some long-lasting impacts upon the long-term offender.

3.3. Adaptations to imprisonment and pains beyond the prison gates

Positivist investigations (usually conducted by psychologists) have assessed a range of apparent deteriorations - mainly through psychometric testing - and were generally unsuccessful in finding cognitive deteriorations in prisoners who have served prison sentences to any significant extent (Banister et al. 1973; Sapsford, 1983; Rasch, 1981; Dettbarn, 2012; Van Ginneken, 2016; Zamble, 1992; Cf. Lapornik et al. 1966; Sluga, 1977). Also, there has been little evidence for clinically sizable personality or attitudinal changes over time (Heskin et al. 1973). Nevertheless, there is some indication that imprisonment can lead to higher dependency on staff with time (Sapsford, 1978; Cf. Zamble and Porporino, 1990 on 'behavioural deep freeze').

Flanagan (1980) concluded that long-term prisoners ascribe greater importance to problems that are associated with imprisonment per se than to deprivations associated with the prison environment. In this sense, the pain of 'missing somebody', 'missing social life', and 'feeling that one's life is wasted' have been systematically found to represent the crucial elements of prison deprivations that were exemplified by prisoner as affecting their lives inside prison (Richards, 1978; Flanagan, 1980; Leigey and Ryder, 2014). Importantly, other studies found long-prison sentences to lead to self-esteem assault (Flanagan, 1981), and prisonisation (Wheeler, 1961; Porporino and Zamble, 1984; Clemmer, 1940). However, there is a controversy around the validity or the comprehensibility of such studies when considering the whole array of effects that imprisonment entails. In other words, there is a difficulty for studies using psychometric tests to fully assess the distress and changes that occur as a consequence of long-term imprisonment (Jamieson and Grounds, 2005). The 'deep freeze' that characterises life imprisonment will necessarily affect virtually all aspects of prisoners' familial and social relationships, in a world that is alien to the recently released prisoner.

Institutionalisation as well as prisonization, have been conceptualised as the natural effects of long-term imprisonment. These concepts stand at the epicentre of prison sociology and of the 'deprivation model' of imprisonment. In his influential work, Clemmer (1940) has analysed changes that prisoners undertake during confinement in the United States. He described the existence of an 'inmate society' that is embodied by an inmate code, and it was thought that the existence of such prison codes represents the natural step that prisoners take in their trials

to cope with long-term imprisonment and its deprivations. In the author's view, prisonisation was the "taking on, in greater or lesser degree, of the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary" (Clemmer, 1958:299). Proponents of a deprivation model of adjustment to imprisonment (Clemmer, 1940; Goffman, 1961) plead for the occurrence of prisonisation as an adaptive response against institutionalisation. A range of studies have found evidence for prisonisation to play a crucial role in prisoners' negotiation of their identity whilst in prison and in the protection against institutionalisation (Thomas, 1977; Paterline and Petersen, 1999; Walters, 2003).

However, those who proposed an 'importation model' (Irwin and Cressey, 1962; Dhami and Loewenstein, 2007; Paterline and Petersen, 1999; Porporino and Zamble, 1984) of adaptation to prison argued that individuals enter prison with a set of personal experiences, vulnerabilities, and strengths (Porporino and Zamble, 1984), that would ultimately affect their adjusting patterns. In this sense, anecdotal evidence from prisoner biographies could be fruitful in elucidating the extent to which pre-prison identities are impacting experience within prison. One notable example is Caird (1974:100), who, as a Cambridge alumnus, argued "I imagined it would be very hard to be accepted by prisoners as 'one of them', that the barriers created by class, education and offence would be all but insurmountable". His method of choice was to embrace an intellectual attitude, where he "buried in the heavier books for which [his] education equipped [him]". This is in stark contrast with prisoners from working class backgrounds (Boyle, 1977; Cook and Wilkinson 1998, Weaver, 2008, McVicar, 1974), who have engaged with long periods of rebellion against authority, mechanisms captured by Goffman (1961), in what he called "secondary adjustments". Interestingly, these 'rebellious' prisoners were found to be highly successful (compared to the 'model prisoner') by some authors (Goodstein, 1979) when released. The alternative for the hegemonic masculinity identity which would normally be suitable for working class prisoners from a middle-class background are thought by Jewkes (2005a) to embrace a 'scholar' or 'student' identity to adapt to the working-class dominated culture of prison.

Irrespective of the prisoner's provenance, a range of symbolic interactionist studies (based on short term offenders) point that to 'survive', new inmates create a distinction between their 'true' identity (pre-prison identity) and a false identity (Schmid and Jones, 1991, Wheeler, 1961). The new identity, which is thought to be based on impression management skills (Goffman, 1959) – although initially designed for survival – gradually evolves into an alternative identity, especially suitable to the prison world (Schmidt and Jones, 1991). Jewkes

(2005) similarly said that 'wearing a mask' is the most prevalent coping strategy adopted by prisoners. The distinction between the two identities has been traditionally conceptualised as 'backstage' and 'frontstage' (see Goffman, 1959). Cook (1998:32) highlights the point vividly in his autobiography:

> "The terrible irony of it is that, when you have denied your true emotions for so long, it is very hard to recover them and, when you leave the prison environment, you find yourself broken, a shell of what you used to be."

Jacquelyn and Gull (2015) argued that new inmates adopt a convict identity during early imprisonment to 'stave off' the uncertainties of a threatening environment; as they become fully acculturated, later within the sentence, they begin to question the convict identity. This shift in identity, or 'the Enlightenment' (Jacquelyn and Gull 2015), was experienced as an ambivalence that prisoners needed to negotiate throughout the sentence; on the one hand, the prison identity was seen as inauthentic, while on the other, there was a need to embrace it for 'survival'.

Research which investigated the effect of long-term imprisonment diminished significantly in the last six decades and had been predominantly conducted in North America, with much of our existing knowledge on the topic published in the 1970s and 1980s (also see Hulley et al. 2016). This is an important consideration given that issues that impact contemporary societies, and by extension prisons and long-term prisoners are significantly different to a few decades ago. For example, Kazemian (2019) reminded us that prisons are now more overcrowded, mental health issues more prevalent (or diagnosed more effectively), and that we now recognise that prisons are ethnically diverse places. In fact, many of these early studies betray a palpable American ethnocentrism, overlooked in British theoretisation (see Young, 2011).

Further, it has been argued that the British deindustrialization consequence of the neo-liberal policies of the 80s alongside consumer capitalism's intrinsic driving forces had led to fundamental shifts in human subjectivity (Hall, 1997; Winlow and Hall, 2015) and the ways in which fundamental institutions function (Wieviorka, 2009). In this sense, it would be naïve to assume that ensuing cultural shifts have not creeped into the penal system and influenced the formation of subculture(s). To what extent these forces affect prison coping mechanisms and exert pressures on early released long-term offenders (homicide offenders particularly) and their identity reconstructions is unexplored.

Although much of our current knowledge on the topic of prison adaptation is outdated and focused mainly on short-term offenders, there are reasons for optimism. A range of authors from the University of Cambridge's Prisons Research Centre, led by Crewe and colleagues, have recently resuscitated interest in the area. Their research gravitates around the adaptations to imprisonment of young long-term offenders and mandatory life sentenced individuals. Their studies are limited to mandatory lifers inside prisons but are useful in preparing the ground for the current thesis. The review will move on to explore this body of literature.

3.3.1. Mandatory Lifers adapt to imprisonment and prepare for release

Recently, Crewe, Hulley, and Wright (2020) made the point that 'pains of imprisonment' as described by Sykes (1958) are intensified for people who commit murder due to the enormity of their crime and the length of their sentence. This would naturally then lead to a series of distinctive adaptive responses. Importantly, in the wake of their murder conviction, prisoners need to make sense of a significant disruption in their narrative coherence and integrate the enormity of having committed murder in their biographical selfhood (see Crewe et al., 2020). The biographical rupture leads to a series of 'affective responses' such as anger, grief, and intrusive recollections of the murder, which are comparable to acute stress disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder as well as complicated grief. Wright, Crewe, and Hulley (2017) concluded that the patterns of adjustment for homicide offenders reflect a particular 'offence-time nexus'. In other words, there is a dual psychological burden characterised by the extreme offence, combined with the time served that generate different patterns of response for murderers compared to the general prison population.

The authors applied a Freudian psychoanalytic framework to explore how the mandatory lifers in the study defended against a series of specific pains such as entry shock, temporal vertigo (referring to making sense of the sentence length), and intrusive recollections (of the murder) by way of suppression, denial, and sublimation. In this sense, to defend against these pains, participants in the early stages of their sentence tended to block unwanted thoughts and minimised reality by way of suppression; some went as far as to deny the weight of the sentence and the reality of their crime. Others, in a much more positive manner, harnessed their energy into intellectual and positive endeavours. Crewe et al. (2020) added to suppression issues (which in their research had emerged as a gendered manifestation of drug abuse and self-harm in a temporal escape manifestation) pertaining to escape through self-isolation. Along with suppression and escape, prisoners reported engaging in 'jailing', a term which denotes engagement with illicit activities within the prison's informal economy. Importantly, these

types of activities had a sense of nihilism as a driving force, represented by a form of "lucid indifference" (Camus, 1954:94 in Crewe et al., 2020:110) but which tended to change with time. Amongst other pains, they found participants to be concerned about becoming docile, feared cognitive deterioration, and complained about their general health later in the sentence (also see Crewe, Hulley, and Wright, 2016).

The important point to note here is that such adaptations lead to fundamental changes in the self which may prove maladaptive on release (Hulley, Crewe, and Wright, 2016). Such results have been contextualised and situated within participants' stages of their imprisonment. The highest discrepancy in terms of deprivation was found between prisoners in the 'post-tariff' group and 'very early' and 'early group'. In this sense, 'thinking about the time they have left to serve', 'autonomy' and 'having to deal with an alien environment', were significantly more severe for the initial phase; this could reflect coping mechanisms that prisoners engage with at the initial stages of their sentence. In this interpretation, the logical deduction then is that prisoners find the appropriate ways to cope with their new environment by redefining it but remain essentially the same. Nevertheless, this may not be an accurate representation of reality. In fact, the very coping mechanisms which are mobilised at the beginning of these sentences (and later) may be deeply transformative which means that they could potentially then affect resettlement in ways which have not been explored to any considerable extent.

For example, Liam and Kunst (2013) found homicide offenders to experience a 'post-incarceration syndrome' (PICS). This included institutionalised personality traits such as paranoia, hampered decision making, social sensory deprivation (especially relating to difficulties in social interactions) and a sense of temporal alienation. In this sense, adaptive responses to pains to imprisonment as highlighted above, once internalised work their way to construct a different type of person by the time of release (see Hulley et al., 2016). This has been well captured by Cook (1998:32) when referring to coping with imprisonment and release his autobiography:

> "Only afterwards, do you realize that you've destroyed your emotions in the process. This is what I found to be one of the most damaging things about prison and is the reason why many long-term inmates find it impossible to revert back to life on the outside".

Nevertheless, not all criminological research participants identified prison as an institution of intrinsic torment and human waste. In fact, a recent review by Crewe and Levins (2020) remarked that some prisoners interpret and utilise prisons as "reinventive institutions". Such

prisoners find a silver lining in their incarceration and admit that prison had saved their lives or contributed significantly to their personal development. A range of authors argued that prison can lead to post-traumatic growth (Van Ginneken, 2016; Vanhooren et al., 2018). Many find that their incarceration had contributed to their 'awakening' (Irwin, 2009), and that there is indeed "lotus in the mud" (see Kazemian, 2019). For example, as they progressed through their sentences, many of Crewe, Hulley, and Wight (2016:21) mandatory lifers started to make their sentence meaningful and constructive and ended up "swimming with the tide, rather than against it". Also, many of Crewe et al. (2020:197) murderers have been motivated by generativity in prison, where a pressing need to give back and to be "an agent of positive change" was related to feelings of "profound remorse and self-loathing about the offence". This body of literature then evidences the panoply of prison experiences which are intrinsic and specific to people who committed homicide. It is reasonable then to suggest that the release of these men would carry equally idiosyncratic pathways to 'reintegration' which have not been explored.

3.3.2. Surviving the disaster when you are the disaster

Those who kill are characteristic of contrasting identities: they are homicide perpetrators, but also, victims of trauma (see Doctor, 2008). These offenders need to answer a pressing question: "how do you survive a disaster when you are the disaster?" (Doctor, 2008:4). An index offence of homicide fragments one's identity (Adshead, Ferrito and Bose, 2015), damage one's life story, and implicitly alters how perpetrators perceive their own selves (Ferrito et al., 2017). One participant in Parker's (1995:111-112) journalistic account of 12 released murderers' narratives expressed the 'murderer's condition' clearly:

> "My biggest difficulty, it's living with myself, trying to come to terms with myself, face what I've done. I took someone's life away […], there's no way I can give his life back or make restitution. […], what I'd done was final, irrevocable, and it wasn't done for any faintly acceptable reason" (Andi Reid, released homicide offender in Parker, 1995:111-112).

The quote may indicate an impossibility to make good after release (Maruna, 2001) due to the irreparability of their crime. Moreover, murderers may be traumatized by the homicide itself and show symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Gray et al. 2003; Liem and Kunst, 2013; Papanastassiou et al. 2004; Thomas, Adshead and Mezey, 1994). The type of murder committed is significant in the acerbity of the symptoms (see Gray et al. 2003; Papanastassiou et al. 2004) especially if the victim and perpetrator had a close relationship

(Sapsford, 1993), for example when a family member was killed (Papanastassiou et al. 2004). Interestingly, researchers stemming from a psychodynamic tradition underlined that like Oscar Wilde's fictional character Dorian Gray, murderous acts themselves can represent a 'projective identification' (McAlister, 2008; Motz, 2008). After a traumatic event, 'meaning-making' is challenged and the 'self' is affected (Burnell et al. 2011, Janeff-Bulman, 1992; Joseph and Linley, 2005 in Ferrito et al., 2017). Transformations or reconstructions of core identities require a fundamental shift in self-understanding and a continuous activity of renegotiating interpersonal interactions (Veysey, Martinez and Christian, 2009). Crewe, Hulley, and Wright (2017) surveyed 310 men and 23 women imprisoned for murder and found that they could never 'come to terms' with what they have done and expressed their desires to 'give back' and to 'make amends' as both lives have been wasted (theirs and the victims'). The extent to which this is something that mandatory lifers still pursue post-release, remains unexplored.

3.4. Walking out of prison: Barriers to resettlement

The previous section has explored prisoners' adaptations to a set of pains of imprisonment which stand at the heart of prison journeys and personal transformations. The argument proposed was that the very coping mechanisms that homicide offenders employ to adapt to their condition may prove maladaptive upon release. This section relocates the prisoner and positions them outside the prison walls and back in the community. As the concept of 'pains of' became a trope in criminological literature, it is important to distinguish between pains of release as represented by those which are representative of ex-prisoners' adaptation to the new environment (which is seldom favourable to the ex-offender), and concepts such as 'pains of probation' (Durnescu, 2011), or 'pains of desistance' (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016) as including the penal actor as contributing to probationers' experiences (see Durnescu, 2019).

One of the most important elements of the ex-offenders' lives post-release is dealing with and managing stigma in the community. Stigma occurs through a process where one's life is dominated by their social identity. Individuals are generally assessed through this label, which is ultimately considered to be dominant and operates as a 'master status' (Becker, 1963; May, 2000). From a sociological perspective, Goffman (1963:3) defined stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" and is representative of one's social identity (also see LeBel, 2008). Ultimately, stigma can affect the construction of pro-social identities post-release as the label is seen to deny certain stories, and to construct individuals as unidimensional (Garfinkel, 1956). As discussed in chapter one, once released, the mandatory lifer operates under a life licence. It

is under such conditions that the offender is further denounced; the stigma is seen as deconstructing one social object and replacing it with another. Garfinkel (1956:422) made the point clearly: "In the social calculus of reality representations and tests the former identity stands as accidental; the new identity is the 'basic reality'".

In Goffman's view, a person with a stigma must quickly decide whether they will disclose information, to whom, with what reasons and importantly, when. In his seminal study he distinguished between two general strategies to manage stigma. The stigmatised individual can simply engage with 'passing', where they conceal their stigma, or they can 'cover' by way of acknowledging it and try to minimise its impact. For Goffman (1963:126), "many of those who rarely try to pass, routinely try to cover". Analogous to the strategies above, LeBel's (2008) research points to a distinction between reactive and proactive approaches employed by stigmatised individuals.

In this sense, reactive approaches include concealment of the stigmatised past, avoidance, as well as withdrawal; intermediate approaches include some sort of selective disclosure. Proactive strategies are represented by pre-emptive disclosure. In other words, as the names of these strategies suggest, newly released ex-prisoners need to decide on whether they should keep their spoiled identities a secret, or to pre-emptively tell new acquaintances about their past. This decision stands at the heart of their stigma management strategies and navigation of social life as well as employment after release. In fact, disclosing is not always in the hands of ex-offenders. In England and Wales, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA) (1974) sets out the precepts of disclosing previous convictions to employers, but no research to date has explored the ways in which mandatory lifers manage their stigmatised past post-release either in social interactions, or in finding and maintaining employment in the UK. An important modality of deflecting stigma is through the development of a new prosocial identity (Giordano et al., 2002), that usually takes the form of 'family man', 'provider' or 'good parent' (LeBel et al. 2008). In this sense, work seems like the perfect site of pro-social identity construction, but research has found that stigma leads to social rejection including from the workplace (Petersilia, 2003; LeBel, 2012; Durnescu, 2019). The vicious circle is exacerbated if we consider how these traditional sites of identity construction have been eroded in late modernity (Young, 2011). This is the irony which Young (2011:94) remarked, that "just as there is a greater stress on creating one's identity, the building blocks of identity become less substantial." The next sections will explore these building blocks in more detail before moving on to the conclusion of this chapter.

3.5. Stigma and the precarious nature of the job market

As Burnett has observed the job market was dramatically different to that of half a century before (Burnett, 2000). Hall (2012a:115) has succinctly described this process: "deindustrialisation, unemployment, inflation and a surfeit of inactive surplus capital all rose together to threaten the social order, profitability and the value for money, all close to the heart of the dominant bourgeois class". A consumer culture emerged as an alternative or substitute to a symbolic order long left devoid of any substance after deindustrialisation (Winlow and Hall, 2016), with the accent increasingly placed on opportunity and individualism. For individuals to construct a status position is to fragment traditional communal interdependencies (Hall and Winlow, 2005).

The fact that our current service-based economy is prepared to absorb as many new employees as possible in jobs commonly described as 'McJobs' (Lloyd, 2018) might be viewed merely as a pyrrhic victory (Rusu, forthcoming). Once released, mandatory lifers are thrown into the vortex of precarious, flexible, and ephemeral (Winlow and Hall, 2006; 2013; also see Lloyd, 2018b; 2019) 'post-modern jobs' of the leisure service economy (also see Bauman, 2005). This 'new' service economy, with its competitive individualist ethos, and increasingly used zero-hour contracts and part-time work, may offer a sense of false security and optimism to these 'returning citizens' as they enter unstable waters upon release. Recently, Sheppard and Ricciardelli (2020) made the point that ex-prisoners may want to refrain from rushing straight into jobs post-release, as this may expose themselves to potential exploitation. Further, the authors remarked that their sample of Canadian ex-prisoners were dissuaded from their desistance pathway by "the low waged, non-gratifying, temporary, exploitative, work for which they qualify or have the opportunity to pursue" (Sheppard and Ricciardelli, 2020:48). The dangers of such disappointment were represented by Halsey et al. (2016:1506) where participants engaged in "fuck it" scenarios, where desistance is simply not worth it compared to criminal lifestyles. Then, clearly, "the current precarious job market further exacerbates the lack of employment opportunities for former prisoners" (Sheppard and Ricciardelli, 2020:38). This is the 'capitalist realism' (Fisher, 2009) that newly released mandatory lifers will most likely encounter and navigate. Then, it may be the case that the pains of release as imagined by previous research are not comprehensive and potentially ineffective in making sense of the difficulties encountered by most homicide offenders on release.

3.6. Pains of freedom: the role of supervision

Added to such fluid and ephemeral work are added a set of 'pains of freedom' (Shammas, 2014) established in penological literature (see Durnescu, 2011, Crewe, 2011; McNeil, 2019; Liem and Kunst, 2013). Such pains refer to: experiences of stigma, lack of work, and being on probation (especially referring to deprivation of autonomy and time, see Durnescu, 2011). This has been captured in desistance research:

> "Acquiring new routines relevant to a non-offending life may mean, among other things, finding work despite the disadvantages of a criminal record; scaling down expenditure on leisure pursuits despite the lure of a hedonist consumer culture" (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011:276).

A range of 'pains of freedom' (Shammas, 2014) have been identified, where the probation officer has a direct role in either alleviating or exacerbating the existing circumstance. For example, Durnescu (2011) has found his participants to experience deprivation of autonomy, of time, finances, stigma, or just conceive their life as being under threat as consequences directly related to their experience of probation. Probation officers could either intensify such deprivations. Research conducted in open prisons reiterates such concerns (Shammas, 2014). For example, Shammas (2014:110) found newly arrived prisoners to experience confusion: "you are free but you aren't free". They are unsure of their contrasting roles within the anxious journey from closed to open prison, and finally into the community. Increasingly the onus is placed on the importance of taking ownership and responsibility; a 'submission of subjectivity' is therefore taking place with the aim of remodelling the prisoners (Foucault, 1983:213 in Shammas, 2014:118)

It has also been suggested that the lifer is required to navigate imprisonment with "tact" and that there is a demand for the capacity to negotiate identities in such a way as to signal low risk to authorities, whilst at the same time showing signs of 'being rehabilitated' (Warr, 2019). Warr's (2019) study of young indeterminate sentenced prisoners had to engage with 'narrative labour' to navigate these contrasting expectations of the prison system. This was not without risks, as:

> "If incapable performers fail to adopt these accepted linguistic tropes and have sufficient disciplinary capital, then impossible barriers are being put in their way by the very disciplinary discourses which are supposed to aid their 'rehabilitation' and release" (Warr, 2019:42).

Once released, the lifer knows that the "responsible officer can recall an individual to prison if they consider the risk of causing harm imminent or of high risk" (HMIP, 2018:7). To avoid recall to prison, the shell of soft power needs to be carried out throughout the licence period and the internalised containment of risk needs to be continuously performed (See McNeil, 2018). In this context, stigma operates as an extra challenge, or a primary challenge for the returning prisoner who is trying to prove 'worthy of forgiveness' (see LeBel, 2012, 2020).

McNeill (2018) found the quality of the relationship with the probation officer as crucial in ameliorating one mandatory life sentenced individual's experience of life licence. A good relationship decreases the odds of being recalled as much as 19 times for life sentenced prisoners (Appleton, 2010), while a 'bad relationship'/supervision and imposed conditions can forestall homicide offenders' re-entry (Liem, 2017). One needs therefore to consider that this population is usually recalled due to parole conditions, and not due to further offending (see chapter one). In this sense, the distinction between primary and secondary desistance becomes blurred. An important element that added to their isolation was a pervasive sense of surveillance; the eventuality of recall was seen as imminent and could be triggered for the slightest 'slip' of behaviour.

Although research on re-entry and desistance has established as one of the most fruitful areas of research in criminology (Maruna, 2001; Maruna and Immarigeon, 2011), there is still little research focusing on the experience of life sentenced prisoners after a life imprisonment (although see Appleton, 2010; Coker and Martin, 1985 in the UK; Liem, 2016, 2017; Liem and Kunst, 2013; Liem and Garcin, 2014 in the US). As discussed in chapter two, the probation service can assist with the development of social capital as well as human capital, but whether this is what happens in practice with mandatory lifers is unexplored. The latest Joint Inspection by HMI Probation and HMI Prisons (2013:6) found that those subjected to a life sentence were treated the same as short-term offenders in the community. The report identified this as "short-sighted" considering that long-term offenders may be institutionalised and therefore would present a set of idiosyncratic needs post-release.

3.7. Conclusion

Considering the above, resettlement for homicide offenders seems to be an impossible mission. The returning mandatory lifer needs to quickly decide on how to negotiate their spoiled identities in interaction with others and enact an internal narrative of desistance which accounts for what happened, and what should happen in the future. As traditional sites of identity

construction may be unavailable, there is a pressing need for identities to be re-written and reinvented. The overly flexible and precarious character of the post-industrial service economy may not be able to provide the long-term stability that both mandatory life sentenced individuals and their case pursue.

The lifer may be further pressured to organise their identities around the consumer culture which emanates from underneath the real of such economic forces. Such a scenario may render the returning lifer disappointed and in need to innovate. Prison-based adaptive behaviours further denounce the newly released lifer as an alien and a misfit to conventional society – they need to quickly denude the vestiges of a life imprisonment. It is this deadlock that mandatory lifers will most likely need to solve and which this thesis is attempting to explore. Given the above, the central question is: 'how do people who have committed murder negotiate identities post-release?'

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Introduction

To understand how mandatory life sentenced individuals negotiate their identities post-release the adoption of a qualitative methodology was seen as appropriate. However, the research question requires an initial exploration of preliminary and metaphysical reflections. This is a decisive step given that the theories used in this thesis inform the most suitable practical methods to finding answers to the research question. As Holstein and Gubrium (2012:5) remarked, "methods of analysis do not emerge out of thin air. They are informed by, and extend out of, particular theoretical sensibilities".

In this sense, the research question is composed of a series of concepts on which much ink has been spilled over the years including 'identity'. To insist that mandatory lifers 'negotiate their identities' is to lean towards some theoretical underpinnings of the research, which ultimately inform the methods used. The syntagm 'negotiate identities' excludes naive realism as the foundation of the thesis, as it seems to contradict an intrinsic essentialist conceptualisation to identity. The chapter will explore the philosophical underpinnings of the research, including the theoretical framework, before moving on to providing a step-by-step description of the research process. The chapter describes access to participants and sampling strategy (including justifications around sample size). This is followed by a detailed account of the data collection method (the longitudinal narrative interview). Issues around taking a reflexive stance and ethical considerations in narrative inquiry are then discussed. Finally, the chapter outlines the data analysis method: Dialogic Narrative Analysis (Frank, 2010a; Caddick, 2015; Smith, 2016) and reflects on its suitability given the research question and the aims/objectives of the thesis which are reiterated below:

"How do people who have committed murder negotiate identities post-release?"

- Explore the lived experiences of identity construction, management, and maintenance for people who committed murder;

- Develop a conceptual model that captures the significance of specific factors in identity reconstruction of people who committed murder;

- Critically consider the extent to which formal and informal mechanisms of support/surveillance of mandatory lifers constrains or enables pro-social identity reconstruction post-release;

- Develop a set of appropriate recommendations for state, voluntary and private sector organizations in and around the criminal justice system to promote better outcomes in working with released individuals who committed murder.

4.2. Philosophical considerations and research design

As mentioned in the introduction, the syntagm 'negotiate identities' which is part of the research question excludes naive realism as the foundation of the thesis, as it seems to contradict an intrinsic essentialist conceptualization to identity. Perspectives which consider the role of language as the primary site where identities are constructed, performed, and contested seem more appropriate (see Burr, 2015). In this way, participants' negotiation of identities can be explored through studying language and text. By taking this position, interviews are seen as the most appropriate method of data collection.

As such, social constructionism is fundamentally anti-essentialist and values language as a social phenomenon; the self is produced and negotiated in social interactions (Burr, 2015). A narrative perspective is compatible with constructionism in making the ontological claim that identities are narratively constructed (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). Most narrative theorists agree with this claim, but they tend to disagree whether the individual or the social are the principal site of narrative identity construction. Some prefer a "thick individual and thin social" view, whilst others prefer a "thick social and thin individual" one (Smith and Sparkes, 2008:7). This is precisely the difference between constructionism and constructivism (with a v) (Burr, 2015).

Narrative constructivism suggests that people's narratives and stories are created intersubjectively (Sparkes and Smith, 2008), and are generally seen as something that people have in their minds (see McAdams, 1993). This is a psychosocial perspective over narrative identity, or a 'cognitive-personality approach' (Smith, 2016) committed to either a realist or constructivist epistemology and a realist ontology (Smith and Sparkes, 2006, 2008; Smith and Hodkinson, 2005). What participants say has relevance beyond the interview context – it is part of their ongoing story (Crossley, 2000) and is "reflexively understood by the person in terms of their biography" (Giddens, 1991:53). Then, identities are seen as situated within the individual rather than the social; the latter is still significant as personal narratives are

influenced by socio-cultural matrices available at societal level. In other words, they are not made from thin air and thus imply some level of interaction in the relational world.

In contrast to constructivism, the focus of narrative constructionism is not on the inner worlds of individuals and their complementary cognitive scripts only, but on narratives as vehicles through which selves are articulated (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). For a social constructionist perspective, narratives are "discursive actions" and "they derive their significance from the way in which they are employed within relationships" (Gergen and Gergen, 2006:118). In this sense, the perspective does not imagine individuals having their readily "narrated life stories in their back pockets […], waiting for a researcher to collect them" (Alasuutari, 1997:6), but rather, narrative identities are formed to an important degree 'on the spot' and thus serve precise functions. This point has been already addressed to some degree by Somers (1994:622) for whom "all identities […], must be analysed in the context of relational and cultural matrices because they do not 'exist' outside of these complexities". Here 'the social' is the crucial force in identity construction (Smith, 2016). Nevertheless, we need to acknowledge that we are not always confronted with wholly new creation of stories in interview contexts. Rather, these are newer versions of some events that have been narrated previously due to the rehearsed nature of talk (Taylor, 2005).

4.2.1. Where does the thesis stand? Ontological and epistemological considerations

The thesis adopts a social constructionist position. Whilst favouring the narrative constructionist approach as the most appropriate to conceptualise and tackle the research question, it does acknowledge that offenders construct stories about their offence which are rehearsed in forensic settings such as therapeutic communities (TC) (Stevens, 2012, 2013) or through participation in Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) and Narcotic Anonymous (NA) (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). In that sense, some narratives may indeed seem to be readily available and kept "in their back pockets" (Alasuutari, 1997:6), but are in fact shaped in interactions. It is difficult to argue that narrative identities are being constructed 'purely' on the spot, but instead one needs to consider how stories are shaped by a variety of structures as described above, including the research context and social interactions (where constructionism takes interaction seriously). Participants need to decide what kind of stories they want to say in the interview context (not always consciously, see Spector-Mersel, 2011), but these are not necessarily entirely new creations. As discussed above, many of the stories that participants tell have been previously used/rehearsed (see Taylor, 2005). In this sense, individuals draw from a range of narrative resources (which are culturally and relationally constructed, see Smith

and Monforte, 2020) to construct newer versions of events in the interview context that serve specific purposes. This is an important theoretical point when considering the research question of the thesis: "how do people who have committed murder negotiate identities post-release". The position taken here is one depicting a "thin individual" and "thick social relational" position (Smith and Sparkes, 2008:7). This is due to the dialogic and performative nature of identities, which is something that people do rather than something that they have. Language has a crucial importance: it constructs the self in social interactions (and therefore, the approach here is anti-foundational, as the self does not just exist awaiting exploration) but is performed within relationships. This also implies a rejection of neo-realism, as reality is not accessible by way of exploring these stories (this does not mean that there is no such thing as a real world) which in the end are individual constructions of reality as imagined by participants. While 'physical things' exist, psychosocial phenomena are multiple and created by people as opposed to having a completely independent existence outside human reach (Smith and Monforte, 2020). As such, the thesis is committed to epistemic constructionism (see Edwards, 1997 for a distinction between ontological and epistemic constructionism).

4.3. Theoretical framework

The thesis draws upon multiple theoretical strands including socio-narratology (Frank, 2010a; Smith, 2016) and narrative criminology (see Maruna and Liem, 2020 for a recent review). Also, the thesis draws from the Good Lives Model of offender rehabilitation (Ward and Marshall, 2007, Ward and Fortune, 2013), as well as ultra-realist thought (Hall and Winlow, 2015).

In this sense, the framework represents a symbiosis of existing theories, which were selected based on the potential that they hold in answering the research question: "How do people who have committed murder negotiate identities post-release?". As mentioned previously the question invites perspectives which conceptualise language as the primary site where identities are constructed and challenged (in other words, negotiated). Socio-narratology emerged as the ideal candidate in exploring the research question and aims/objectives of the thesis. To consider the relationship between narrative identities and criminal behaviour, I turned to the Good Lives Model of offender rehabilitation (Ward and Steward, 2003). The theory posits that the rehabilitation of offenders is dependent on the construction of a more adaptive, prosocial narrative identity (Ward and Marshall, 2007; also see Gannon, 2007; Ward and Marshall, 2007). I will briefly present these perspectives and argue in favour of a hybrid synthesis of these conceptual tools as the most appropriate to tackle the research question of the thesis.

4.3.1. Socio-Narratology and Narrative Criminology

Given the thesis's interest in the ways in which mandatory lifers reconstruct their narrative identities post-release, the study is located within a narrative paradigm (see Spector - Mersel, 2010). As mentioned in section 4.2.1, the thesis is committed to a social constructionist view of knowledge and narrative and thus values 'the social' as the designated space where identities are created and performed via language (see Burr, 2002, 2015). In line with this reasoning, the thesis draws from socio-narratology (see Frank, 2010a) as the main theoretical framework. This means that the stories gathered do not merely "reveal something about who we are" (Spector - Mersel, 2011:173) but are in fact guiding our action (Frank, 2010a). Narratives are seen as constituting our senses of selves and identities (also see section 2.2.3. on Narrative Criminology)

Socio-narratology conceptualises stories as actors in the sense that it explores what stories do to individuals, rather than conceptualising them as portals into people's minds (Frank, 2010a). Stories teach people who they are. Individuals do not make up stories out of thin air, but these are always made from other stories which surround the storyteller. When an individual tells a story, they "draw from the menu of narrative resources that culture and social relations make available" (Smith and Monforte, 2020:2). This is not to say that storytellers have no agency; a narrative subject can negotiate with master narratives (see McLean and Syed, 2015) and resist dominant cultural narratives by telling counter-narratives.

Socio-narratology conceptualises narrative resources as paramount in the construction and maintenance of narrative identity. Caddick (2015:232) suggests that "narrative resources are linked to narrative identity in that resources are required for sustaining identity performances". In the absence of narrative maps, to use Frank's (2010a) term, a sense of direction is lost. Some of the tools used by socio-narratologists are employed by this thesis. For example, the concept of Interpellation (which derives from Althusser's 1971 work on ideology) is specifically important to explore the ways in which formal supervision (for example the probation service) enables or constrains mandatory lifers to construct pro-social identities post-release (as per the aims/objectives of the thesis). In his book, *Letting Stories Breathe*, Frank (2010a) suggested that Interpellation is a process (an invitation) which teaches people who they are by asking them to take a particular identity. Then, this theoretical tool is appropriate to explore the 'pulling and pushing' forces which invite homicide offenders to take on a series of identities post-release. Importantly some people seem more likely to respond to such invitations and to take on identities than others. The narrative habitus, or "the collection of stories in which a life

is formed" (Frank, 2010a:49) of the individual is crucial in deciding the force and success of the invitation (also see Fleetwood, 2016). Thus, Frank drew from Bourdieu's theory to suggest that "narrative habitus is the unchosen force in any choice to be Interpelled by a story" (Frank, 2010a:53). It involves a narrative repertoire that one has mastered and uses, a disposition and openness to hear some stories and not others and takes the form of an inner library.

4.3.2. Socio-narratology (ii): Narrative Resources and social/resettlement capital

There is an obvious strength to taking on this approach as it allows the research to explore stories as personal as well as culturally derived. Taking on a socio-narratological approach is also useful as it allows us to consider the ways in which individuals accumulate narrative resources to perform new identities post-release. Following on from this point, the concept of social capital is fruitful to consider in conjunction with that of narrative resources. Naturally, a strong social capital, similar to a "sociological superglue" (Putnam, 2000:23) enables individuals to develop the necessary narrative resources to perform a series of new identities with credibility post-release. Albertson and Halls (2020:311) made this point succinctly:

> "If one has a diverse range of relationships with family members, friends, work colleagues, wider social acquaintances, these relationships can constitute significant assets when an individual, group, or community faces changes, difficulties, or transitions"

Life post-release in rife with such difficult transitions – having a wide network of support post-release would then invariably place one in a favourable position to develop/enhance available narrative resources to reconstruct their identities.

Overall, the thesis uses interpellation, narrative habitus, and the concept of narrative resources to explore how mandatory lifers negotiate and reconstruct identities post release (especially in the context of their supervision, on a life licence). Further, the concept of narrative resource is combined with that of capital (Bourdieu, 1994 in Greenfell, 2014 also see Best, 2019 on resettlement capital) to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role social relationships have on homicide offenders' identity reconstruction and performance post-release. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the thesis considers that narrative identity change is at the heart of the desistance process: to make sense of the relationship between crime, narratives, and desistance, I turned to the Good Lives Model.

4.4. Access and the MLS sample

Having considered a series of theoretical elements as explored in the previous sections, I then moved on to collecting data. Necessarily, this meant that I needed access to mandatory lifers who committed different types of murder and who were willing to accept being interviewed.

Many researchers admit that by having personal contacts with the study population, access becomes more comfortable to negotiate (Duke, 2002; Wilkes, 1999 in Reeves, 2004). Initially, I had no such contacts, and therefore it was difficult to find a way to build connections and rapport with gatekeepers - this would be the only way to 'break-in' (Trulson et al. 2004). Similarly to Kay's (2016) doctoral experience, in preparation for the study, I contacted those in my closest proximity - professors and fellow colleagues, whom I thought could link me with appropriate gatekeepers. Then, it would have been simple: a snowballing strategy would lead into establishing and maintaining contacts. At this point, I had already started to engage with the appropriate literature around different strategies of establishing and maintaining such links (Trulson et al., 2004; Reeves, 2004).

A snowball sample became possible after one of my visits to a prison where I used to work on an Enabling Environments accreditation portfolio during my first two years as a PhD student. A probation officer there linked me up with a mandatory life sentenced individual in London. Later, I identified other gatekeepers through social media platforms. All gatekeepers were informed that to be included, participants had to have committed murder and to have been released from prison back into the community. These individuals were purposely selected to explore the aims and objectives of the thesis. In total, five released mandatory life sentenced individuals were interviewed, four of whom have been interviewed repeatedly over a period of 2 years. Several other individuals who reached the inclusion criteria refused to participate from the very beginning of the research or postponed continuously. This made me question my capacity to conduct this research as well as my interpersonal, communication skills. On numerous occasions I blamed my initial strategy in conversation with some of the men as having been either 'too directive' or too 'soft'. I thought that directiveness would portray a sense of professionalism - I should act as someone for whom an interview with a convicted murderer is just 'another day at the office'. I would then ruminate in reverie as rejections started to pile up. Nevertheless, it became evident that what was in fact happening was that I had already started collecting data only that I was not aware of it. The men's evasion represented in and of itself a measure of identity work – they were negotiating their identities from the first

moment we were put into contact. I realised that for some of them, in order to move forward they needed to forget the past.

This demanded me to look further into the issue of absence and avoidance when it came to securing interviews. On several occasions, initial eagerness, and enthusiasm to participate was doubled by an inability to meet. It was as if an obscured force would keep these potential participants away. The closer I got to organising the location/date/hour for the interview, the further away the concretisation of the meeting became - many times I compared this with the Kafkaesque sentiments pervasive in his *Castle* (1926). My first contact with a gatekeeper represented my first obstacle. The conversation below was facilitated by one of my first PhD supervisors, who retired during the completion of this thesis:

I left a voice note to a potential participant. I kindly asked him for an interview over a coffee. He phoned back a day later. Below is the conversation ad litteram from my research diary:

> I have just received a phone call back from a potential participant: "Hi! I am not doing it. You see, [I am somebody/something else] now, but keep in touch". I feel anxious; there is a pervasive sense of ambiguity. Not sure why he declined to participate; he said he loves Professor David Wilson to bits, but he would still not take part. He said: "I am an easy participant, get someone harder". Not sure what that means. I feel that he does not want to go 'back there'. He is an [redacted] now; he is someone else. He resisted the position I have inattentively placed him under. In the end, [he] did try to send across a sentiment of collegiality: "Dan but do keep me up to date" (16 April 2019).

It is not unusual for the researcher to feel rejected or disillusioned in the process of conducting research. Such refusals should be read in key with the sensitivities of the "interview society" (see Silverman, 1997:248) under study (Herzog, 2012). These individuals have spent many years inside prison; throughout their imprisonment, they have been interviewed by countless experts in positions of authority: psychologists, probation officers, parole boards, and so forth. Then, the interview society is exacerbated in captivity; evidently, there is a discrepancy in power dynamics between the interviewers and those who are subjected to the interview process (also see Presser, 2005). Nevertheless, to follow Brigg's (2002) point, the fundamental thing here is not counting the number of refusals that I had (which were numerous), but to contextualise and analyse the meaning of their refusal.

4.4.1. The MLS Sample

In total 11 interviews were conducted with five released mandatory lifers over a period of 2 years. Four of these men were interviewed twice, and two were interviewed three times. Only

one participant was interviewed once. All homicide classifications are based on Brookman (2022) - see Table 1.

Table 1.

Name	Age Index Offence	Current Age (first interview)	Type of murder	Reported Ethnicity	Time since release (first interview)	Second Interview (since no.1)	Third interview (since no.2)
Raul	17	31	Revenge Homicide	East Asian	18 Months	11 Months	12 months (phone)
Peter	24	36	Financial gain homicide	White Caucasian	6 months	10 months	12 months (video call)
Nathaniel	17	36	Random homicide	White Caucasian	6 years	7 months	N/A
Richard	19	52	Intimate Femicide	Black	20 years	12 months	N/A
Jacob	19	60	Random homicide	White Caucasian	20 years	N/A	N/A

4.4.2. The mandatory lifers: Case synopsis

Raul killed a young man by stabbing him when he was 17. The murder occurred in the context of an arranged fight somewhere in London. Their friends gathered to see the fight. He was released 12 years later. He now works for a gym in London as a personal trainer (a continuation of what he used to do in prison). His crime is classed as a 'revenge homicide' due to the premeditated nature of the murder: he went to the fight equipped with a knife. Brookman (2020) defined revenge homicides as killings which have a degree of planning involved and that evidences some history between the parties. He now lives with his father and proudly takes care of his niece.

Peter killed an elderly man during a robbery when he was in his early 20s. He used to be a crack cocaine addict and the robbery was carried out to feed his addiction. Peter says that he did not realise that someone was in the house. He killed the elderly man with his bare hands. His crime is classed as a 'financial gain homicide' (Brookman, 2022) as he was motivated by financial gain. He had been released for six months when I first interviewed him, and he had spent a few years in HMP Grendon. The happy father of a 1-year-old boy, he currently lives with his wife and is unemployed.

Richard killed his girlfriend when he was 19 as a refusal to accept that she wanted to break up with him. He describes his murder as a 'crime of passion' and is affected when people do not accept his construction of what happened. His murder is classed as Intimate Partner Femicide and is characteristic of this category to include issues around control, jealousy, and possessiveness at the aetiology of the killing (see Daly and Wilson, 1988; Radford and Russel, 1992 in Brookman, 2022). He was released 20 years ago and now works for a known broadcasting network, as well as in a non-governmental agency dedicated to assisting with the re-entry of ex-prisoners.

Jacob tied, gagged, and shot a man when he was 20. He describes his murder as being classed as an 'execution'; he believes that it was callous, brutal, and ruthless. I have classed this as a random homicide, as the motive was difficult to obtain. He mentioned killing the man because he witnessed him stealing from a car. Later, he mentioned that the man looked identical to his father (which triggered him to kill). Nevertheless, Jacob currently runs a successful IT business and lives an isolated life with his wife. He has been released for over 20 years.

Nathaniel went to prison for murder when he was 17. He said that he decided to "go out and kill somebody" after an argument with his girlfriend. Based on this description, his murder was classed as a random homicide. Nathaniel kept silent about the details of the murder and chose to disclose very little about anything to do with the crime. His silence can be analysed as acts of "not-saying" (Presser, 2019:410), which may explain some exceeding anxiety or simply a matter of identity work, which will be explored in the chapters that follow. He is currently married, has one child, and works in a local factory in Birmingham.

4.5. Sample size: Are 5 participants 'enough'?

To this day, qualitative theorists have not been able to reach consensus with regards to what should be classed as an 'appropriate' sample size in qualitative research (and perhaps they should not). Caelli et al. (2003:3) made the remark:

> "A problem arises, however, when we try to develop quality criteria that are applicable to all qualitative approaches. This task has been unsuccessful because the fundamental suppositions, presuppositions, and premises that need to be considered when using a particular approach vary significantly, making it virtually impossible to set criteria that apply to all."

In the process of writing this thesis, I have, on numerous occasions, been put in a position to discuss my thesis' sample size, especially when filling in forms seeking ethical approval or

funding. Yearly, I would have to justify the number of participants in front of a committee that would decide whether my progress has been satisfactory or not. The quantitative researchers on these boards would at times place me into a "positivist straitjacket", and at times I did try to be "more Catholic than the Pope" (Kvale, 1999:88) and employ positivist parlance.

Of course, as qualitative researchers, we are encouraged to turn to consecrated qualitative 'gold standard' assurance mechanisms/systems to defend our decisions. The go-to concept in this sense in qualitative research is 'saturation'. This procedure stems from the grounded theory approach (Guest et al. 2006) and simply refers to the fact that we should continue collecting data until nothing new or illuminating is generated (Green and Thorogood 2004 in O'Reilly and Parker 2012). However, as O'Reilly and Parker (2012) recognised, this cannot be applied to all qualitative research - including mine. In fact, sample size is influenced by the aims of the research and its philosophical underpinning. For example, in narrative inquiry the focus is placed on quality rather than the quantity of the interviews. Each life story is unique, and in some sense, saturation is impossible to reach (see Wray et al. 2007).

For Kvale (1996:101) the answer is simple: "Interview as many subjects (sic) as necessary to find out what you need to know". Then, transparency, heuristic value, and the epistemological underpinning of the research should influence what is seen as an appropriate number of participants. Each qualitative approach should be assessed in congruence with its epistemological and methodological origin (Caelli et al. 2003). To be credible, qualitative researchers must then address their philosophical underpinning and congruence between methodology and method, strategies for rigour, as well as being clear about their theoretical frameworks.

In deciding the adequacy of sample size for this thesis, epistemological considerations were key. Epistemology, according to Goodley et al. (2004) can be viewed as the building blocks, or the grounds and structures, on which researchers build up their theories. In its primal sense, epistemology is a philosophical orientation which directs us to the theories that we use. This in turn influences the ways in which we conceptualise the outcome of our studies but also our sample size. Narrative research is often perceived as stemming from several epistemological origins. It is idiographic as opposed to nomothetic; hermeneutic as opposed to positivistic; qualitative, based on authenticity and not on validity; and where language is seen as creative, constructive as opposed to descriptive (Goodley et al. 2002; Clough and Nutbrown, 2002 in Baldwin, 2013). The idea that selves are narratives (see Riessman, 2008) is varying in degree

of anti-realism (see Vollmer, 2005). As a general 'rule', this type of research is opposed to methodologies that seek definitive answers and absolute truths (much as positivists do). Nor is there an absolute and correct way to analyse a text; by definition, a narrative approach includes a degree of relativism and subjectivity (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiac, Zilber, 1998). For Bruner (1991:4), "narrative constructions can only achieve 'verisimilitude' […], which are only "version of reality rather than empirical verifications". This stands in contrast with the golden standards of positivist research, which can be repudiated as mere 'abstract empiricism' (Young, 2011; Winlow and Hall, 2016). Rather than referring to a definite and clearly delineated shared reality, people are seen to constitute reality themselves, like works of fiction which create their own idiosyncratic realms (Bruner, 1994). The analyst has a hermeneutical duty in making sense of participants' narratives; this is a canonical aspect in Bruner's (1991) discussion (although this contrasts to dialogical approaches such as Frank's 2010a). 'Truth' in qualitative research should not be understood ontologically in the sense of the measurable or verifiable; rather, there is what Spence (1982) coined "narrative truth".

It is not within the aspirations of this thesis to claim that my findings apply to all released homicide offenders in the United Kingdom, or elsewhere. Such 'golden standards' are reserved to the domain of 'hard sciences' and their insistence on the existence of universal truths. Irrespective of these metaphysical concerns, as qualitative researchers we do look for themes, for similarities, as well as for differences between our participants and their stories. Criminological research, especially that stemming from psychodynamic frameworks (Gadd and Farrall, 2004) has taught us about the importance of case studies (see Kvale, 1999) and richness of data in making sense of human experience. Although these approaches, as Schiff (2013:246) said, are "slurred as mere literature, journalism, or perhaps philosophy", we have to accept that "all qualitative researchers are philosophers" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011:12). Conceptions of knowledge, stemming from existential, hermeneutical, or postmodern positions, although in tension with mainstream positivist assumptions and methodologies, are important in knowledge production. The statistical approach to generalisation is not consistent with narrative inquiry; nevertheless, case studies involve "generalisation to theoretical propositions" (Riessman, 2008:13). Knowledge generated by this piece of work, can become the basis of someone else's knowledge and work, and can be ultimately improved and tested, should we need to do so. It is difficult to prescribe numbers of participants needed for narrative inquiry. However, Kim (2016) for example, recommends five to six participants when

collecting full life stories. This, of course, is discretionary, based on a multiplicity of variables and, in the end, highly speculative.

4.6. Data collection: The Life story and 'Longitudinal Narrative Interview'

After the theoretical positions to the research have been adopted, and access to participants was secured, the methods which are the most appropriate in answering the research question could be formulated. Participants were initially subjected to a Life Story Narrative Interview – this represented an initial unstructured, passive approach that aimed at eliciting participants' full life stories. In the second part of the first interview, I asked participants to narrate a low point, a high point, and a turning point since release (see McAdams, 2008). This was specifically designed to elicit stories pertinent to their lives post-release, as per the aims/objectives of the thesis.

A second in-depth interview was scheduled with most of the participants (four out of five); this was meant to complement the first interview in reaching a fuller understanding of their experiences of identity negotiations post-release. Some initial reading of the transcripts was needed for this process. As such, I had to take the time to read the men's life stories and, based on the most important elements that emerged, to ask further questions relevant to the research project.

A third interview was conducted with the most recently released mandatory life sentenced offenders (Nathaniel, Peter, and Raul). This third interview took place around two years after the first interview and was aimed at exploring the ways in which initial narratives have been maintained or changed considering some of the structural impediments that the men encountered in their lives post-release. The decision to conduct the third interview with the most recently released mandatory lifers emerged as a necessity; Raul's and Peter's life were hectic; they would go through significant life changes between the first two interviews which warranted increased exploration of stability vs change of initial thoughts. The longitudinal narrative interview is depicted in table 2. In continuation, each step of the interview protocol will be outlined.

Table 2.

Interview Number	Interview Type	Sample	Timing
1.	Life Story Interview Semi-Structured Interview	All participants	First interview
2.	In-depth semi-structured interview	All participants	Six months to one year after the first
3.	In-depth semi-structured interview	Most recently released (Peter, Raul, Nathaniel)	One year after the second

Table 2. Table two depicts the number and type of interviews conducted with each participant over time.

4.6.1. The Life Story Narrative Interview (the first interview)

The interview approach has been influenced by the life story interview and narrative interview. A life story was defined by Atkinson (1998:8) as:

> "A life story is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another… A life story is a fairly complete narrating of one's entire experience as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects."

It is important to note that irrespective of a researcher's positions and philosophies, a life story is atheoretical in the sense that as communicated by the participant; it does not stem from and is not accountable to any prior theoretical affinity. Of course, a researcher can go on to add or assign a theoretical stance or understanding of it once the life interview is completed. Atkinson (1998, 2012) recommends eleven steps that interviewers should always consider in preparation to meeting their participants. Although he does not necessarily attribute his essential interview guide for life-story research, issues such as taking time to prepare, making sure you know who you interview, be responsive, be reflexive, use open-ended questions, listen, and be grateful are good practices and values to be upheld in any research.

Primarily, a version of the narrative life story interview was employed because it "provides a practical and holistic methodological approach for the sensitive collection of personal narratives that reveal how a specific human life is constructed and reconstructed in representing that life as a story" (Atkinson, 2012:115). The approach provides the opportunity for the

interviewer to step inside the intimate world of the storyteller and "discover larger worlds" (Atkinson, 2012:115). The interview was predicated on the notion that identity and sense of self are narratively constructed. To echo narrative criminologists: "we make sense of ourselves and our relationships with others by sharing stories and through our on-going inner narrative" (Sandberg and Ugelvik, 2016:129).

Further, narratives are not merely about individuals' representation of their own identities alongside their own images of themselves, they are constitutive of specific socio-historical phenomena, within which biographies are rooted (see Muylaert, et al. 2014). Then, as Muylaert et al. (2014:187) said: "the objective of narrative interviews is not only to reconstruct the life history of the informant, but to understand the context in which these biographies were constructed and the factors that produce change and motivate the actions of informants".

The transcribing process was verbatim, although I have included comments or questions during the interview posed by myself, as per the theoretical stance of the research which values interaction as constitutive of experience and narratives. Nevertheless, I was able to end up with a clear, flowing, and connected narrative in fidelity to the words of the participants. Admittedly, the decision to focus on the content of the narrative overall, and therefore not paying attention to paralinguistic elements emerged after it was decided that the focus should not be on rhetorical form (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). McAdams (2008) proposed a life story interview schedule that closely resembles that of the chapters of a book (which means that they have a beginning, a middle, and an end). In McAdams' work, participants are asked to think of their lives as if they were a book, or novel, complete with chapters, characters, themes, and scenes (see McAdams and Jen Guo, 2015). Although I have flirted with this idea, on a closer inspection, I have decided to adopt a more passive approach. The decision was premised upon Mishler's (1986:235) observation:

> "If we allow respondents to continue in their own way until they indicate they have finished their answer, we are likely to find stories; if we cut them off with our next question, if we do not appear to be listening to their stories, or if we record a check mark or a few words on our schedules after they have talked at length, then we are unlikely to find stories".

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) had a similar approach to their endorsements of the narrative interview (NI). In their 'story elicitation' technique they recommend minimal interventions on the part of the researcher; in fact, non-verbal communication should be the only means of encouragement for the storyteller to continue (also see Kvale, 2007 in Kim, 2016).

This has then cemented my decision to employ an initial unstructured approach to all the interviews. Each participant was asked a simple question at the start of the interview: "please tell me your life story, in whatever order you want". This was meant to provide the space for a full narration to start. I then listened carefully and passively as participants narrated their life stories. Most participants started with their childhoods, apart from one participant, Richard, who started with the murder scene. This meant learning how to be comfortable with short awkward silences, which are inevitable when looking for a rich description of one's life. I had to overtly renounce my turn in conversation through maintaining the silence which in turn signalled to participants that they are welcomed to continue. When there was no clear coda (see Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000) I could proceed to asking questions; in this 'conversation phase' (Kim, 2016) I avoided asking 'why questions'.

Then, in the same interview sitting, I asked each participant to narrate a low point, a high point, and a turning point since their release. This semi-structured approach was used in the second half of each interview, after the life stories have been fully narrated. This approach aimed at eliciting stories directly pertinent to the aims/objectives of the thesis, especially to exploring transition back into society. Research has found that individuals start making sense of turning points naturally, without being explicitly invited to do so (see Alea, 2017; Carlsson, 2012). Further, they have also ensured the presence of a uniformed approach, across participants; structured scripts would also be difficult to follow (Muylaert et al. 2014). To reiterate, the aims and objectives were:

1. Explore the lived experiences of identity construction, management, and maintenance for homicide offenders;

2. Develop a conceptual model that captures the significance of specific factors in identity reconstruction of homicide offenders;

3. Critically consider the extent to which formal and informal mechanisms of support/surveillance of homicide offenders constrains or enables pro-social identity reconstruction post-release; and

4. Develop a set of appropriate recommendations for state, voluntary and private sector organisations in and around the criminal justice system to promote better outcomes in working with homicide offenders.

I then proceeded to the fourth phase - 'the concluding talk'. During this phase, I made it clear to the participant that the recorder has been switched off. I then asked questions which I had formulated during the interview, but which I could not ask as they would interrupt narration. In this phase, 'why questions' were used. To record these discussions, I used a notebook which also acted as my reflexive journal (see Goldstein, 2017, who used a similar strategy). Unfortunately, this was not possible with all the interviews, which meant that I had to either write down these discussions immediately after I had left the interview; on some occasions I recorded myself on my way to the train station, or on my way home. I have asked all participants whether I could use this data in the research, and they all responded affirmatively.

4.6.2. The second interview

A second in-depth interview was scheduled with all participants after an initial reading of the interview transcripts. This allowed me to explore emergent narrative themes, and to follow up on stories. Hyden (2014) remarked that it is impossible for a participant to 'say everything' in one interview. Moreover, interviews are time specific. Although we cannot do much about the time-specificity of interviews, we can combine stories from different interviews with the same participants to reach a more complete and fuller understanding of their experiences and lives (Hyden, 2014). Also, an initial interview assisted in building trust and rapport with the participants which turned out to be important in a second meeting. Cornwell (1984) found that interviewees tend to use public accounts in initial meetings, which are mere expectations transformed into stories. However, on future occasions, when trust and rapport had already been established, private accounts started to surface (Cornwell, 1984 in Grinyer and Thomas, 2012). Nevertheless, trust cannot be switched on and off. I quickly understood that if I were to maintain contact with my participants, I needed to negotiate these relationships continuously. This proved to be difficult with some of the participants, who at times, reverted to avoidant or isolating behaviours. Darlington and Scott (2002:54) wrote:

> "Rapport is often included in research texts as an entity that is established at the beginning of the research, and once this is done the researcher can get on with the business of researching. But rapport is not a finite commodity that can be turned on and off by the researcher. It is relational… Like all relationships, the researcher-participant relationship is subject to continuing negotiation and reworking; this extends to the participant's trust in the researcher's behaviour at every stage of the research" (Darlington and Scott, 2002:54 in Grinyer and Thomas, 2012: 221).

Comparable to research on homicide offenders in forensic settings (Ferrito et al. 2020) on this second occasion, I discussed the ways in which my participants made sense of having

committed murder, and the effect this had on their lives and transition post release. My approach throughout had been neutral, and non-judgemental (see Brookman, 2015). Nevertheless, as the coronavirus pandemic was declared, I had to find other means of conducting follow up interviews with some of the participants. Phone interviews were initially identified as the alternative. Of course, this presented its own limitations; as Creswell (2007) has correctly said, in phone interviews meaning is lost due to the absence of informal communication. This has influenced my decision to discard phone interviews and turn to online applications such as Skype, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom. A strength of using video-calls was that participants managed to showcase their progress in the community, and I was able to explore stories as embodied - participants told stories as much with their words as they did with their bodies (Smith and Monforte, 2020). However, second interviews were not possible with all participants (4/5), and this was mainly due to some of their tumultuous lives post-release. This reminded me of Brookman's (2015) point, that murderers have spent lengthy time in prison; this may not only lead to 'therapeutic lingo' when you interview them but remind you that they are likely to be institutionalised.

4.6.3. The third Interview

A third in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with the most recently released men. This decision was based on the need to explore prospective accounts of their resettlement. In this sense, in approaching the men's re-entry experience of identity management, I was influenced by Leverentz's (2014) research with short-term female offenders living in Mercy Homes in Chicago. It was suggested by Leverentz that desistance is difficult to capture, and repeated interviews with our participants allow us to see how the process unfolds in participants' lives. One of the limitations of current research on desistance of offenders generally, and homicide offenders in particular, made in chapter two was their use of cross-sectional designs. Repeated interviews are a first step in closing the gap on these methodological issues.

The decision to focus on the most recently released lifers (this will be explored further in the next section) then came from the crucial timing of their release. According to the most recent data from the Ministry of Justice's, (2020) quarterly bulletin, reconviction rates for adults released from custodial sentences for less than 12 months is at a staggering 62.7%. Although not all participants were within the 12-month bracket at the time of our first interview (as per table one), they were at the early stages of the resettlement process and would naturally face a set of struggles that could influence their initial narratives. This is a point also made by Harding

et al. (2017, np) who remarked that "a longitudinal design is necessary in a study of released prisoners due to the rapidly changing nature of their lives. Reentry is a period of significant flux".

The reality is that the men's early release experiences will be fundamentally different from experiences years later. I was interested to see how the men's interactions with structures and obstacles post-release influenced their construction of pro-social identities and projected selves. Although the accounts of those released many years ago were fruitful to the analysis, it only brought a retrospective view of the past and thus their struggles could not be captured 'in the now' (see Brookman, 2015). In deciding on this approach, I was influenced by the work of Harding et al. (2017) who explored stability and change of ex-prisoners' narratives in the face of structural constraints in Michigan. The first two interviews were crucial in deciding what questions I should ask during this third interview. Some initial analysis of the first two interviews led to the development of a conceptual model where I mapped narrative identities for each participant as emergent from the data alongside their value commitments and their desires that underpinned the narrative identities. I then asked questions in relation to these elements to observe stability vs. change in their lives and narrative identities in time and given potential disappointments on release.

4.7.   Interview location and the role of reflexivity.

Interviews were conducted in university offices, the library, in participants' cars, and one took place in the waiting area of a Cineworld. Critically, post-modern, post-structural, constructionist, and feminist approaches to interviewing (see Herzog, 2012; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Kvale, 1996) conceptualise interviews as social processes which are integral in the construction of individual subjectivity (Herzog, 2012; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). In other words, we have moved away from traditional understandings of interviews as mere opportunities to excavate 'uncontaminated' information from participants. These considerations emerged theoretically as a repudiation of objectivism (Bourdieu, 1999 in Frosh and Baraitser, 2008); essentially, truth is not to be separated from the practices that had led to its construction. Interview situations, as Gubrium and Holstein (2012) have described, affect what is said and how it is said in fundamental ways. They suggested: "interview participants are as much constructive practitioners of experiential information as they are repositories or excavators of experiential knowledge" (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012:32). This type of narrative practice warrants, on the part of the researcher, attention to be paid to both the 'whats' of the

interviews, as much as the 'hows' (this has informed my data analysis approach). Usually, interviews demand the participant to link the subject of investigation to their biographical particularities. Participants need to be considered within a 'narrative environment', which produces a "subject who both responds to and is affected by the narrative environment" (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012:34). One must acknowledge and take seriously the fact that narratives are put together in specific contexts. Wengraf (2001:4-5) has put this eloquently:

> "The interview that you do or that you study is not an asocial, ahistorical, event. You do not leave behind your anxieties, your hopes, your blindspots, your prejudices, your class, race or gender, your location on global social structure, your age and historical positions, your emotions, your past and your sense of possible futures when you set up an interview, and nor does your interviewee […], (or) when you sit down to analyse the material you have produced."

All of this opens a discussion about the need to reflect upon the ways in which my own positions, identity, nationality, and place of interview contributed to data and knowledge generation (see Presser, 2005). Further, this would affect what stories I heard and which I may not have paid attention to (see Frank, 2010a). An interview is literally an 'inter-view' (Kvale, 1999:101). It is an interchange of views; it is intersubjective (Finlay, 2002) and therefore demands reflexive thought.

Reflexivity is broadly defined as "the capacity of any system of signification to turn back upon itself, to make itself its own object by referring to itself: subject and object fuse" (Myerhoff and Ruby, 1982:2 in Riessman, 2015:220). In other words, it is about being thoughtful of the ways in which one's relationship with the research participants influences the research process; it is a self-awareness strategy (Finlay, 2012). Consistent with social constructionist thought, the observer, the observed, and interpretation are not separable (Riessman, 2015). Nevertheless, to incorporate reflexivity in an attempt at removing bias is to inadvertently adhere to positivism. In contrast, reflexive thought is employed as a secondary data source that improves our understanding of the ways in which narratives are constructed in research contexts (Goldstein, 2017). Further, being reflexive, is also about acknowledging that a multiplicity of factors, including our own personal narratives as researchers shape the data we produce, although, in practice such objectivity is a chimera (see Bishop and Shepher, 2011). Frank (2010a:99) has persuasively said:

> "Research is no one way transmission of information about lives; rather, it is an ongoing dialogue between participants' meanings' the meanings that researchers

attribute to their words, their actions, their lives, and their stories; and how participants change in response to researchers' responses"

Criminological research has been interested in how interview accounts are situated within power relations (Presser, 2005; Rowe, 2014). In Presser's research, the interview location, alongside gender assumptions of the interviewer have provided participants with opportunities to present themselves in different ways whilst in prison (see Liebling, 2001). Unfortunately, most of these discussions are related to institutionalised dynamics, usually in prisons or forensic settings. My own identity as a neophyte Romanian researcher interviewing British released homicide offenders surfaced several times during data collection, and also when accessing prospective participants. I have never been so aware of my national identity than in some encounters with my participants. On one occasion, after the interview had been completed, Raul, made a game out of identifying each Romanian on the street of Camden Town as we were walking together towards the train station. I recorded this in my diary once I got on the train:

> "Only a couple of minutes ago Raul showed me every Romanian on the streets he could identify. He didn't personally know these people; so, he only guessed with complete certainty that they were Romanians. This reminds me of the conversations we had during the interview; he said that the animal he identifies with the most is the eagle. He looks down on us, flying, he knows who the Romanians are, who the Asians are; he can spot this from miles, as he said. I was on his territory, and he wanted to make this clear. I can only wonder how my 'Romanianness' has affected the interview data. Does he not like Romanians? Was this an attempt to say that he accepts me or was I being exposed as someone not worthy? (7/30/2019).

During the data collection phase, I would note down all my feelings, thoughts about the interview in my reflexive diary, and then, I would contemplate for days over the process. By re-reading the transcript, I was able to imagine how I was experienced by my participants. I would seek to experience myself as both subject and object (Aron, 2000 in Goldstein, 2017; also see Finlay, 2002), I had to think back to the intersecting subjectivities that create the participant-researcher relationship; these considerations were crucial for analysing the data. In doing this, I had to think about the feelings elicited by each participant, the fears, encounters, discussions, wishes and anxieties as they occurred in the interview. On one occasion – we both laughed at the fact that he killed someone – this made me feel uneasy and think about how we use humour to make sense of difficult situations and to build rapport.

4.8. Ethical considerations

When researching with 'vulnerable populations' one needs to be careful in framing research questions during the interview process, as well as to ensure that appropriate safeguarding measures are in place to minimise harm (emotional, physical). Of course, what constitutes vulnerability is open to interpretation. Some authors have argued that vulnerability is a social construction (Moore and Miller, 1999 in Liamputtong, 2007). I agreed with Moore and Miller's (1999:1034 in Liamputtong, 2007:2) definition of vulnerability as the most appropriate in conducting research with MLS individuals due to their "lack [of] ability to make personal life choices, to make personal decisions, to maintain independence, and to self-determine". Of course, their ability is hampered by the corseted condition of the life licence.

Further, some are "impoverished, disenfranchised, and/or subject to discrimination, intolerance, subordination, and stigma" (Nyamathi, 1998: 65 in Liamputtong, 2007:3). A life licence is fundamentally a limiting process. There is an abundance of research suggesting that offenders have experienced agonising childhoods and life courses (see Winlow, 2014). Moreover, the act of committing murder can be traumatising to some perpetrators (Doctor, 2008). This relates back to the paradoxical situation of the murderer: "how can one survive tragedy when the very same person is actually the malefactor? And how do they become "architects of their own lives"? (F.-Dufour, Brassard and Martel, 2015:485). Considering this, I needed to be careful how I approached these individuals, what questions I posed, and how I would respond to their questions. Here it is important to note that a narrative life story interview does not explore the intricacies of participants' crimes or potential experienced abuse. Interviewees are granted complete freedom with regards to the topics being discussed in the first interview. Further, all participants were told in advance about the nature of the interview, including what the initial question would be.

Ethical guidelines are established to protect research participants and their rights; nevertheless, as briefly mentioned, research with homicide offenders, or violent individuals, pose additional challenges. For example, I agree with Brookman (2015), that although ethical guidelines are put in place to protect the rights of those whom we research, these can be overridden in situations where the rights of past or future victims are compromised. Here, I am primarily referring to possible disclosures of unsolved homicides during the interview. In such cases, I agree that it is "difficult to argue […], that it would be morally, ethically, or legally acceptable […] not to pass this information to the authorities (Brookman, 2015:239). However, I made it

clear to all participants that anonymity will be upheld, as much as possible, but that disclosure of further crimes would force me to report.

I was also explicit that complete anonymity might be unreachable (also see BSC Statement of Ethics, 2015). All participants were then informed of available support, should they experience any emotional distress during or after the interview. A participant information sheet highlighted available organisations such as St Giles Trust, Aquarius, NACRO, and the Samaritans as available organisations ready to provide support. For my personal wellbeing, I have been in contact with the supervisory team throughout the data collection process. After the completion of each interview, I would immediately speak over the phone with my supervisors. Regular meetings with the team ensured that adequate support was provided. Further, the university was and still is equipped with a wellbeing team that has very good credentials, and which I would use in times of need (although this was not necessary).

As Brookman (2015) has argued, interviewing homicide offenders in the community is not an easy task, and maybe this could explain its scarcity, albeit with a few exceptions (Appleton, 2010; Liem, 2016; Liem and Garcin, 2014; Parker, 1990 – their research usually took place in probation offices; Parker's work is a journalistic account). In selecting the interview location, I have always tried to negotiate between the need for security and privacy - a compromise which had to be navigated continuously, and participants were active in this negotiation. For example, the decision to interview in the café at Cineworld took on board the following considerations: the time would ensure that the place is not busy and therefore noise pollution is low (2pm); enough individuals would be there, including the staff to make the place a public one. Of course, I ensured that the interviews took place in quiet places for participants' privacy - talking about one's past is seldom an easy task, especially when the one shares personal information with a stranger.

4.9. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality refers to "agreements with persons about what may be done with their data" (Sieber, 1992, p. 52 in Kaiser, 2012:457). The qualitative researcher faces a paradox when aiming at exploring richness of human experience and data, whilst, concomitantly, trying to avoid deductive disclosure (Tolich, 2004). This conflict is naturally exacerbated when researching released homicide offenders; a high percentage of participants would have received media coverage due to the nature of their crimes, and would therefore, be easily identifiable.

For example, some of my participants have built their own organisations working with released offenders, some of which have reached a national influence.

In this respect, authors such as Weiss (1994:131) state unequivocally: "Nothing reported from the study, in print or in lecture, should permit identification of respondents". To protect against such risks, I decided to follow Kaiser's (2012) confidentiality management strategy stages: (a) pre-interview, (b) during the interview, (c) post-interview. Before collecting data, I made sure that all participants were thoroughly informed about the research process and about their right to withdraw at any time (participants have been made aware about this both verbally and in writing via de information form and consent form). All participants have signed a consent form and have read the information form (see appendix A2) which was reviewed by the Faculty Ethics Committee which granted full ethical clearance.

Each of my participants were made aware at the start of the interview that if they did not feel comfortable with the level of confidentiality that has been provided, then they were free to withdraw from the interview process, or indeed stop the interview at any time. Further, everyone was assigned a pseudonym. Location names were changed to avoid deductive disclosure. I also made it clear to each participant that should they reveal any information that goes against the HMPPS guidelines or the law, it will have to be divulged - for example: undisclosed illegal acts (previous and planned), behaviour that is harmful to the participant or others, information that raises concerns about terrorist, radicalisation, or security issues. I felt that I had a burden to share this with the authorities for victims' sake, and the men needed to know this. All documents containing personal information, such as consent forms, were locked in a filing cabinet with a key that was only accessible to the researcher. All audio-recording devices were moved on to a password protected storage drive. All documents, particularly Participant Information Sheet, and Consent forms, have been explicitly designed in line with the EU's and UK's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines. Data was agreed to be kept for 5 years before it will be destroyed, as per Birmingham City University policy; all participants consented for their data to be used in peer-reviewed publications and monograph.

4.10. Informed Consent

Each participant signed a consent form before the interview. The British Society of Criminology Statement of Ethics (2015) reinforces that it is within the role and responsibility of the researcher to explain as comprehensively as possible the nature of the research, why it

is being undertaken, and how data will be disseminated. Importantly, these considerations must be delivered in a way that is meaningful to the participants, to avoid deceit and based on enough information. In this sense, I made sure that each participant read and signed the consent form (which was also verbally explained). The Consent Form (see appendix A1) made it clear that the participant had the right to withdraw at any moment without any consequence. Each interview started with me describing the nature of the research and providing the participant with an information sheet (see Appendix A2) (which was also read out loud), as well as securing permission to record. They then were given the opportunity to ask questions. The Participant Information Sheet was used to make sure that participants understood the purpose, duration, and methods of the research (Marzano, 2012). These were also sent to Birmingham City University Faculty Ethics Committee for approval prior to their utilisation in the research context. The form made it clear that identifying characteristics will be obscured, but as mentioned before, that complete anonymity is difficult to reach. I obscured names by using pseudonyms, mentions of location names have changed. Where the nature of information would lead to deductive identification, the decision was to not use that information altogether. Further, the thesis committed to respecting the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All participants have been informed that they can withdraw at any time of the research process, and that their data will be destroyed should they wish to. A problematic aspect of informed consent emerged with the Coronavirus pandemic. All primary face-to-face research had to stop, and I found myself in the situation where my follow-up interviews had to be done via phone or video-call. Further, one of the participants was interviewed during the first lockdown (Jacob), and therefore consent had to be secured verbally.

4.11. Analytical Framework: Dialogic Narrative Analysis

After the successful completion of each interview, I would transcribe it verbatim and start some preliminary analysis. My preferred data analysis tools to tackle the research question was Dialogical Narrative Analysis (see Frank, 2010; Smith, 2016; Caddick, 2015). Before exploring the tool in relation to the research question and objectives of the thesis, it is important to explore narrative analysis as a 'family of methods' (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative analysis refers to a family of methods that interpret text that takes a storied form (Riessman, 2008:11). In comparison to other qualitative analysis methods, such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Thematic Analysis, or Grounded theory, Narrative

Inquiry goes beyond analysing the content of stories/data (Holstein and Gubrium, 2012; Josselson, 2011; Riessman, 2008) to analyse issues such as story structure as well as its function. Narrative analysts are interested in maintaining data sequence for interpretative purposes (Riessman, 2008). Riessman (2008:11) summarised:

> "Narrative analysts interrogate intention and language – how and why incidents are stories, not simply the content to which language refers. For whom was this story constructed, and for what purpose? Why is the succession of events in that way? What cultural resources does the story draw on, or take for granted? What storehouse of plots does it call up? What does the story accomplish? Are there gaps and inconsistencies that might suggest preferred, alternative, or counter-narratives?"

Given the above, researchers analyse the form, content, or function of their participants' stories, or a combination of these elements. There is no prescriptive way of conducting narrative research (Riessman, 2008; Frank, 2010a). Narrative methods have, as Frank (2010a:72) said "tradition, precedents, guidelines, and especially, exemplars […]"; and should not be taken as dogma. Josselson et al. (2011:228) remarked:

> "There is, mercifully, no dogma or orthodoxy yet about how to conduct narrative research. The aim is to elicit stories around a theme in as unobtrusive a manner possible, attending to the context of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, and then to analyze these stories in the framework of the questions that the researcher brings to them, giving due consideration to the linguistic and cultural contexts that shaped the account, both immediate and in terms of the larger culture."

My approach to narrative analysis was influenced by Frank's (2010a, 2012) and Smith's (2016) Dialogic Narrative Analysis (DNA). I chose to guide my analysis through the DNA because this approach studies the "mirroring between what is told in the story, the story's content – and what happens as a result of telling the story – its effect" (Frank, 2010a: 71-72). In other words, its analytic orientation focuses upon how stories are performed between individuals, whilst placing significant importance to the content of the stories alongside the narrative resources people employ in their storytelling (Smith, 2016). To engage in DNA is to ask what kind of stories individuals are caught up in and what actions these stories authorise (Frank, 2010a:80). In this sense, DNA allows us to consider how people's identities are created and transformed through the stories that people tell and enact (Caddick, 2015). This approach is directly relevant and useful in exploring the research question of the thesis as well the aims and objectives:

"How do people who have committed murder negotiate identities post release?".

1. Explore the lived experiences of identity construction, management, and maintenance for people that committed murder;

2. Develop a conceptual model that captures the significance of specific factors in identity reconstruction of people who committed murder; and

3. Critically consider the extent to which formal and informal mechanisms of support/surveillance of homicide offenders constrains or enables pro-social identity reconstruction post-release.

To negotiate identities then means to perform stories which have clear functions. To explore specific factors in identity reconstruction is to explore narrative resources as the men accumulated on release and which allowed them to perform certain identities. To critically consider mechanisms of surveillance and how these constraints or enables pro-social identity reconstruction is to explore issues around interpellation and how these invitations were resisted or accepted by them.

Stories are the specific tales that people tell, whereas narratives represent the templates and cultural resources that we use to construct our stories (also see Caddick, 2015). The concept of master narratives is of use here (McLean and Syed, 2015). To define stories, I turned to Frank's (2010a) work. For him, a story is a genre that contains characters, it expresses a point of view, and has a plot (a structure that connects events over time, which has a complicated action where an event disrupts the initial state affairs, a resolution, and explanations for why things happened).

To reiterate, I started the transcription processes immediately after the completion of each interview and made theoretical notes as I transcribed the data. Following Smith (2016), at this stage I would re-read the transcripts and consider the main stories that emerged. I was specifically interested in immersing myself in the stories that participants told about their transition back into society. To identify stories, I looked out for new beginnings that had a shift in content, or simply for the story structure I have mentioned above. Certain phrases such as 'it all started with' signal the presence of stories, and thus I had to keep an eye open for such syntagma. The analytic process had to take place in tandem with collecting data, as opposed to sequentially as in other qualitative methods (Caddick, 2015). Put simply, this ensures that meaning is not lost due to fragmentation of data. I would then write down memos and initial views, theoretical points that were developing. After this process, I moved on to identify themes

between participants and story structures (I paid attention to both similarities and differences in stories of transition, at what was being said and how it is being said). The results/discussion section will explore both what was said and how it was said.

Smith (2016:216) defines a narrative theme as a "pattern that runs through a story or set of stories". Then, I focused on both the 'apparent' and 'latent' meanings of data. To analyse the structure of the story is to ask 'how' the story is put together. One way of exploring this is to simply consider the direction of the story: one needs to look holistically at the story initially, but then we need to have an eye for detail; this can be simply done through spotting certain language devices and terminologies. For example, does the participant mention being at a crossroads? Is there a clear sense of progression, or stability across the narrative? (see Caddick, 2015; Smith, 2016). The participant may reflect upon specific transformative epiphanies and use evaluative statements ("my life has gone downwards since…") and so forth.

Then, in line with the theoretical framework, I focused on resources storytellers draw upon to shape their experiences and construct stories. In this sense, I followed Caddick's (2015) dialogical identity and resource questions: "how is the storyteller's identity shaped by the story they are telling?" and "what narrative resources does the storyteller borrow from the wider stock of cultural narratives in order to tell their stories" in making sense of the data. Of course, to maintain an identity one needs to have opportunities to perform it and the necessary resources to put it together. Then, the storyteller must have an audience to tell the story to. In this sense, 'connection/affiliation' questions need to follow. Caddick (2015:230) reminds us:

> "Even if the story is told inside a person's mind, there will still be an imagined audience that will be important in shaping the story. Certain stories may be approved or disapproved of by certain people or groups, connecting us from these people or disconnecting us from them"

Smith (2016) recommends several ways of pulling the analysis together. I decided to first explore the ways in which mandatory lifers accumulate narrative resources to perform pro-social selves and then to build up typologies around my analytic interests by combining the results from the different strategies employed together. In this sense, I was interested in building a typology that captured the content of stories and their functions.

4.12. Conclusion

The chapter started with an outline of the research question. It then progressed methodically, in a top-down fashion to explore the philosophical underpinnings of the question, and how

these led by way of consequence to specific methodological choices. The chapter then followed a temporal order: it explored issues around finding participants and sampling; the latter was justified based on epistemological bases. Then, it moved on to describe the narrative longitudinal interview as the primary data collection tool; each step of the proposed three step interview was explored in depth and with considerations to the research question. The chapter then explored ethical considerations and the role of reflexivity in qualitative research. The data analysis tool, namely the Dialogic Narrative Analysis was also discussed in relation to the aims and objectives of the thesis.

Overall, the research utilised a longitudinal narrative interview to explore the experiences of transition and identity negotiation of 5 released mandatory lifers who committed different types of murder and who are in the process of resettling into community. In total, 11 interviews were conducted over a period of two years. The data has been transcribed verbatim and then subjected to a Dialogical Narrative Analysis.

The remainder of this thesis is dedicated to the findings of this research and to tackle the research question. The next three chapters explore the ways in which the mandatory lifers negotiated their identities against a series of 'push-pull forces' which constrained/enabled the development of pro-social identities post-release. In this sense, chapter five focuses on the importance of family and employment in assisting with role transition in the period immediately after release. Chapter six explores identity negotiation and reconstruction by reference and submission to the ideological precepts of consumer capitalism and consumer culture. Chapter seven explores the role of supervision (especially by the probation and social services) in constructing the men as risky and dangerous.

Chapters eight, nine and 10 focus on the 'whats' of the men's narratives, namely on the function of the stories which represent a way of performing ethical selves in the interview context. In this sense, chapter eight explores the men's performance of an appropriate levels of remorse through 'complicated redemption'. Chapter nine shows how despite their experienced remorse, the men problematized their involvement in the murder through a 'Splitting Narrative'. Chapter 10 explores a specific hierarchy of moral abomination created at discursive level by the men to negotiate acceptability. These three chapters formulate a wider theme around discursive devices used by mandatory lifers to construct ethical selves in interaction and thus directly tackles the research question: "how do people who have committed murder negotiate identities post-release". Chapter 11 provides the conclusion to the thesis.

Results and Discussion

Chapter 5: Initial release transition and prison identities

5.1. Introduction

The first few years after release are crucial in redefining the identities of released ex-prisoners (Leverentz, 2014). At this critical time in their re-entry experience, mandatory lifers may have the opportunity to reflect on who they are and to contemplate on who they want to become. Leaving prison meant that the men had been given the task to resettle, socially reintegrate, and reconstruct their identities; this includes re-establishing ties, relationships, and even learning new social roles (see Western et al. 2015; McNeil, 2012). As explored in chapter two, such resettlement-led goals may be complicated for mandatory lifers. Long-term imprisonment affects patterns of resettlement in ways explored in depth in chapter three.

Naturally then, as Griffin and Healy (2019:134) remarked, "life sentence prisoners are rarely in a position to demonstrate stable and prosocial family support, accommodation or employment". Homicide offenders were found to rarely resume ties with their children after such lengthy sentences (Liem, 2016; Liem and Garcin, 2014; Liem and Weggemans, 2018). Moreover, long-term offenders tend to cut ties with their families to save them from the humiliation of the visitation process – a coping strategy that has been named 'hard timing' (Kotova, 2020). Others attempt to safeguard against anxieties relating to infidelity (Crewe, Hulley, and Wright, 2020). This observed trend in specialist literature is worrying given that early release success is cumulative in predicting successful reintegration of ex-offenders (Western et al. 2015, 2018).

This chapter will explore the ways in which the men had mobilised resettlement capital (Best, 2018, 2019; Albertson and Hall, 2020) to scaffold into normative/pro-social roles post-release. Here, the chapter draws from the men's thick description of their experiences to focus on two of the most important 'correlates of desistance' (Farrall, 2011), namely family formation and employment status, and the importance that these two social institutions played in the 'role transition' of the men from detained mandatory lifers to potential 'responsible citizens' (see Uggen, Manza, and Behrens, 2004). Contrary to much research on homicide offenders, the

chapter evidences that offender families are a crucial steppingstone to the development of capital that ultimately assists in the construction of pro-social identities post-release. This analysis is split into two parts: the first part will provide evidence that participants who accumulated resettlement capital (Best, 2018) while in prison via maintaining relationships with their families and by starting work were able to scaffold into pro-social roles. The second part of the chapter explores how newly developed family men identities were negotiated with an identified 'prison voice' which indicated a degree of institutionalisation. The successful negotiation of these identities proved crucial to their early resettlement. Implications for policies are discussed in chapter 11.

5.2. Family, romance, and employment: The importance of resettlement capital

Raul captured his sense of disconnection from the outside world in our first interview; his family was all he had. He was telling the story of an encounter he had with his probation officer before release. Asked what he would like to do next, he lamented:

> So, I was staying in a hostel in [part of London], and I was having to have my family coming out of this borough to see me, and when the parole board said to me…oh where do you want to go next? I want to go home. What am I supposed to do? I was 17 when you put me away, I've got no life outside. This is my everything, my home, my school, everything like that so they said OK, fine, we're knocking you back for 1 year, start doing your home leaves to [redacted] and we will see how that goes. I did that for 1 year, and I came back here, and I fought with everything that I had to come back here. Sometimes I feel maybe I shouldn't have cuz…this area is no good, you know what I mean, it's hardly people around here, yes, it's home, you love home, but I don't know, sometimes I feel suffocated here (Raul).

Evidently, Raul lacked the narrative resources to perform an identity which was divorced from his 'prison self'. Prison was all he had at that stage, with one exception: he still had his family (father and sister). This fortunate story above is one at odds with that of the majority of lifers in the UK (Flanagan, 1980; Cohen and Taylor, 1972), but Raul's family acted as a steppingstone to his development and construction of pro-social identities on release. Living with his father meant that he secured long-term accommodation at an 'affordable rate' and achieved a sense of security on his return. He continued to wrestle with thoughts of moving out for almost two more years but ended up accepting that his stay is founded upon a realistic analysis of financial benefits and mutual aid. In our third interview Raul had renounced any ideas of moving out:

I'm gonna stay here cuz obviously my dad's here, my family home's here, my family is around here, unless something amazing comes up…but even that probation has to go through all of that they wouldn't let me move just like that so yah…. I try not to think about stuff like that (Raul).

Compared to Raul who maintained a good relationship with his family throughout the sentence, Peter had resuscitated his relationship with his mother late in his life sentence. The therapy at HMP Grendon influenced his decision to 'excavate' a set of feelings he had, for a long time, repressed. Reconnected, Peter managed to reconstruct his ties with his mother and ended up living with her for well over one year before moving in with his current wife. The couple's relationship with the mother has since progressively deteriorated. In our third interview, both Peter and Jasmine complained that the mother-in-law (Peter's mother) was not doing enough for her grandchild.

To be honest mate, it has gone downhill a bit. You know she is a …she is not really doing anything man. We call her 'nanny Facebook'… you know. With the kids and me and Jasmine (pseudonym) because you know, I got 3 children now, not only one, but situation also…and (unclear) and she just doesn't engage. Last time I spoke to her I said I'll ring you as much as you ring me... yeah? And I haven't really heard much from her since. She sent Liam a message on Facebook on his birthday and that's it….no card in the post or fucking… nothing for her grandson and aa… that's not good enough, you know, I am not having him forced to raise defence mechanisms around certain people because as I said, you know, you know why, I am weary who Liam is going to be around, who he is going to learn things from, you know….(Peter).

What transpires in the story above is Peter's transformation from a dependent person to someone upon whom others depend on. The new home environment offered Peter the narrative resources to construct the story of a protective father who would defend his child from anyone, including from his own mother. At this point in time Peter had made an important 'leap' in developing a pro-social identity, and his mothers' initial instrumental support was paramount in the journey from a 'recently released prisoner' to a 'family man' (see Laub and Sampson, 2003). By our third interview, Peter would exploit any potential occasion to showcase to me his little boy (the other two children are Jasmine's), his garden, and his dog over our video calls; he portrayed living in a stereotypically happy family life.

With few exceptions that focused on the re-entry experience of long-term prisoners (Boman and Mowen, 2017; Taylor, 2016) most existing research did not seriously consider participants' length of prison sentences in their longitudinal analyses. Despite this methodological conundrum, in line with some of the research above, three out of the five participants in this

study (Raul, Peter, and Jacob) resorted to the instrumental support of their families before and after they secured their release. Similar findings have been reported in the literature. For example, nearly all of Western's (2018) younger men interviewed in Boston lived with family members in their first few months of release. These studies have used short-term offenders as their samples and therefore has been suggested that their findings could not be possibly applied to lifer populations (see Liem, 2016; Liem and Garcin, 2014) but this research provides evidence to the contrary. In some cases, family members presented the men with potential romantic partners. Overall, these relationships provided the necessary social capital so that the men could practise social roles and acquire the narrative resources to reconstruct their identities and maintain desistance from crime (Fox, 2016; Albertson, 2021)

5.2.1. Prison based-romantic relationships as 'resettlement capital'

Different types of family can provide diverse types of social capital (Mills and Codd, 2008). For example, Jacob met his wife through his mother while he was still serving time in a high security prison. As an indeterminate sentenced prisoner, Jacob did not have a definitive date for his release, but the couple decided to marry anyway.

> My mother knew my wife and she was having a lot of difficulties she was having a lot of emotional difficulties and uhm and she'd been she was just in a mess and my mom, just thought that I may be able to help her and she put her in touch with me and she came to see me and we corresponded a bit, we met and we just became friends and ah, so we considered we talked and we just had so much in common and became really good friends ah, and… then we realised that you know we were in love with each other and it seemed easy to get married in prison. She was a Muslim who converted to Christianity she wasn't a church of England uhm, member and we got permission and we got married in a local church, we still married aa 24 years later (Jacob).

In addition to the obvious instrumental benefits of providing a roof over his head once he was released, Jacob's wife represented his main pillar of emotional support for the remainder of his sentence. This is important for his desistance journey. Ex-prisoners' families are paramount in providing instrumental support (Mowen et al., 2019; Western et al. 2015) and protection against recidivism (Duwe and Clark, 2013; Boman and Mowen, 2017). She also assisted him in developing resilience to the realities of his incarceration (Markson, et al. 2015; Naser and La Vigne, 2006; Taylor, 2016).

> It wasn't really until 1999…late 90s that I met my current wife through my mom strangely enough and she persuaded me to start participating …uhm. Gave me the presence of mind to believe that actually uhm… I could get out of prison and

have a life, because I never could actually I got to the point I accepted the fact that I'd probably wasn't going to get out of prison…and… somehow the friendship she persuaded me that I really could and so I began participating so in 1999 I was released after 20, 20 ½ years, it was quite a journey through the whole thing… there was a pointlessness, it's a little bit like some doctors, they don't look at you as a patient, they look at you as a disease, and the prison system very much looks at you as a criminal, as a malformed individual (Jacob).

Not all participants met their romantic partners via their families. For example, Richard met his wife through the religious services at the maximum-security prison where he was held. The relationship started as a friendship but soon transformed into a romantic one and culminated in their marriage once Richard was released. Their daughter was born around the same time.

I married in London Victoria, because my wife is from London, and she got to know me when I was in prison you know, and, one of the procedures with her was that my probation officer, cuz we got married quite early after I got released, had to sit there with her and tell her the full story you know, to make sure that she, she knew, so she went through that process as well, but she knew before anyway, because she got to know me when I was in [maximum security prison], just as another visitor, you know, because she is from the church, and she visited with the Church and we built a relationship there so I would say that probably the highest point after release is probably the birth of my daughter (Richard).

As evidenced, community-level social capital (Fox, 2016) characteristic of faith services (O'Connor and Bogue, 2010) turned out as critical in assisting Richard to meet new people and develop the narrative resources to construct pro-social identities (of husband and father) immediately after release. Also, as Richard remarked, one of the benefits of constructing 'resettlement capital' whilst in prison meant that he eluded the Caudine forks of stigma negotiation and family formation on release. Nathaniel met his wife during a release on temporary licence (ROTL):

I was on a home leave and working out, so more or less out anyway, so I think I still was classed as a prisoner, but then obviously when I was released we carried it on. I was on a home leave, and… obviously we just stuck up, and carried on… then obviously before, whilst I was out in the three months stage but then I was recalled obviously, uhm so I missed all the, like… the scans, the birth of my son but then obviously my re-release I had to go to the hostel, but it was still there, go home every day see my missus and the baby and I haven't missed a day since (Nathaniel).

All but one of the participants managed to build bonding and bridging capital during their imprisonment, which turned out to be crucial in their movement towards pro-social identities

post-release. This finding echoes Western's (2015) point that early release success is cumulative and that the first few months of release are crucial in predicting future success. In this context, the smooth transition into 'family men identities' meant that the participants had a base upon which to build and further hook pro-social identities in the future. Also, developing prison-based romantic relationships acted as an effective stigma management strategy as some of the men did not have to be concerned about disclosing or concealing their past (see LeBel, 2008) to potential romantic partners after release. This finding contradicts similar research conducted in the United States. For example, Liem and Garcin (2014) found that for homicide offenders in Massachusetts social ties did not act as pro-social forces post-release; in fact, the opposite was true. Interviewees in their sample had provided several reasons for avoiding becoming involved with romantic relationships or felt that they were playing "catch-up" when they did.

This stands in tension with the findings discussed in this chapter. This finding may be representative of fundamentally different resources available in UK prisons compared to some in the US. A further explanation lies in the timing of building such relationships which was not considered in the American study. Had participants in this thesis explored the prospect of engaging in romantic partnerships or resuming ties with families strictly after their release, their experiences may well have been fundamentally different. Furthermore, the cases above contradict research which maintains a 'purist approach to prisoners' families as providers of either instrumental, interactional, or emotional support (Mowen et al. 2019). In fact, these domains of support interact in more sophisticated ways as it was evidenced above. Instrumental support through accommodation was seldom separated from emotional support in this sample of mandatory lifers. For example, Raul has been receiving support from his father and sister since he got sentenced for murder. I asked him whether he felt supported by the family, and then repeated the same question one year later.

> Yes, of course they did, they supported me throughout the whole thing, after release they're there for you, they do so much for you, make up for everything you missed, showing you new places, tell you about things… and yeah… family is everything (Raul, first interview).

> It is a cultural thing, everybody kind of knows that Asian families are quite tight knit and that but then on the flipside there are other families that wouldn't have stood by me after what I did, you know what I mean? But with my family thank God, they were always supportive of me… they didn't condone what I did, but

they do know that obviously I recognise the wrong that I did, and they were willing to just get me through what I had to get through (Raul, second interview).

Raul conceptualised his family's non-conditional support through the cultural lenses of his Asian cultural appartenance. Calverley (2013, 2019) highlighted that UK desisters from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Indian, Bangladeshi, and Black and dual heritage) vary in available social capital post-release. Although the 'family' was significant in all the men's movement away from crime, there were some observed cultural variations in the ways in which the social institution resonated in participants' lives. Both Indian and Bangladeshi families were critical in providing a strong foundation in encouraging a re-orientation towards the family as available hooks for change (see Giordano et al., 2002) on release. Bangladeshi families were forgiving and supportive of their children, perhaps resembling their wider religious beliefs. Raul recounted that one of the first few things that his family offered him when he was imprisoned was a Qur'an and a praying mat. Released, and now that he was spending more time with his family meant that Raul could take the 'family role' more seriously. One year later, a quasi-official pro-social identity had become evident (see Giordano et al. 2002) as Raul started caring for his newly born nephew. This further cemented his family man identity:

> My nephew has now been born in August, so it's my sisters' son. I spend a lot of time with him. Playing with him staying there doing a lot of things that I never thought I would do, like you know bathe him, change his nappies, feed him, that sort of thing, then I juggle that with a lot of work as well, not being as complacent as I was before, ok I am employed that's it just go to work every day that's it, now I am just trying to do as much as I can in case another lockdown comes or I lose my job again, you never know what's gonna happen nowadays, uhm, still seeing probation and that as well, and yeah that's about it really (Raul).

Evidently, Raul's family had been foundational to the development of pro-social identities post-release. He had been accepted to assume a clear role within the wider family structure despite his failed efforts to build a family of his own. This finding echoes the experiences of Bangladeshi participants in Calverley's (2013; 2019:85) study who structured their time through "childcare and running errands for family members". Further, the finding echoes Farrall's (2019) recent call for research to take the role of culture in the distance process more seriously.

To reiterate, participants in this sample were able to use their families as informal mechanisms of support for the construction of pro-social selves post-release. What seemed to be important

was the timing of building such vital ties. The most 'successful' lifers have reconnected with their families whilst still in prison, which meant that they could use their instrumental and emotional support immediately before and after release. Nevertheless, such experiences of positive familial relationships post-release are not reflective of the general experiences of long-term offenders and indeterminate sentenced individuals in the UK (Kotova, 2020).

In some cases, families can exacerbate release stress or carry criminogenic potential (Farrington et al., 1996). For this reason, Kay (2020) has recently conceptualised desistance as the reorientation of a type of capital which sustains crime (anti-social capital) to one which imbues pro-social capital. Furthermore, developments in desistance research called for a more systematic attention paid to social capital as supporting desistance (Uggen et al. 2004; Bottoms and Shapland, 2011; McNeil et al., 2012; King, 2013). These authors, as Albertson (2021) summarised cite a lack of access to pro-social capital as hampering the desistance process. This analysis adds to this important conversation and highlights the ways in which mandatory lifers mobilised bonding, bridging, and resettlement capital to ensure a smooth scaffold into further prosocial post-release. Further, the section's findings reiterate Lord Farmer's (2017) report that the criminal justice system must prepare the necessary steps for long-term offenders' family's involvement in their resettlement planning (see chapter 11 for a full list of recommendations).

5.3. Employment as resettlement capital: Becoming working men

Many studies have focused on how ex-offenders and homicide offenders particularly are denied employment based on the 'questionable nature of their moral character' and (in)existent work-experience consequence of their imprisonment (Petersilia, 2003; Liem, 2016, 2017; Liem and Garcin, 2014 on homicide offenders). As discussed in chapter three, experiencing stigma is one of the most significant pain of re-entry for ex-offenders, rendering reintegration a fundamentally difficult quest (LeBel, 2012). Homicide offenders and indeterminate sentenced ex-prisoners are no exception to this axion; to the contrary, these populations were found to experience exacerbated levels of stigma and stress due to unemployment history and the severity of their crime (see Liem and Garcin 2014, Liem, 2016; Atherton and Buck, 2021 for an UK review). Nevertheless, for some of the men, prison assisted with finding work outside, which in turn helped with their early re-entry experience.

Richard managed to secure a job with NACRO, a charity which is committed to the prevention of reoffending of ex-prisoners, during his imprisonment and was then offered a permanent position immediately after release. This allowed him to use his stigmatised past as an asset

rather than a liability (Maruna and LeBel, 2010). I asked Richard whether he ever feels stigmatised at work.

> No, because, I suppose, it is hard for me to see, because I haven't applied for many jobs, cuz I've been in this job since 20 years this year, working for [organisation], I've been working for [broadcaster] for 15 years, but maybe if I'd apply for different jobs, probably I'd find out, aaa, so the barriers, but it hasn't been a massive barrier for me because I have been in stable jobs you know (Richard).

As evidenced above, for Richard, this initial role was a crucial steppingstone to his professional development, as it provided the social capital needed to further progress in the job market. He was then able to secure work experience and part time employment with a well-known broadcasting network and has since been working in both roles. Interestingly, Richard rated working for the broadcaster as a salient component to his new sense of identity. He was offered the job after having been observed helping someone "who was on air" delivering a gospel programme for several years. After being offered a job, Richard felt that it was his duty to disclose his past.

> Because they observed me for so long, maybe 18 months to 2 years doing work experience, they said, they could see I was a stable person now so they gave me the job; so I have had this job, part time job now, for about 15 years with the [redacted] uhm, and achievements there help me to flourish and help me sort of to look at things positively, the highlights of that particular job was that I interviewed the prime-minister, 4 years ago, David Cameron, so for me, personally, for the average person at the [redacted] is probably not much of a special thing, but for me who has served a life sentence, and been through very dark places like [maximum security prison], etc, uhm, it was kind of a big thing for me, and still is, working for the [redacted] is a privilege, and to run an organisation as well. So, I would say that is the reason I was reasonably successful after release you know (Richard).

The story above contradicts Liem's (2016; 2017) and Liem and Garcin's (2014) finding that homicide offenders' employment is successful as long it provides ex-offenders with 'professional ex-criminal', generative roles. To the contrary, as Richard remarked, it is expected of individuals such as himself to land in helper roles (White, 2000; Brown, 1993) where utilising criminal pasts is a significant part of the job description. In contrast, working for a 'prestigious' media institution was seen as fundamentally at odds and in contradiction with his stigmatised identity. This role publicly validated Richard as a 'normal person', divorced from his criminal past. The quality of the individuals he has been associating with at

the new role is important in validating his pro-social work identity (see Wright and Cullen, 2004). Further, following King's (2014) point, Richard reminds us that it is the subjective attachment of the individual to the job rather than the job in and of itself which matters to identity commitments and ultimately, to identity desistance. It is noteworthy that Richard had disclosed his past to his employers only after he had already been observed for a long time. A similar strategy had been identified by Harding (2003) where ex-offenders disclosed information strategically, at the most opportune moment to employers. Many strategized to work as volunteers or in low-level jobs which did not necessitate thorough background checks in order to present themselves as worthy first and then progress into more senior roles.

Richard evidenced that contrary to the belief that family ties act as a bridge to the job market (Berg and Huebner, 2011), these two life dimensions operate in a dialectical fashion. Job stability is integral to a stable life and a stable family and both elements are important when considering entering long-term commitments with romantic partners. Employment also provides the economic resources to facilitate family formation (Lichter et al., 1991 in King et al. 2007).

> I suppose it works both ways really, having a job, because when I first got released uhm I started straight away, going into work, because I got employed by NACRO, and whilst I was going on day release from open prison and I was doing day release at NACRO and when I had the parole, the manager uhm, offered me a job, so I went straight into a job after that and I mean when my wife looks at me as an individual, having employment helped me: "at least he is settled". And also, it helped me with my licence as well because as soon as I got a job, I didn't have to see the probation service every week at that point, it was only once a month, so that was a sign of stability. Both the job and the marriage helped with stability (Richard).

Not all participants found viable work while still inside prison, but their prison-based contacts were relevant in finding some stability post-release. For example, Jacob used his prison based social capital to find a few sporadic jobs immediately after being granted parole. These jobs had simply 'landed on his lap' - handed to him by some of his old prison associates. He then managed to build a successful IT company. Jacob's approach to employment represented an innovative yet aligned application of his avoidant strategy to the job market: by building his own business he managed to deflect attention from his own identity and project it onto his business.

> I've been incredibly fortunate in the, my transition, because I was able to have income and substantive income I was able to build a life which a lot of guys in

the same position as me don't have these opportunities or those doors open for them or they don't have the wherewithal to start their own business and I knew that nobody would employ me, I knew that the only job I would get would be a meaningful job that that, because I would have to declare my prison history that you know, and who is going to employ somebody like me ? You know? It was sadly enough to realise that if I didn't do it myself then it would I wouldn't be able to so…. that's the premise upon which I started this journey out of the prison […], I've been fortunate because I've managed to get this far without a big sign over my head saying: 'killer', you know. There is no doubt even now I wouldn't be in the same position I am today (Jacob).

The passage above displays Jacob's self-sufficient and entrepreneurial 'character' which 'rescued' him from the potential bleak prospects of his own release. Jacob's stigma concealment strategy (LeBel, 2008) is inextricably linked to issues around exposure. Not having to apply to a multitude of jobs meant that he walked without "a big sign over [his] head saying 'killer'". He learnt early on that disclosing his past would present a set of challenges. Nevertheless, running his own business meant that he did not have to accommodate his strategy to the 'moral aspirations' of the job market.

As evidenced above, a smooth role transition into working identities was secured by either using stigmatised identities as assets (Richard), or by innovating in their approach to the job market (Jacob). The finding reinforces a criminological truism that social ties are important to prisoners who seek employment upon release (see Granovetter, 2001 in Duwe and Clark, 2013; Kotova, 2020). This section evidenced that building pro-social ties in prison may act as a potential 'bridge' to the job market for long-term offenders. Nevertheless, not all five participants managed to build such useful connections during their imprisonment.

Raul had been released for over one year at the time of our first interview. He received all his gym qualifications in prison but quickly realised that despite his suitability for a personal trainer's role, his social position was not favourable in achieving meaningful jobs too easily. He was nevertheless given the chance to work at a local gym soon after his release.

> You apply for a job, when you've just been in prison for 12 years for having killed somebody, nobody's looking to hire you, I was lucky cuz I got all my gym qualifications when I was in prison and now I am a qualified personal trainer, I was doing a sports science degree at university, the guy at my local gym decided to give me a chance, he said look: you made a mistake when you were young, I don't believe that is who you are now, and he gave me a chance you know, but it's rare to find people like that (pauses) (Raul, first interview).

Raul's initial strategy involved a degree of discretion; he selectively disclosed his past depending on the social situation.

> Do you tell people about your crime? When you meet new people? (Dan)

> It all comes down to the type of person you are, if you have that respect about you, that dignity about you, you don't want to sit there and lie and spit a bunch of lies, because that always comes back to haunt you. So, I gauge the person that I'm talking to, and if I find that that's a good person, a respectful person, I've got no problem telling them, if it has any bearing on our relationship, so for example, the guy who was going to give me a job, I thought, out of the goodness of his heart, he is willing to give me a job, so, I should return that favour by being completely honest with him, rather than later down the line it comes out that I lied to him. And he's thinking, look, I gave you a chance and this is what you did. I'm not that guy you know, I'd rather be straight, upfront, this is who I am, but then, on the flipside, you don't go around advertising, you don't go about boasting, you know what I mean, kids do that, wanna be gangsters, they do that, "oh I've been in prison, I've done this I've done that", you know what I mean, it shocks people, and it worries people for a week or a month or so, and then afterwards, they start looking at me differently, do you know what I mean, so yeah (Raul, first interview).

Raul's cold analysis evidenced how mandatory lifers need to 'strike the right balance' between disclosing and concealing their past to avoid being discredited and denied opportunities after release. The leitmotif of our first interview had been represented by his sentiments of feeling 'blocked'. Raul repeatedly told me that he needed to further progress within the job market but was unable to do so due to his stigmatised past.

> So I went for a job interview in Nuffield in [redacted], and uhm had the talking interview, like the face to face interview, guy loved me, then I moved to the physical interview where I had to be on the gym floor show particular exercises, and how I would react in certain situations etc, and yeah, the guy pretty much loved me and said yeah I can't wait to see you start and that and just as I was leaving, he said yeah, uhm once the CRB check is done uhm that will be it really, that shouldn't be a problem and that…and ….yeah the minute he said CRB check I kind of knew what was going to happen, because he didn't ask me in the end if I had anything to disclose or anything like that so I know that you are not obliged to say unless they ask you. Yeah, once the CRB came through, he just made this story about how many others have done better than me on the physical, even though at the interview he told me that I done the best that he'd seen, so yeah, pretty much knew where he was trying to get, yeah … I think Nuffield and these kinds of places because the level of clients they have, rich people, and stuff like that, if it is found out that they were working with an ex convicted murderer you

know, people could have issues with that even though it doesn't affect them in the slightest way (Raul, first interview).

The story arch above is split into two separate episodes. Raul, the lovable and knowledgeable individual managed to navigate the interview process with skill and success, but in the end was denied employment because of his stigmatised past. The story betrays a tension which Raul needed to navigate as a consequence of his stigma (see Goffman, 1963). During situations as the one narrated, Raul has the chance to glimpse into a 'life that could have been', but which fades from reality as his 'master status' (Becker, 1963) overrides his professional qualities (also see Harding, 2003). Raul's experience echoes that of a multitude of participants in criminological and sociological research. Pager and Quillian (2005) found that despite initial declarative openness to hire applicants with criminal records, employers hardly ever follow through. In the UK, Atherton and Buck (2021) found that employers were especially concerned about hiring ex-prisoners who they branded as part of the 'TSM' (Terrorism, Sex Offenders and Murderers). Although murderers were more likely to be employed than the other two groups, they were still reluctant to share 'courtesy stigma' (Goffman, 1963) and to transfer image with them (Wolfensberger, 1999 in Atherton and Buck, 2021). Raul remarked that alliances with convicted murderers may not be representative of the marketing strategy of luxurious gym brands. In fact, research evidenced that employers in other jurisdictions are interested in both the severity as well as the timing of an offence when analysing potential employment (see Vuolo, Lageson, Uggen, 2017; Lageson et al., 2015 for an American context) and this may well have applied to Raul.

For example, a study based on surveyed businesses within 12 Texas zip-codes found that 80% of surveyed employers would not hire someone who has been to prison for a violent offense (they were more likely to employ individuals who committed 'minor' crimes, rather than violent crimes such as sexual assault and murder; also see Cerda et al., 2015). Interestingly, the type of murder committed seemed significant to the employers when deciding to hire. For example, in Atherton and Bucks' (2021) study, domestic murder was constructed as a 'one-off moment of madness' and a 'crime of passion' and therefore was not perceived as abominable as other types of serious, persistent offences. Nevertheless, Raul's experience of stigma translated into other dimensions of his life. We talked at length about the difficulties he encountered in finding a romantic partner willing to accept him.

It's a massive hurdle in itself (meeting someone), you meet a girl, you tell her, what you went away for her, you tell her, you got to see if she is ok with it, and

if she is ok with it, you got a bigger problem, is her family gonna be ok with it? Cuz she may love you and be willing to accept that, but her family are thinking, do I really want to give my daughter to a guy who killed someone; regardless of what the circumstances are, and you got to try and get over that hurdle, uhm, yes, it's just a lot of hurdles. Everything you do, what you did never leaves you, it impacts everything you know what I mean. There is no moment of everyday when you forget, you know what I mean (Raul first interview).

The passage above betrays Raul's experience of a complicated, double stigma. Not only does he need to be accepted by a potential partner, but also by her family (her father). This type of 'elimination tournament' ensures that his prospect of success is minimal. Also, Raul's fears are related to the totalising effects of the murderer's stigma which denies him any trace of humanism and human complexity. For example, the 'potential father' in the scenario above does not have to process a difficult decision: they simply need to decide whether they "want to give (sic) [their] daughters to a guy who killed someone" or not. I asked Raul whether he still felt the pressure to get married one year later:

Yeah, that's there every day because obviously I am getting older, but like I said, coming out and seeing how people are these days, girls are no different, they are very they have changed a lot as well, do you know what I mean, they are not as worried about preserving their chastity, or their self-respect before, (unclear) they are very out there now and that's really not something that you would like to build a life with, rise kids with, so it's hard to find somebody with the same drives as yourself (Raul, third interview).

Raul's experience and conceptualisation of his own stigma seemed to have radically changed in between these two interviews. The difference is sustained by a fundamental transformation in the internalisation of his social stigma versus projecting it onto a society which he now seems to despise. His relativism observed with his initial stigma disclosing strategies had also changed drastically and became more categorical. These two radical changes in his narrative betrayed a fundamental transformation in how Raul had started to make senses of the world. I asked Raul whether he tells people about his past once more:

No, never. But I don't lie about it either, but because the life is so self-absorbed now, no one ever asks (Raul, third interview)

The 'sudden change' coincides with a fundamental change in the way that Raul had internalised a different set of values at the heart of his narrative identity. Also, it evidences Raul's rebellion and disappointment with society at large (explored in more depth in chapter six). Nevertheless, Raul's difficulties can be understood as an exception to the rule for this sample of released

mandatory lifers – it serves to strengthen the point that prison-based capital can render a smoother transition into pro-social identities post-release. However, structural barriers can render the accumulation of social capital difficult, as evidenced in Raul's case.

This section used the concept of resettlement capital (Best, 2018) to make sense of the ways in which social and community capital was mobilised from within the prison walls to assist with pro-social role transition post-release. Nevertheless, the men's early resettlement success was doubled by a pressing need to negotiate their newly cemented identities with a 'prison identity' that evidenced a degree of institutionalisation. The successful navigation of these two distinct voices proved crucial.

5.4. Negotiating the prison voice

As discussed in chapter two, prison-based adaptive mechanisms can prove maladaptive on release and this is especially true for long-term offenders (Jamieson and Grounds, 2005) and homicide offenders particularly (Hulley, Crewe, and Wright, 2015; Liem and Kunst, 2013). The earliest stages of re-entry (1 month up to 18 months in this sample's case) were identified as the most stressful by the men (also see Western, 2018). During these early times, particularly demanding was the need for shedding behaviours, as well as values which had been learned as adaptation to the ideological settings and customs of prison life (see Clemmer, 1940). Goffman (1961:13) argued that long-term prisoners are especially prone to a process he called disculturation, where an "untraining" renders the nearly released individual "temporarily incapable of managing certain features of daily life on the outside". The re-entry narratives presented here highlight the negotiation between the cultural logics of the prison setting and life outside.

Peter initially found life post-release significantly more traumatic than he expected. Ever since he got out of prison, he found himself caught in a 'liminal' space (Van Gennep, 1960; also see McNeil, 2020) which requires a continuous negotiation of two distinct voices.

> Getting released from prison, Dan, was a way, way more traumatic event than I thought it was going to be. I realised I had lots of personality traits and alarms you know, that's a lot subconscious that's grown up in prison, I have issues almost constantly, like you know a radio static, and it's around uhm… everything; one, this is gonna sound: I can be at work standing next to a toolbox and talking to someone, you know like how people just idly pick things up and you talk to them, it means absolutely nothing, you know what I mean, you can pick up a pen up of the desk and whatever. I am at work, and a guy picks up a screwdriver, and

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at the back of my mind, screaming, WHAT IS HE DOING? Why is he picking up a screwdriver what's going on here, but at the same time, and this is very George Orwellian, I am holding a doublethink yea, I absolutely know that it means nothing and I need to ignore all the stuff that is going on behind it, 100% I know that, but I also know that there is a potential threat and I need to be very aware of it (opening the windows of the car now) (Peter, first interview).

As evidenced above, the very coping mechanisms developed during his long prison sentence prove maladaptive in the outside world (Hulley et al., 2015). Some penal researchers have theorised that to survive in the prison environment, newly arrived prisoners create a distinction between their 'true' identity (pre-prison identity), and a false identity (Schmid and Jones, 1991, Wheeler, 1961). This new identity is seen as being based on impression management (see Goffman, 1963) but ultimately becomes integrated within the multiplicity of the prisoners' voices. Then, as Goffman (1961:73) has put it, "release is likely to come just when the inmate has learned the ropes on the inside." Peter's initial struggles are representative of such adaptive mechanisms, which, according to him, can only disappear with the passage of time. Harding et al (2019:60) remarked that formerly incarcerated offenders "must quickly shed the vestige of their prison disculturation, juggle the demands of the parole supervision and requited treatment problems, and begin to put their lives together after a long period away". These concomitant demands are stressful and can become overwhelming in periods of increased stress. Once the recorder was switched off, Peter confessed that in times of exacerbated stress, he sometimes thinks about going back to prison. Below is an entry from the research diary.

> Peter recognised that there are times he would want his prison life back. He said that "there are times when I wouldn't mind [to] go to prison, because there are two conflicting opinions in my mind, one kind of, I suppose, like a combat mode, prison mode, and the voice of everyday normality saying 'no'; and they are in balance, but when they are not in balance, maybe I would like to go back to prison, or it would be more comfortable to go to prison". Peter made this remark during a time when his girlfriend was sick in hospital. He now must go to work, sleep alone, go to hospital to visit her, all of which is "too tiring" he said (Research Diary, 4 February 2020) (Peter, first interview).

This passage above draws attention to the crucial timing of the first few months of release as the latest Ministry of Justice (2020) quarterly bulletin identified reconviction rates for adults released from custodial sentences for less than 12 months at a staggering 62.7%. In our third interview, 2.5 years later, Paul admitted that this sense of alertness had diminished. I asked him whether he was still experiencing 'the combat voice'.

> Aaa, not so much, not so severe, I'm always on the ball, if you know what I mean, but I don't feel the threats, you know what I mean? […], I do feel a lot calmer, I don't feel so threatened. I don't like it, but sometimes everyone is sitting here and I'm holding the baby and then maybe my stepson will be here as well and the missus will come over as well and they are all in my face, I don't, I don't like, that makes me feel uncomfortable, when we are all, even when we are laughing and joking, too many heads near my head space unsettles me you know? (Peter, third interview).

In his view, the panacea for this is to ridicule the inner thoughts and keep a healthy attitude where communication is key in signalling to people when he feels threatened. Similarly to Peter, Raul experienced a sense of alertness as being representative of his early release months. He recalls being overly protective of himself and his family, to the extent of making people around him uncomfortable.

> When I came out for the first at least 6 months, 9 months, I was like an owl, I was always constantly looking around, I'd be walking with my sister and my niece, and my eyes are everywhere, thinking, just trying to perceive potential threats that weren't even there, but I just wanted to make sure that if it did happen, I was there and ready to protect my family, and what I realised that was just from prison, cuz in prison that is how you are every single day, you have to make sure that you can neutralise potential threats every single day, but doing that out here, in the normal world, it took me 9 months to realise that I don't have to do that, you know, my family survived without me for 12 years, without me protecting, and now all of sudden, when somebody is walking too close, I'm having to stand in between them, or if I see someone walking that I don't like the look of, I get my family to cross the road, and there little things like that, and I realised that I don't have to do that anymore (long pause) (Raul, first interview)

Two and half years later, Raul continues to experience a heightened sense of alertness, although this has moved away from the forefront of his mind. That is to say, the anxiety associated with the pervasive sense of threat has moved from a conscious rumination to second nature, diffusely experienced, potentially unconsciously:

> It's always there, it's never gonna go away if you know what I mean, but yeah, not with the type of area and the stories you hear something like that, I'm never gonna switch off from that you know what I mean, and I'll be annoyed at myself if I ever did let myself fall into that false sense of security, but I have chilled out quite a bit you know, but yah, as I said it's always going to be there (Raul, second interview)

> Still there, but you are not showing it as much, or am I understanding it wrongly? (Dan)

Yeah, yeah, I'm not, it's not in the forefront of my mind as much as it was, you know. So, a few months back me and my sister, my nephew, pushing him in the pram, we were in the park, and some guys were play fight each other, it's a lady in front of us with no pram, they haven't moved out of her way, so kind of got a little bit caught up in all of that, it's all roughhousing, you know, pushing into each other and all of that stuff yah. And I don't know something just kicked in, as soon as they came near my nephew's pram I came and I physically moved them out of the way, and they were a bit surprised, taken aback by it, but at that point all I really cared about was just making sure they didn't come near my nephew you know what I mean, and they backed up after that (Raul, third interview).

Raul conditioned his heightened senses of alertness, and specifically that of fear of crime/victimisation to the area where he lives, which is constructed as a dangerous place (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). The overprotection described in our first interview is reiterated here, 2.5 years later in the story of protecting his nephew. This could potentially explain an achieved sense of masculinity in the absence of other available resources. In a very similar fashion to Peter and Raul, Jacob too felt that he had an 'radar' switched on soon after he got released.

I really struggled with sitting in a restaurant. I was talking with my wife about it the other day, ah, she is a passionate cook, so we would go out for a meal, but because of the nature of prison I could sit in a restaurant and I could hear a conversation at every table around me I was so attuned and aware of my surroundings, having to have eyes at the back of your head and ears, and knowing what was going on and what is going on around you. I used to find it really difficult to sit in and enjoy the meal in a restaurant cuz I was constantly… my radar was operational to what was going on around me and it took me quite a long time to become comfortable doing that, and I never lost it. I am always aware of my surroundings. I see things; I observe things that no one else sees and it is in some respects a good life skill, but in other respects… it's not paranoia, I never felt it, I've met people who had been extremely paranoid, it's just like a security system really, of, of a, actually stopping and relaxing and that was quite difficult… The other thing I think it is as a result of the control that's exerted by the prison system even, you know, I still don't like control, I am independent, I want to do things my way, my understanding of things, uhm, you know, I… I analyse everything, so, you know that's good and bad, I suppose… uhm… the… I didn't find it particularly difficult on an individual basis uhm, I mean I walked in some amazing job roles very quickly, because there was a focus on a target which was the job project or whatever, I think I was able to cope with that, my mind was attuned to doing, getting the job done you know… I always say to my wife 'come on let's go to Wales'… And we would drive, come on just go, and

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she said why, and I said well because we can (laughs). We jump in the car and go driving and get fish and chips 100 miles away simply because we could, and I know that sounds crazy (Jacob, first interview).

Jacob directly referred to a sense of paranoia which characterised his first few months of release. Studies specifically focusing on homicide offenders found that long-term prison sentences lead to paranoia, hampered decision making, social sensory deprivation and temporal alienation (Liem and Kunst, 2013). Further, to make up for the lost time and his loss of autonomy (see Sykes, 1958), and the consequential deindividuation due to the neo-paternalism (Crewe, 2011) exerted by the prison system, Jacob would exert autonomy by travelling with his wife simply because they could. Nathaniel also expressed his jubilation with the sheer amount of choice and freedom:

Do you recall how you felt when you started going out? (Dan)

It was just jubilation, I was proper excited, it was like Christmas, like being in a gig, just silly things like popping into a shop, going to buy different hair gel, you can't get it was just crazy, it's just the smallest things to a normal person but it was the biggest things to me, so… It was, you are always looking around and just couldn't believe how fast everything is, obviously time goes faster (Nathaniel, first interview).

Richard recalls his early release as a lot easier than [he thought], although more difficult than the upcoming re-entry phases. Specifically, Richard remembers a period of uncertainty and fear of possibly losing his licence.

The most challenging would have been the resettlement initially because I didn't know what to expect, I didn't know what it would be like, how long it would last. When I first got in, I thought probation service forever, but then I realised it was for a certain time. And not having to report to them now makes life feel normal, even though I am not officially in a normal situation because I am on a life licence… uhm, but not having to report to the probation service has brought a sense of normality, but it was a challenge at first because I had to report to them each week, and comply, and always feel that you know, will I do something that will upset them and they may revoke my licence, there's always that fear… You know, because you don't really know what to expect and I felt when I got released that they didn't explain that properly, I think that should have been explained properly from prison you know so there wouldn't be these fears, and hopefully now they do that, it's something that I look into now… so, I think uhm… that was the most difficult (Richard, first interview).

Although released more than 20 years ago, Richard's concerns echo some of more recent parolees in criminological research. For example, participants in Weaver's (2014) study

complained about competing expectations from probation and which rendered the post-prison experience uncertain and ambiguous. Several of Harding et al. (2019) previously incarcerated individuals in the United States, voiced that part of their anxiety about violation stems from the fact that reincarceration can result from behaviours which normally would not have any legal consequences. To best explain the men's sentiments of fear and ambiguity in the initial stages of their release, I return here to Peter who unintentionally explains the aetiology of his combat voice:

> Yes, so I was in my room the other day not long ago, my mom came in with some washing, so she washed for me, folded, and she opened the cupboard. My bells went off like mad, what the fuck and it settled in completely but at the back of my mind, because in prison no one can walk in your room like that and just open the cupboard door, that is not, that's a fight, and even though it was my mum, you know what I mean, I still had that feeling of discomfort this is not alright, and that is because of prison. And I have that a lot of the time, I have that channelling at the back of my mind, watch out, watch out for that and it's all bollocks, you know what I mean, it's all warning me of things that would be threats in prison. Even things like people can pick up a coffee you know just to have a sip of their coffee, and I am like 'wowowowow', sounds crazy… cuz it's not the big things, the big things like I said to you, job, wife baby, I knocked them down easy, you know what I mean, I bit the barrier towards these things, this is not a problem, it's the little tiny things at the back of my mind, it is exhausting, mentally drained, all the time because there's this survival mechanism from prison that is working from background all the time that I don't need anymore. Every thought that comes up it's doubled, triple by potential threat you know, is this an affront to my reputation, you know what I mean all nonsense, all from prison, all irrelevant to life outside prison, but it still has to go through the process of my mind, thinking yes, I know that is bollocks you know what I mean… does that make any sense to you Dan? (Peter, first interview).

As evidenced above, the men's early re-entry narratives (up to 18 months) are characterised by a sentiment of insecurity, which indicates that they actively negotiate a multiplicity of contrasting voices. Most of the men have referred to 'alarm systems', 'contrasting voices', and 'combat mode' to exemplify interference in accommodating to life and social encounters outside (also see Clifford, 2010). After release, the men need to reconcile their prison voice with roles, expectations, and social situations which may require a set of interpretations at odds with the prison settings (see Clemmer, 1940). This proved crucial to the extent to which Peter had almost given up life outside in periods of exacerbated stress. Luckily, his wife's pregnancy and his subsequent and imminent role of becoming a father had provided a motive for conforming (Laub, and Samson, 2003) and confronting his fears, and thus renouncing ideas of

prison return. Peter later remarked one year later that the 'combat mode' had diminished in intensity as he continuously ridiculed the prison voice - for him, deep introspection was key in managing the tension and moving on with his life. Raul, on the other hand, felt that the alertness will always be there - not in the forefront of his thinking, but diffusely experienced, actively eroding his optimism of a successful release.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter explored the early resettlement transition of the mandatory lifers with a focus on the most salient experiences as narrated by the men. The chapter evidenced that two of the most-researched socio-economic 'correlates of desistance', namely family formation and gaining employment (Farrall, 2011), are crucial in the initial construction of pro-social identities for this sample of released mandatory lifers. More specifically, families and romantic partners provided much needed 'resettlement capital' of the instrumental type (accommodation, housing, even finances) as well as emotional support, and assisted with the men's resilience to both life inside prison and outside. In turn, such support acted as a 'scaffolding' mechanism which supported the men to further develop and cement pro-social identities (family men identities) post-release. Also, the chapter drew attention to the importance of timing in accumulating social and 'resettlement capital' needed for a smooth role transition after release. In contrast to some published work, the men did not have the opportunity to simply "inherit their families' social capital" (Farrall, 2011:66) and end up straight into jobs. However, they managed to accumulate necessary capital during their imprisonment and skilfully mobilised their social relationships on release or secured their roles while they were still in prison. To avoid anticipated stigma on release, the men deflected attention from their history of unemployment and criminal past, or simply used such spoiled identities (Goffman, 1963) as assets in the community. Nevertheless, not all participants managed to accomplish this in due time and have therefore failed to achieve the 'untroubled' role transition as presented in this chapter. Prospective longitudinal accounts of the most recently released participants in this sample offered a glimpse into the experiences of stigma which were difficult to navigate, and which hampered the men's progress, as was Raul's case.

Despite the 'smooth progress' into family men identities and employment, the men's early release represented a state of liminality (Turner, 1969). These new identities needed to be negotiated alongside an identified 'prison voice' which rendered 'early resettlement' as the most difficult stage of the men's re-entry experience. Their first year and a half coincided with

their experiences of disculturation: a process where the mandatory lifers had to denude the vestiges of a life imprisonment along with its coping mechanisms. Compared to much research on the effects of imprisonment as explored in chapter three, the men in this sample experienced a 'combat voice' which needed continuous internal negotiation, and which interacted with their 'family men' identities. For example, in times of exacerbated stress, Peter was ready to go back to prison, but his wife's pregnancy and his imminent role of becoming a father acted as a protective factor which deterred him from making this step. The implications of this results are discussed in chapter 11 (conclusion to the thesis).

Chapter 6: Pursuing identities of success: Mandatory Lifers navigate consumer-capitalism

6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter explored the importance of timing in accumulating social capital to ensure a smooth role-transition into pro-social identities post-release. To reiterate, the men's initial aspirations and projections for their 'future selves' were "normatively conventional" (Bottoms and Shapland, 2014:10 in Kay, 2016:118): they generally planned to construct identities around traditional family roles such as that of a husband, father, and worker. Perhaps this resembled the men's association of such ambitions with notions of traditional masculinity and masculine identities (see Fletcher, 2007 in King, 2013). In addition to such traditional aspirations, the most recently released lifers (Peter and Raul) have envisioned future identities consistent with the prevailing ideology of consumer capitalism. Importantly, notions of consumerist success interacted dialectically with the men's capacity to navigate structural obstacles in achieving traditional normative roles. As these traditional forms of identities could not be achieved due to structural impediments, the men's fragile sense of self interacted more strongly with the consumerist demands and seductions of the post-industrial, consumerist society (Bauman, 2004) which presented a set of pressures to perform successful selves through dominant consumerist symbols.

This chapter draws from repeated qualitative interviews with the most recently released men (Peter and Raul) to explore the ways in which they have adapted their narrative identities to the demands of a society which interpellated (see Althusser, 1971) them as consumers on release. Peter and Raul were the most recently released mandatory lifers and experienced these pressures the most acutely compared to the other men. The chapter will initially explore Raul's commitment to consumer culture and the emanating guilt which stemmed from his failure to answer the cultural injunction to enjoy (Žižek, 2002). Then, the chapter will explore Peter's case to evidence the protective (but illusory) potential of traditional familial roles in providing the necessary narrative resources to stave off the pressures of consumer-capitalism. The implications of this are discussed in the conclusion to the thesis.

6.2.   MLS negotiating identities in consumer capitalism

As mentioned in chapter five, the men's initial aspirations were related to building a family of their own, finding the right type of employment, and to find a suitable romantic partner. Nevertheless, alongside such aspirations those most recently released mandatory lifers also sought the promises of consumerism, including the accumulation of consumerist symbols to make up for lost time as a consequence of imprisonment (in Raul's case) as well as the flexible 'work-life balance' promised by consumer-capitalism (in Peter's case). An important point which is made here is that the demand for consumerist symbols partly acted as a substitute to a fragile sense of identity that was due to the impossibility to fulfil early projected plans. Raymen and Smith (2016:14) succinctly made the point:

> In the relative absence of distinguishable life stages, stable relationships, work, and politics to mature into, it seems all that is left are the shops and the self as a lone competitor in the struggle for symbols that paradoxically represent both social distinction and conformity (see Miles, 2000)

Apart from the stigma of having committed murder which affected both his romantic and employment prospects, Raul experiences the stigma of not owning the right type of consumer items associated with specific moments of his life.

> I wouldn't have been in this boring normal situation that I am now if I would have had kids or I would have had a nicer car, a nicer house, and you know… it's hard to explain… it reminds you more than anything that you have lost… the normality of everything. How much better it could have been if I hadn't gone away […]. Yes, being 31 years old and I only passed last year, so that means you can only get a certain type of car, you know, your insurance it's not gonna be, you know what I mean, so, people that don't know you are looking at you thinking, why is he 31 and he is driving this little hatchback car, you know what I mean? Shouldn't he have a big proper car by now? And you can see that their eyebrows are raised a bit and you know, you realise that there are guys your age driving around in big Mercedes and Audis and stuff like that… you are thinking, shit that should have been me, you know what I mean. It is not nothing to lose sleep over, but it is a big thing. You know…. Time is frozen, or that you have lost. Lost is probably a better way of describing it, sometimes when I had a bad day you feel that you have been robbed of it. You blame everybody else you know what I mean, but yes…(Raul).

Raul characterised his life as normal and boring, but boredom has no room in consumer societies (Bauman, 2004). A boring life is ultimately an unhappy and unfulfilling life. Bauman remarked that "a happy life, as defined by consumer culture, is life insured against boredom,

life in which constantly 'something happens', something new, exciting, and exciting because it is new" (Bauman, 2004:39). Raul's normality serves as a daily reminder of a life of wasted consumption and missed enjoyments. In fact, Raul's offender stigma, which is normally classed as 'invisible', and as 'passing' in the literature (Goffman, 1963) was now experienced as conspicuous due to his consumption patterns. Raul equated lost time to a period of deep freeze (see Zamble and Porporino, 1990) and wasted opportunities to relish which elicited sentiments of guilt as he failed to answer the 'cultural injunction to enjoy' (Žižek, 2002) in all the time he was in prison. In our first interview, he felt that he could wait no longer. Having already achieved most of what was 'achievable' at that point, he was experiencing a pressure to accumulate the necessary capital to build a successful life based on the precepts of the consumerist societies:

> I feel that I am stuck, I need to move on to the next chapter, you know what I mean, because some people may be content with what I have... you know what I mean? I want to build a better life, a better quality of life, I don't wanna be that guy that... Something really bad happened to him, and now he's just stuck in this, under this dark cloud all the time, you know what I mean (Raul)?

Faced with a series of blocked opportunities and lacking in the narrative habitus to identify and express a set of identities in the period emergent of his release, Raul felt "compelled to enter the battle for consumer significance" (Hall, Winlow, and Ancrum, 2008: 65) and bought his dream car a year later - a BMW Z4 convertible. Buying the dream car meant that he recuperated lost time through imprisonment and avoided insignificance in the consumer culture of post-industrial society, or late modernity (Hayward and Yar, 2006). Raymen and Smith (2016:18) made the point:

> Consumer objects have the ability to act as reflective mirrors of identity and distinction, temporarily staving off the anxiety of cultural obsolescence and for the individual providing a precious sliver of relational security, if only fleetingly.

Winlow and Hall (2016:90) also remarked how traditional sources of identity, as they 'recede into history', are being replaced by consumer objects of socio-symbolic significance. Raul made sure that the car he had bought was unique: "I am still the only one in the area with that colour, that mode, so yeah, I always live to be rare and different". The car guarantees Raul's golden membership to consumer culture whilst evidencing his individual qualities and characteristics (see Miles, 1996). Nevertheless, he had to consider selling the car a year later due to financial difficulties. Around the same time, Raul rejected social media as a 'blind and envious world' which he does not want to engage with by any means.

> To this day I haven't downloaded any social media so I am not on Facebook, I am not on Instagram, I am not on Snapchat, only because I know that in that world, is such a blind world, like people envying other people, ah look at me, he has a Lamborghini, she's got this make up and I am seeing what this is doing to people and I just don't want no part in that and that's helped me in how I am in my day to day life that I don't need to do this that and the other to prove to people yeah, this is what I am, or yah this makes me a somebody, because I am wearing Versace, or Louis Vuitton, or whatever, they don't mean anything to me. And that pressure that we did discuss about being our age and needing that sort of stuff I think it only becomes a problem if you let yourself caught into that sort of world, lifestyle and I've been lucky that I've avoided it as much as I can (Raul, second interview).

The passage above betrays an apparent rejection of consumer culture which stands in contradiction to Raul's initial narrative. Nevertheless, this was not necessarily the case once the motivations for his rejection of social media were clarified in a further interview, six months later.

> So, because one thing I saw that social media does is very fake a lot of people putting up these fancy cars, and it makes people envious, make people ungrateful for the life that you have you know what I mean and I don't want to go down that route I already am at a massive disadvantage for being where I have been having to work extra harder than everybody else to get to where I am and the last thing I want to do is go on social media and see people, rich kids you know with their cars, and fancy places, if I can avoid it, I will avoid it, you know what I mean? (Raul, third interview).

Rather than a rejection of consumer capitalist culture, the above signals Raul's truce with its competitive character, and his submission to its prevailing ideology. Raul recognised the narcissistic ethos of the post-political, post-industrial world of neo-liberalism which nurtures competitive individualism as its driving force (see Treadwell et al. 2013). Given his 'massive disadvantage', consequence of his lengthy imprisonment, engagement with social media users' conspicuous consumption and self-promotion (Taylor, 2020) would simply serve to twist the knife in the wound created by his 'consumer insignificance'. In this sense, he chose to avoid social media altogether and started to develop a cynical attitude to his future. Compared to our first interview, Raul's plans for the future a year later were scarce:

> Same as I once said to you before, you can never really plan too far ahead, you are not promised tomorrow if you know what I mean, and just be grateful for what I've got now and when an opportunity comes, I'll do my best to take it. But in terms of big plans and anything like that no I don't have anything right now (Raul, third interview).

Ricoeur (1991) noted that narratives of expected future serve as maps for actions which orient individuals and provide them with a sense of motivation. Raul has been disillusioned as he encountered a set of barriers which deterred him from achieving his set of initial aspirations; he now reserved what he considers a healthy realism for the future but keeps an eye open to opportunities without actively seeking them. He conceptualises success as being comfortable in taking care of his family, not having to rely on anyone, being self-sufficient and resourceful. Raul's latest narrative lacked a progressive line which was evident in our first interview; in the absence of such an expected and desired future, it is difficult to envision that Raul has much motivation to fundamentally change his future (see Gergen and Gergen, 1997). Raul partly resembled Jarman's (2020:1463) typical life sentenced prisoner: "highly controlled, instrumental and strategic, capable of not offending, but ill-equipped for and disappointed by life after release." I asked what success meant to him, and he replied: "Being comfortable, taking care of your family, not having to rely on anyone, just being self-sufficient and resourceful."

He then started to work two jobs to prepare himself financially for potential future lockdowns and to save money – Raul had started to become resourceful, just like his father. The pandemic made him realise that:

> I'm here (at the gym) like 6 days a week man, it's crazy, one thing I've realised in lockdown now is that never rely on only one source of income so now I am just trying to smash the personal training, do my tutorship, do my online classes which I run as well, so yeah, I am just trying to do as much as possible. You know? Yeah, I am still in the [redacted] gym, here I do my personal training, I work for the actual gym as well 8 hours a day and then I do, run online fitness classes on another platform, so yeah, it's a bit crazy (Raul, third interview).

He referred to his father as a resourceful man and constructed him as a masculine role model when we have first met. His life philosophy to employment after the first lockdown, described below seemed to follow his father's steps

> You know what, it is, and a lot of people don't understand that these days because my mentality is quite old fashioned, and what people may consider as me being overthinking stuff and that, it's not. It's me being resourceful and if that does replicate how people react in war then that's what it is, you know what I mean… (Raul).

From a Good Lives Model (GLM) perspective (Ward and Maruna, 2007; Ward and Marshall, 2007) Raul evidenced a fundamental change to his initial narrative identity, as performed in

our first interviews. An individual's narrative identity emerges, as Word and Fortune (2013) remarked, from the value commitment and goals that individuals have and cherish to achieve their conception of a 'good life'. Raul's initial value commitment had been dictated by the precepts of the neo-liberal capitalist socio-economic system and its underlying consumer culture. Importantly, this had occurred concomitantly but not unrelated to Raul's lack of access to sites of traditional pro-social and masculine identity constructions such as romantic relationships, or meaningful employment post-release.

The proponents of the model indeed have said that "according to the GLM, offenders should be viewed from a naturalistic perspective, albeit one that allows cultural factors a significant role" (Ward and Marshall, 2007:290) but to this point, no research has seriously considered the way that culture as well as its underlying socio-economic predominant ideology influence how ex-offenders adapt their narrative identities to the realities and barriers of their release. In this sense, the research reinforces Winlow and Hall's (2016) point in highlighting that it would be naïve to think that action is free from ideological restraint. Initial fantasies had broken down into mere cynicism as life barriers made their way in rendering Raul's initial plans unattainable. A return to work-ethic (see Bauman, 2004) as a site of identity construction meant that hard work was an appropriate 'secondary good' which ensured that resourcefulness was an achievable narrative identity goal in Raul's life. Importantly, resourcefulness, although not perfectly aligned with his initial projected self, is a quality which has much traction in the neo-liberal world of hyper-individualisation and self-governance (see Rose, 2000). It is also a resource which he associated with his father who represents a masculine role model to Raul. The implications of this discussion are discussed in the conclusion to the thesis (see chapter 11).

In a similar vein to Raul, soon after his release from prison, Peter eagerly considered the promise of the globalised neo-liberal society. He lamented about getting rid of his current exploitative job and started planning to become an entrepreneur. He would then only work for his own wellbeing and follow his dream. A simple connection to the internet would ensure that he could make money from any corner of the globe and provide him with much-needed flexibility. He was released for six months at the time of our first interview:

> I felt very negative towards my work, you know what I mean. I just didn't want to work there; I didn't want to have to wake up in the morning and have to do this job. You know what I mean, and I didn't like the people I was working with, I didn't like any of them just feeling rotten, you know what I mean? (Peter).

It's you know, I said to you earlier, I don't want to get up in the morning and be paid not a lot of money to work my ass off towards someone else's dream, now I would say seriously that in my work, I bet within 3 days I earned that company the money that they pay me for the whole 3 months do you know what I mean… and I don't want to do that anymore, because I want to have time to spend with my children, I want to be there when he goes to bed every night and be there when he gets up in the morning, you know what I mean. I want to make myself a laptop lifestyle, you know where my work is 3-4 hours a day on my laptop and it gives me time for swimming, going for a bit of walking, going to the trampoline with the boys, to do other things. […] I said now when I go to work, I put my work in put my effort in yah, what I'm starting to do now like I said to you, I'm starting to spend a bit of time in the evenings, even when I am tired to work towards my own business (Peter, first interview).

At the time of the interview, Peter worked for a car repairing company, and was waiting for the birth of his son. He resented his work and was prepared to move on. The neo-liberal capitalist discourse of 'self-realisation' assured Peter that he could blossom as 'his own boss'. Now that he was released, 'the sky was the limit' so he quickly started to stage a fantasy for such a future. The promise is that every human being "has something entrepreneurial about them" (Dardot and Laval, 2013:111 in Catlaw and Marshall, 2018:10) and thus the "entrepreneur" acted as Peter's preferred narrative identity for a future self. Peter did not provide a clear and feasible plan as to how this will be pursued and achieved. Nevertheless, by the time of our third interview, the plan had evaporated. Peter was made redundant as a consequence of the COVID-19 first 'lockdown'. He made no reference to his initial plan in our last conversation.

Peter had taken a job interview hours before we spoke over a video-call. He held his baby in his arms throughout our conversation – it was our third interview (over 1.5 years after our first interview). This new job included forklift driving among other activities. Despite his lack of the necessary qualification to drive the machine, Peter displayed an unrealistic optimism over his future. At this point I had asked him what he would like to do in the future:

I really want to get more into carpentry, because I like it and also, I found Dan, you know, with straight lines and the angles and what have you, I, for whatever reason, I quite like that, you know, you know what I mean? (Peter, third interview).

His relaxed mannerism in discussing his (un)employment status, as well as his interest in pursuing carpentry to feed his creativity as a vocation struck me. A fundamental shift in Peter's values and orientation had taken place, and this solicited a value-laden question on my part:

What is a successful person in your view? (Dan)

I don't care, I don't care man, my life is not a competition in order for success or whatever means nothing to me. The whole concept of success is just, fucking... you know, border of this capitalist environment that we live in, you know, you got to have a bigger car and a fucking whatever, and you see people on the street, and they have a fucking Porsche truck thing, for their seven kids and their kids are dressed in fucking rags that's upside down innit? The Porsche should be gone, the kids should be well tendered. You know what I am saying? I don't, I don't believe in it as a concept, I think it's a control mechanism, and you need to be free of that, I don't say fucking go off the grid and go live in the woods and that you got to be in the system but not necessarily part of the system. We are forced to live in a machine because we are born into it. We are born into the national insurance number which is essentially your fucking employee number (kisses the baby). In any situation we can look at the model, ok right, what is going on here, you can observe the model Dan, and you can look if you are careful to find how you can be happy. Other people can't tell you when you are happy. Ralph Lauren can't teach you, that shit don't make you happy. You know, they might make some people happy but not me, there's lots of things that will give you joy in life and they don't cost a penny, but you couldn't buy them for all the gold in the world... and there he is! "I didn't pay a penny for you! (Looks at the baby: "you are the most valuable thing that I ever seen in my life"). See? (Peter, third interview).

Compared to Raul, who constructed his identity by reference and submission to the ideological precepts of consumer capitalism, Peter repudiated ornamental consumerism, and thus constructed a resistance narrative stemming from an anti-capitalist moral position (Cherrier, 2009; Fernandez, Brittain, and Bennet, 2011). In this sense, Peter's counternarrative to the hegemonic cultural and socio-economic discourse leads to his construction of a rebel and resistant consumer identity free to reflect upon the system from objective distance. Nevertheless, Peter accepted that he cannot completely repudiate a system which "makes us all an offer we can't refuse" (see Winlow and Hall, 2016:90) as such refusal would simply be disastrous, but highlighted those other things are important in life, such as being a good father. The function of the story depicting 'rich kids in rags' serves to organise and guide Peter's moral principles, which now stand at the heart of his narrative identity. Peter had recently become a father, and fatherhood equipped him with the necessary narrative resources to discard consumer culture as a mere distraction from the important things in life. This sort of clarity has become apparent only recently and stands to evidence Peter's adaptation of narrative identities to the realities of his situation and acts to stave off any consumerist pressure of capital accrual. Compared to Raul, who had struggled to accumulate the narrative resources to make sense of

the structural barriers he encountered on release, Peter's adaptation had taken a fundamentally different route. Fatherhood had been crucial in this journey. Further, his ease to discuss his unemployment may be indicative of a masculinity which is achieved through his fatherhood rather than through a specific position within the neo-liberal market. Nevertheless, his resistance is illusory: Peter's commitment to traditional family as alternative to consumer capitalism only serves to position him in the front seat of one of the main drivers of capitalist economy (see Bur, 2015). Nevertheless, these interpretations should not be taken as steps towards finalising Raul's and Peter's stories, or to claim that it speaks the final word (Frank, 2010a:85). The men's stories are continuously changing and adapting to the realities of their position in social structures and situations.

6.3. Conclusion

This chapter has evidenced how the most recently released mandatory lifers in this sample, namely Raul and Peter, negotiated with master narratives of success in a consumer capitalist society which interpellated them as consumers on their release. Concomitant to initial agentic projections of taking on conventional family roles which in the end fell short due to structural barriers to resettlement, Raul had decided to enter the "battle of consumer significance" (Hall, Winlow, and Ancrum, 2008: 65) in a race to substitute a fragile sense of identity with the consumerist symbols demanded by the post-industrial, consumerist society. Soon after his release, he experienced 'consumption melancholia', which stemmed precisely from his perceived missed opportunities to enjoy due to his lengthy imprisonment. This then pressured him to perform successful selves through dominant consumerist symbols. In fact, his inability to conspicuously consume was experienced as stigma, perhaps evidencing the need for a reconceptualization of Goffman's theories for an application to 21st century subjectivity.

Would-be desisters such as Raul, rather than falling onto 'habit' when encountering structural barriers as King (2012) suggested, become entangled in the ideological precepts of consumer capitalism which structure their subjectivity and subsequent agentic movements in line with its consumerist interpellant forces. Then, it would simply be naïve to suggest that 'habit' is devoid of any ideological restraint. However, this does not render Raul as 'super dupe' (Farrall and Bowling, 1999) puppeteered by ideology. Rather, the finding is partly consistent with Farrall, Bottoms, and Shapland's (2010) adaptation of Mouzelisian sociology in that actors' own perception of their immediate surroundings and position within the social structure guide individual choices. However, not only does socialisation matter in 'dispositions' to perceive

such structures, but biographical narrative resources are important in mobilising adaptive narrative identity and subsequent action. When the situation imposed it, Raul attended to available opportunities and worked extra-hours to become resourceful and avoid financial difficulties. He renounced the car when he could not afford it anymore but bought a new one 6 months later (which he posted on his WhatsApp profile). The adaptation of narrative identity to his structural position stemmed from his narrative habitus (see Frank, 2010a; Fleetwood, 2016) – an internal, biographical source, intimately linked to ideals and stories constructed around the father figure. In this sense, Raul acted as an agent who mobilised internal narrative resources to project an adaptive narrative self. Peter on the other hand is the example *par excellence* for the lifer who, to avoid consumer insignificance reinterpreted his social situation and lamented about having obtained the 'most expensive things in life', a new-born son and a stereotypically happy family. These narrative resources were mobilised to discard consumer capitalism as a mere distraction from what truly matters in life. Nevertheless, this resistance is illusory: from a Marxist view, the family and marriage are some of the strongest driving forces of capitalist economy (Burr, 2015). The theoretical and practical implications of this chapter are discussed in the conclusion to the thesis.

Chapter 7: Experiencing Supervision

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter offered a macro analysis of the ways in which the most recently released mandatory lifers in this sample negotiated with master narratives/hegemonic forces of consumer capitalism to construct their identities post-release. This chapter moves on to focus on the meso level of the analysis by exploring the ways in formal mechanisms of support and surveillance, especially supervision exerted by the probation system is enabling, or constraining all five mandatory lifers in constructing pro-social identities. Life on probation represents the liminal position (Turner, 1969) *par excellence* – although quasi free in the community, the probationer is subjected to the supervision and control of penal power. Thus, these men are caught in the indeterminate space between prison life and freedom.

It is argued that the mandatory lifers in this sample experienced supervision with a degree of ambivalence. The individualising discourse of neo-rehabilitation ensured that the men perceived themselves as the agents of their own-self change. Invitations to self-governance were doubled by periods of tension where the men were constructed as risky and dangerous by their case workers; the type of murder committed became relevant in this context. The most serious of the offenders were required to perform a very specific form of remorse to account for their past and to provide evidence for their redemption. Nevertheless, the men did not passively accept these positions – they drew from counter-narratives to resist probationers' constructions. At times, expressed acts of resistance almost cost the men the revocation of their life licence.

7.2. Responsible, dangerous, and risky: mandatory lifers negotiating supervision ambivalence

In our first interview, Peter was content with what he called the 'length of the leash' that probation had offered him soon after release. Being left alone meant that the probation service trusted him, and this was a consequence of the great rapport he had built with his supervising officer. Nevertheless, he recognized that the length of the leash was only partly in his control. Murder, he remarked, is a political category. At the time of our first interview murderers were not in the spotlight of the mediatised public spectacle of failed rehabilitation. In fact, public attention was squarely focused on the terrorist attack at the London Bridge. This allowed

mandatory lifers such as Peter space to breathe. Nevertheless, he was aware of the highly politicised nature of his own crime and his subsequent supervision which, at that time, allowed for flexibility and freedom which was built on the right context, and a good level of rapport with his probation officer.

> At the moment, the people that are embarrassing probation in the media are the terrorist people aren't they. So by and large they just leave me alone, I'm not part of that group, I'm sure there will come a time when a recently released life sentenced prisoners commits a heinous crime, and they may put the spotlight back on my generation of people who've been released, you know what I mean, but at the moment, the media is firmly focused on these terrorists who done a sentence and been released early for whatever reason as I'm sure you are aware. Which means that really, I just go to the meeting, every, aa whenever, really, once about every 4-5 weeks, (says mockingly): "how are you doing, you alright"? "How's it going then?" They are busy, they aint got time, and I think they have an amount of trust in me? (Peter, first interview).

> Best thing they can do to help me out is to fuck off and leave me. You know what I mean, and by and large at the minute, because of the terrorist situation, that's what is happening, so I don't know, what more could they do to help me… I don't know (Peter, first interview)

Peter's narrative is imbued with a sense of pessimism reserved for the future which, in turn, echoed *carpe diem*! The extensive 'liberty' may be short lived, so, he may as well enjoy it while it lasts. In fact, the probation service had been previously under scrutiny with the high-profile murders by released prisoners - for example Damien Hanson and Anthony Rice (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2006a, 2006b). This raised the question of the safe release of those who murdered (see Kemshall, 2007). Nevertheless, in a visionary fashion, the sort of invisibility that Peter referred to was indeed short-lived. Recently, Colin Pitchford, a person convicted of double murder had been recalled to prison, after approaching young women and had thus breached the conditions of his life licence. This led to a public outcry around his suitability to be released (and the role of Parole Board in the process), as well as the extent to which rehabilitation is achieved in prison (BBC, 2021).

What makes the resettlement of 'dangerous' individuals problematic is the anxiety and fear that such crime elicits in the public (supposedly comparable with sex offending; see Kitzinger, 2004) in that "they may do it again" (Liem and Weggemans, 2018:474). The inquiries which followed the cases mentioned above led to what was considered a 'rebalancing of justice' between the offenders and victims (Home Office, 2006a; 2006b; Home Secretary, 2006 in Kemshall, 2007). One may justifiably ask, in this context, to what extent the fear of such a

scenario repeating itself may influence probation officers' day-to-day supervision of MLS (see Philips and Westaby, 2016). Peter thinks of the probation system in political terms and this, in turn, means that he recognises his supervisory style as decided elsewhere, not between him and his probation officer. Rather, it is bound to socio-political factors which are experienced as being far away.

As emphasised above, shortly after release, Peter had been left to his own accord by the probation system; he was free to do as he wanted - he never felt 'micro-managed'. He has been caught up in a responsibilising neo-liberal discourse which works on the premise of cherished individualism and independent citizenship (Rose, 2000). Peter seemed to accept the probationer's injunction to become a willing and responsible citizen (Werth, 2011) who self-regulates and accepts governability from a distance. The following passage makes this clear; having asked him whether he believes that his probation experience can be improved, he answered:

> Because of the way I live my life Dan, it's not a massive burden, I feel I am free to do whatever I want to do, because what I choose to do is the next right thing on every occasion (Peter, first interview).

Peter's strong commitment to personal responsibility is central to his life philosophy, and to the management of his own release. He conceptualises the probation system not as a provider of security, or to 'advise, assist and befriend' (Probation of Offenders Act, 1907; cf. Durnescu et al. 2018b), but rather "as a partner and facilitator for active and independent citizens" (Rose 2000:186). Whilst this seemed to work for him at this early stage of his release, Peter later evidenced ambivalence to this supervisory style. For example, 12 months after our first interview Peter complained about not being able to get into contact with his probation officer who is never around. Interestingly, Peter's 'responsibilization' (Rose, 2000) is evident once more through his own internalisation of guilt to account for his probation officer's absence:

> Mate, she won't answer the phone to me, I don't speak to her for weeks on end, supposed to speak to her every 2 weeks yeah but she is not around, I don't speak to her. You remember I had the first one who was my probation officer for all those years, they switched her with this other woman, and a… yeah man she's alright, I think she has understood that I am a changed person and you know, but it does annoy me because when I got, when I want to talk to her, I fucking ring her 2 or 3 times and it may take me 1 week of trying to ring her to actually get contact with her. […] This is part of getting the best out of the system. Through communication, building a very quick good rapport with this new probation officer has led to her leaving me alone which gives me… because she can be a

real pain in the arse. She can have me come in every 2 days go to the probation office what have you, but she doesn't, I've committed a very fucking serious offence as you know, I've only been out of prison for a short time… (Peter, third interview).

The contradiction in the passage above is evident. Peter perceives his probationer's non-interventionist, neglectful, and distanced supervisory style as a hardly earned right. As a responsible citizen (Rose, 1996) living in an advanced liberal society (see Kemshall, 2002), Peter is invited to self-regulate and live independent of any serious support (see Kramer, Rajah, Sung, 2013). Kemshall (2002: 52) remarked that "as the social and its attendant notions of social justice and social processes have retreated, the space has simultaneously left has been filled by "individualisation" with the attendant notions of the 'rational and prudential citizen' and notions of individual responsibility and blame".

For Peter, the lax and highly individualised, neo-liberalised, and 'responsibilising', self-regulatory (see Perry, 2013) supervisory style was short lived. Six months after our first interview, Peter and I spoke again. Since our last conversation, his partner, Jennifer, had given birth to their baby son. Soon after, Peter was informed that he would not be able to continue seeing the child until he had successfully completed a battery of risk assessments requested by social services. These were scheduled to take up to six weeks and were related to his index offence:

> I can understand that maybe one in every unspecified amount of people in my situation may cause harm to their child, but I know that I am not that one. So, me having to go through this may spare that one, but to be honest I don't fucking care, I just want to see my little boy. You know what I mean? I am quite angry about the whole situation, you know Dan. As I was saying to you earlier, I was released on parole, and a parole board is a fucking, just, it's a full risk assessment, isn't it? Do you know what I mean? And that doesn't seem to be good enough for these people, you know… and, also, they knew that the baby boy was coming for a long time, so they should have gotten done before in my opinion. So, to vent my fucking anger at them, I instructed my solicitor that I want to legal action against them… sooner! They are terrified of a photograph of me 20 years ago, you know? They are judging me on the basis of… yeah… and that's not the way to move anything forward. They are after my offence. They are not taking any time to talk to me so far (Peter, second interview).

> You know, at no point have any of the judges or the parole board ever said that you know you need to be careful, make sure you never have a child you know what I mean? It's just these other agencies that suddenly involved themselves you know… my index offence is murder yea? Not of a child, of a grown person, and

I never been convicted or suspected, of otherwise, of injurious actions against any children or anything like that (Peter, second interview).

Repeated risk assessments at the hands of different agencies invited Peter to consider taking on the identity of a risky murderer who may not be trusted around his own child. Accepting this proposition would serve to deny, as well as spoil his emerging identities (especially that of fatherhood), and self-professed transformation (cf. Opsal, 2015). The story above is one of stagnation where Peter is eternally returned to his past (cf. Eliade, 1954); the risk inertia places him in a vicious circle which interferes with a pro-social construction of self.

Peter was interpellated to accept his index offence as master status, which, in turn classifies and invites him to become a certain type of person (see Werth, 2018). The 'long-leash' that he celebrated in our first interview had been exchanged for a much shorter one on account of the risk he carries once the social services got involved. In this case, social services betray a binary judgement (dangerous / not dangerous) (Werth, 2018) based on Peter's type of crime and level of MAPPA supervision.

Murderers such as Peter are seen to live on the precipices of serenity and where murderous impulses can return in force at any time. Social services, unlike his probation officer, pathologized Peter by "[going] after [his] offence", as opposed to talking with him, as a person. This pathologizing discourse (see Perry, 2013; Lacombe, 2013; Waldram, 2007) constructed Peter 'the murderer' as irrational and unpredictable. Further, there is a gendered undertone attached to the deficits cast onto him. As Perry (2013) remarked when exploring the intersecting discourses between probationers and offender identities, facilitators often draw on ideas of 'cavemen', or 'hunter gatherers' to explain the aetiology of male criminal behaviour. Of course, the image of the caveman is the image of a man who functions on impulse – and in that sense Peter is constructed as a potentially impulsive risk taker who could terminate his child's life on a whim. To reiterate, what makes the resettlement of 'dangerous' individuals problematic is the anxiety and fear that such crime elicits in the public, especially when those released kill again. Peter felt that such fear is illegitimate as his crime has no bearing on children.

Having invited him to consider and take on such a subject position, social services acted as a convergent force that hampered his progression through the liminal realm. Supervision, then, similarly to McNeil's 'Malopticon', casts its subjects as fundamentally untrustworthy and bad (McNeil, 2018; 2019). Nevertheless, as Werth (2012) remarked, individuals are not merely

passive receivers of 'parole governance'. In fact, parolees can as much actively comply with the requirements as they can engage with "small acts of striking back' (Carrabine, 2005:906), or even overtly defy rules. In this case, Peter was not simply a passive subject of penal power. In fact, he attempted to follow rules with a degree of malleability when situations imposed it. He confessed that he had thought about ignoring the instructions and to continue visiting his child. However, I have never asked whether he acted on this thought or not. Potential non-compliance for Peter was not necessarily a means of regaining autonomy as others have imagined (Rose, 2000; Opsal, 2015; Werth, 2011; 2016), although it could serve this as a secondary function. Rather, it represented an attempt at protecting his emerging fatherhood identity from being spoiled. Peter resisted social services' positioning and reconstructed the story to fit what he wants to become - a 'true father' willing to lose everything for his son. This modern, romanticised, version of fatherhood is the story that Peter prefers, and one he is willing to sacrifice everything for. He did not accept riskiness as part of his own story. In turn, he embraced a story which runs the risk of making him breach his parole conditions. The investigation ended once he managed to convince the authorities that he is not a potential risk to his son: the "initial fear of the fucking snapshot of [him] 20 years ago very quickly subsided once they got to know [him] a little bit - they were alright". As evidenced above, Peter had been experiencing supervision with a high degree of ambivalence; long periods of self-governance intersected with acute stress followed by his construction as a fundamentally dangerous and risky individual. Peter's case evidences how mandatory lifers, provided they can draw from a range of wider narrative resources, are able to resist and negotiate invitations by the probation system to take on dangerous and risky identities, and thus return them to their past.

Like Peter, Raul too felt that his probation officer has been allowing him to carry on with his life without much interference. Despite the potential power that probation can exert over him, Raul is content that they have not 'not been on [his] case'. Nevertheless, such cherished freedom came with a degree of ambivalence. A pervasive sense of panoptic power (see Foucault, 1975) is diffusely experienced as Raul lives in a constant fear of potentially going back if he ever makes a mistake. The sentiment of walking on eggshells is evidenced in the following passage, taken from our first interview - at the time, Raul had been out of prison for little over 18 months:

> I was lucky because I always had good probation officers, since I got out, they
> never really nagged me, or been on my case, or breach me or anything like that,

but you always know, yeah, it's always at the back of your mind, ok, if I mess up, if I do this, or that, are they gonna come on me, you know what I mean. And they do lessen the time you would have to see them, so start weekly, and then monthly, and then 6 weeks; I think I am on six weeks at the moment... it's a little bit frustrating cuz you go there and you got to tell them everything that's going on, but when you live like a normal, mundane life, there's nothing you can say, you know, they sometimes are perceived that like you not being honest with them... (Raul, first interview).

This passage is seemingly benign in that it projects optimism for the future, but it betrays Raul's Kafkaesque uncertainty regarding probation's expectations of him as a 'regular', 'ordinary' lifer. The sense of progression from weekly visits to presently visiting the probationer's office once every six weeks is experienced as a positive incentive that encourages him to continue with optimism and offers sentiments of reassurance. The construction of his probation officer as 'good' is, similarly to Peter's case, strictly related to the provision of distance and liberty - both men feel they are left to their own accord. What seems to be missing from the men's narratives is a focus on how the probation service has been or could potentially be useful in their lives and future. In turn, this absence betrays a deep penetration of neo-rehabilitation (Feely and Simon, 1993) in the men's available narrative repertoires to construct more complex expectations of their supervision. In our third interview, 1 year later, as the COVID-19 pandemic had started in earnest and the subsequent lockdown ensued, Raul experienced a setback and he felt that the probation system had begun to distrust him:

So before, they had me on my coming in every 6 weeks, sorry not even coming it they were calling me, and you know they were trusting me and all of a sudden Covid happened and now they insist on all lifers having to come in once a month in now, so I feel like quite a big step back from that, they won't let me travel nowhere still even though I've been out 3.5 years, I've got an impeccable record, so that's a bit annoying, but when I go there I don't give them attitude or nothing like that, I do whatever they ask me to do, to be honest, my probation officers haven't been horrible or tried to trip me up in any ways it's just a lot of legislation and red tape that they can't get around, which I can't really hold them to account for. It's like a step back innit, I was pretty much done with all of that, what can you do, if they say jump you gotta say how high? (Raul, third interview).

Not allowing you to move on (Dan).

100%, if you have to still answer people to people. These little wannabe gangsters, they're all sitting there with their trousers hanging low you know giving attitudes to the reception staff, turning up like half an hour late, I've seen them every time I been in there, ahh I was meant to have an appointment at 10 it's now like 11 a clock and I'm thinking if I was to have done that, they would

> put me straight back in prison, you know what I mean, but this is difference between my crime and these people you know what I mean (Raul, third interview).

> Because of risk (Dan).

> Exactly (Raul).

Raul associated the pandemic and accompanying changes as a drawback in his re-entry progression, and he also decried a reduction in trust granted to lifers such as himself during lockdown. It seems to Raul that his classification as a 'lifer' and membership to the lifer category takes primacy in how the authorities make sense of himself in such stressful moments. They are seen to simply eschew his individual progress and disregard individual differences. This is evidenced in the passage where Raul counterposed his experience of stagnation with a personal impeccable record. His crime placed Raul at the high end of the 'dangerousness'/ 'riskiness' scale which is felt as inappropriate given how successful and dedicated to reintegration he has been up until that moment. Compared to the life-course persistent offenders (Moffitt, 1993) that he is forced to share the waiting room with at each one of his supervisory meetings, his behaviour has been exemplary. Despite this, his classification as a mandatory lifer seems to take primacy in official analyses of Raul's behaviour. This construction is experienced with frustration and resistance and interferes with his construction of pro-social identities. Here, spatial and organisational elements of the probationer's room remind him of his criminal past as much as the 'wannabe gangsters' he referred to earlier.

> Do they remind you of authority? (Dan)

> Of course, they do, because probation officers don't just sit there; it's like an interview at the police station. They have the alarm along the wall, you know the thing that they have there, they sit opposite you, they got the pen and paper, and you think to yourself like, this isn't somebody who genuinely wants to know how I am feeling, and my wellbeing, this is somebody who has a particular box or not particular box to see if they will send you back to prison or not (Raul, third interview).

Raul's routine visit to the probationer's office is the opposite of Albertson's et al. (2020) 'stigma avoiding places' which sustain desistance. In fact, Raul's space-time rhythm (May and Thrift, 2001 in Hunter and Farrall, 2015) organised around routine visits to the probationer's office gives the place (as much as his interactions with the probation officer) a meaning which in turn shapes Raul's identity (see Hunter and Farrall, 2015) by way of inviting him to take the position of a dangerous ex-offender. The alarm along the wall, the interview arrangements, and

pen and paper position Raul as a subject of penal power which needs containment and, in the end, contribute to the formalism of their interaction.

To reiterate, there seems to exist a paradox evidenced by the ambivalent mode that 'murderers' are governed in the community. Invitations to self-governance and to individual responsibility are interrupted periodically by acute panoptic (Foucault, 1975) supervisory episodes which serve to construct the men as risky and dangerous. Thus far, the men had not simply accepted these constructions, but engaged with and expressed counter-narratives to these tendencies in their negotiation of acceptable identities.

Nathaniel, on the other hand, is an example *par excellence* of the mandatory lifer who has internalised the 'risk paradigm' of neo-rehabilitation (Feely and Simon, 1992). He too identified the probation service through its punitive character rather than its potential rehabilitative assistance. In our first interview, I asked Nathaniel about his relationship with the probation officer since release and whether there have been any turning points that were worth exploring in our interview:

> Everyone seems to think that with probation it's rapport, with probation I found it's just about longevity and maintaining good work and just being honest with them. It's not about doing a specific thing, or one specific thing, or two bad things, it's just getting the balance right, and then, just about every month they want to see that you can handle it in society, they are not there, I found that they are not there to judge whether you good or bad, it's whether you are a risk to society or a risk to breaking your conditions. There are no turning points. Because I did nothing with probation that is special, uhm… my reports', and have 10 minutes chats, it not like they keeping you, so… in all the time I've been out and I've reported to probation I probably still didn't have more than a week's interviews with them but it's just about the rapport you build through how long you kept your job for, uhm… obviously that's it with probation, it's not like I am doing nothing special with them… (Nathaniel, first interview).

As shown above, Nathaniel did not rate good rapport with his probation officer as the secret ingredient to a positive relationship, contradicting some published research (Healy, 2012; Doekhie et al. 2018). For him, consistency and honesty have been superior elements that maintained a smooth connection with the authorities. Further, Nathaniel was clear in identifying the principal role of probation officers as that of evaluators of his riskiness to society, and to his own licence conditions. The finding echoes a recent European study which explored supervision experience across jurisdictions and found probationers to associate supervision with its punitive character, rather than its rehabilitative potential (Durnescu et al.

2018). For him, "proving that [he] is not a risk or a monster" represented a mission for much of his initial time on release. Six months after our first interview, I asked him how he has managed to achieve this desiderate:

> It's not about episodes or stories, it's about literally blending into society showing that you are not a risk, it's like I said, it's not like… you don't really, not every day, like I don't come across an incident every day and I automatically like get angry over it, or… it's just about literally, just about timing, it's like watering grass, it doesn't instantly grow or instantly develop, but slowly, just water it and watch it grow, and I think that's the same with probation that it's not that you are on your case all the time, they give me enough rope and then they got the attitude well, he will hang himself… sort of thing, so it's just literally, there's not much an incident to show that I am not a monster it's just dealing with everyday life and literally staying out of trouble, the police ain't coming to my door then obviously I am doing a good job. It's not so much about circumstance, you can only show people in time, you can't instantly change people's mind, it takes time… (Nathaniel, first interview).

Proving that he is not a monster is Nathaniel's long-term plan with probation. This quest to prove his normality evidenced the chasm between his conceptualisation of his own personal identity, and his experiences of his social identity. The same sense of unjust perception has been experienced by all the men. Nevertheless, Nathaniel had chosen to accept probation's risk-laden discourse to negotiate identities by playing the authorities' game.

The productive power exercised by the probation system, evidenced through the "long leash", resembles the mobilisation of technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988) - such as responsibility and empowerment - which are experienced dialectically with oppressive forms of power (Turnbull and Hanna-Moffat, 2009). Like Peter and Raul, Nathaniel too felt that he has been given sufficient space to self-govern his life on release. Nevertheless, his freedom is not entirely benign - it is experienced as a mechanism specifically designed to test his ability in managing his freedom. The 'panoptic' (Foucault, 1975) probation service is thus supervising him from a distance and is perceived as cynically waiting for him to 'slip'. Should he use his freedom, which is epitomised through the long leash, inappropriately he could eventually 'hang himself' and return to prison. As a result, Nathaniel experiences supervision as an oppressive mechanism which operates under seemingly benign means. Turnbull and Hannah-Moffat (2009:537) have succinctly summarised a similar point:

> "The paroled subject is recognized and expected to be independent, self-regulating, and willing to change, but is also constituted as requiring close monitoring and direction on how to make the necessary changes and choices.

Thus, parole conditions are a technique of discipline and self-governance within an integrated exercise of penal power that is simultaneously responsibilizing and de-responsibilizing."

Admittedly, Nathaniel is the only participant in this study who had been recalled to prison for breaching his licence conditions. This may account for his acceptance of the authorities' construction of his identity, and thus his intense experience of the "performative purgatory" (Crewe, 2011:516). Nathaniel is concerned that leaving the 'wrong' impression may get him into trouble. The metaphor of watering grass with a glass stands to portray the continuous nature of the work that he must put in to demonstrate his ordinariness. To achieve this, Nathaniel needed to construct a 'penal avatar' (Crewe, 2011:216), which assists with the performance of his 'own containment of risk' (McNeil, 2018) in the community. Crewe (2011:523) imagined symbiotic shell of soft power which although imposed from outside, becomes part of parolees' identity, and must be performed with much tact:

> "The prisoner can jettison some of its psycho- logical weight, but he or she cannot simply detach it. The shell also represents the identity that the institution assigns to the prisoner, which has to be carried for the remainder of the sentence".

Lifers such as Nathaniel must carry such a shell of soft power whilst on a life licence - his narrative evidenced "risk-encoded communication skill" (Lacombe, 2008:73). In fact, 'risk reduction' is the leitmotif of Nathaniel's overall narrative and betrays an internalisation of prison-based programme parlance (see Digard, 2014; Lacombe, 2008):

> It's only through time and doing the courses trying to enhance the way of thinking about certain scenarios. So, it's just through doing the courses that are on offer there, and that helps obviously to lower your risk and over time you have to show just the examples of your behaviour changing […] I knew what time frame I had, I knew what sentence I had, I knew what I needed to do, what I needed to change, and I set a goal and I achieved it and that's the way I looked at it. I worked towards the goal and everything else was second… so I just focused on my goal and then I thought, what do I need to do to get to it (Nathaniel).

What Nathaniel's experience shows, as Digard (2014:431) remarked, is the "psychological penetration that supervisory work can achieve"; he seems to 'have been coached in delivering appropriate, expected life narrative' which he attempted to achieve throughout our meetings.

Jacob was released 20 years ago, and he expressed probation's expectation of murderers' performance vividly:

They want to hear, their perception of someone who has taken someone's life is that you should be broken that you should be remorseful, you should have a sort of seriousness and a kind of purgatorial aah, almost like wrapping yourself in sackcloth kind of demeanour and do you know what that is absolutely meaningless because all that is self-pity (Jacob, first interview).

I demonstrated my remorse by what I doing and the person that I was not by this this, because I believe it's a lie (laughs, nervously), and I don't know whether it still goes on today and how analytical they are as individuals and so forth, but there is this sense that because of the enormity of the crime that there is this perception that people will have to be in sackcloth and ashes because they have taken somebody's life aah, and I, you know, in many respects it doesn't matter what you do wrong you demonstrate that you are sorry (Jacob, first interview).

The type of remorse demanded from mandatory lifers such as Jacob is thus exceedingly dramaturgical – it must be visible and continuous (see Rossmanith 2015; 2014). In this sense, comparable to criminological research which explored the construction of acceptable remorse in courts (Zhong et al. 2014; Johansen, 2018; Weisman, 2009) mandatory lifers, depending on the circumstances of their murder, are expected to enact an appropriate 'remorse narrative' (Rossmanith, 2014) whilst in prison as well as upon their release. Otherwise, they risk jeopardising their 'quest for freedom'. He added:

The reports that they put on me, they put me down as some sort of a psychopath and, you know, very very negative sort of reports even those written by Chaplains because I got to see, towards the end I got to see some of the reports, in fact I still have some of the archives, they put down very negative things about this man shows no remorse, you know but there was also this sense in which, because of the nature of the system and the way that they were, is that the pain and remorse that I feel, they are not worthy of seeing it because they don't care, and I really, really care ah, and I won't, I won't because of the ways in which I was brutalised as a child I won't show what I feel to people who aren't worthy of it, you know, I will put on a brave face and I will , they have no idea, because what I feel deeply down I only reveal to people that I care about, and that includes yourself. Because that's the problem you see… in order to get through the system you have to jump through certain hoops, you have to say certain things you have to tell them what they want to hear (Jacob, first interview).

As shown above, Jacob had not been performing an institutionally acceptable remorse, which in turn had influenced his construction as being dangerous (also see Weisman, 2009). Zhong et al. (2014) found that absence of visible remorse is considered by some judges to be indicative of sociopathy. Importantly, the expression of remorse proclaims the fundamental difference between the wrongdoer and the act for which they are condemned (Weisman, 2016). In this

sense, the absence of 'appropriate remorse', is cast as evidence for Jacob's psychopathy and so the crime is not separated from his identity but is essential to the subsequent construction of a dangerous identity. Griffin (2018) found that parole board members analyse the attitude that life sentenced offenders have towards their victim in order to assess their level of risk. In this sense, those who show signs of remorse and empathy were judged more favourably. Further, by not accepting the official version of his crime and identity as narrated by the authorities, Jacob ran the risk of appearing as not taking responsibility for his crime (see Weisman, 2009). The type of crime he committed may also have a bearing on the type of remorse he is demanded to enact:

> My murder was a particularly brutal one you know, we took this guy we gagged, we tied him up and we shot him three times in the back of the head that's a pretty brutal and cold, and callous and ruthless kind of murder, execution… and that's how it was perceived, described; the reality however, of it all is very different… aah… and I don't know whether you want to explore that…(Jacob, first interview).

This version of events, which is derived from the context of his murder and imposed by the criminal justice authorities stands in tension with the way Jacob interpreted what happened. Nevertheless, if expressed officially, this disagreement runs the risk of portraying Jacob as not showing responsibility for the murder and, by consequence, showing no remorse (see Weisman, 2009; Gold and Weiner, 2000). Much of his identity negotiation is related to resisting this position and constructing a narrative which reconciles an expression of deep remorse with a lack of responsibility for what happened (this is explored in detail in chapter nine).

The type of murder committed also emerged as significant in how the authorities and probation services dealt with Richard. To reiterate, Richard was released over 20 years ago. He had killed his girlfriend when he was 19 and has been referring to the murder as a 'crime of passion' ever since. In one of our conversations about his involvement with romantic relationships after release, his murder type emerged as significant in how the probation service dealt with him:

> So, uhm, one difficult thing about that is that when I got released because of the nature of my crime, my probation officer knew that it was quite a serious relationship, so his senior, said to him that he had to sit down with my prospective wife, which I think that by then was engaged and tell her all about all I did so he could be implacably sure that she knew all about, she was aware of it before she took the punch to get married to me. So that was quite a challenging thing really,

but then, but my wife, I think got through that really well… considering the circumstances (Richard).

I then asked whether a different type of murder would have led to a different outcome:

> Aaaa, probably yes, and, the reason why I think they would approach in this way, because the nature of my crime, it was a crime of passion, and so they probably felt, it was important that she knew that, cuz they would see that as a certain amount of risk to any future relationship you known, probably the risk would have been different for her, what tends to happen with gang related murders, is that it's not a risk for the person who commits the crime but a risk because the people who are after him… so she could be at risk had she been linked to him, but sometimes the gangs don't come after you, they come after the people that you love, you know, and I've seen that before as well where that's happen, with people that I had known in prison, where people have gone and done injury to their family (Richard).

Richard's risk is constructed directly in relation to his romantic partner, who fortunately had accepted him without any question. Nevertheless, compared to the other men, Richard discussed his crime more openly and more often. It seemed that it was easier to frame the crime as a 'one off' mistake which has been accepted by society as such - the crime seemed to be accepted as divorced from his identity. On each occasion, he has framed his relationship with probation officers in most positive terms. He remarked how officers had always been there to assist with reintegration. They were understanding of his past, like most people, although with some important exceptions. In this sense, stories depicting issues around his construction around 'risk' are scarce.

There is some limited research that assists us in making sense of this finding. Griffin (2018) remarked that members of parole boards in Ireland draw distinctions in risk level between different types of mandatory lifers based on the type of murder committed, amongst other factors (circumstances of surrounding the commission of the offence, whether it was an isolated incident, and the relationship between the offender and the victim). Nevertheless, 'crimes of passion' such as domestic murders are usually considered 'low risk'. In contrast, members considered gang-related murders, or organised crime activity as a high-risk category. Possible other explanations may revolve around intent and premeditation as well as providing men such as Richard with attenuating circumstances (victim precipitated homicide, or simply loss of control, see Brookman, 2022). Although his crime may place Richard in somewhat of a more favourable situation, he deplores the current state of the probation system.

Richard's lament refers to a probation service which had traditionally managed to find the right balance between offering freedom and support to probationers. In his view, the state of the probation service today, with its managerial ethos is a direct consequence of the unfortunate 'Transforming Rehabilitation' Policy which, Richard believed, has politicised the service and led to increased caseloads to probation officers working in the National Probation Service.

> It's probably got worse, and I think it is probably down to the division, bringing 'Transforming Rehabilitation', I think uhm… there we have this private sector and national, it does not really work. I think a lot of probation officers are more interested now in how the service is going to survive rather than the good work that they need to do, and that is what has really changed as far as that is concerned. […] If I came out now this time, I don't know how that would affect things, maybe they wouldn't have enough time for me, or maybe they are too strict, I don't know. Because I think that when I came out there was the right balance of attention and not too much freedom at the same time. Me for instance, I had to see my probation officer on a weekly basis, until I got a job, so I think the attention at that point was right, but now the caseload is so big I don't know whether the person doing a life licence get the right amount of attention and that concerns me really (Richard).

Nevertheless, on the 26th of June 2021 the probation service in England and Wales were reunified and brought back under the control of the public sphere (see Carr, 2021 for an overview). The promise then, is that the new "orthodoxy of privatisation" in the criminal justice system that has fearful competition at this core (see Whitehead, 2017:220) is on its way to becoming history. This chapter has not focused on the ways in which mandatory lifers experience supervision after reunification, due to the timing of data collection, but politicians are promising the change to represent the new panacea for HMPPS. The Lord Chancellor's speech explored some of the changes relevant to mandatory lifers: "The new Probation Service will also have a refreshed set of national standards – to ensure that there are more face-to-face meetings and more frequent supervision for offenders with the highest risk or most complex need" (see https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/lord-chancellor-outlines-government-plans-to-rebuild-criminal-justice). Whether more frequent supervision for the 'highest risk' offenders will amount to increased managerial supervision for public protection, and whether these new needs are constructed as dynamic risks (see Andrews and Bonta, 1998) is up to further research to explore. Given the current political climate, a return to a welfarist mode of supervision is unlikely.

7.3. Conclusion

To conclude, the men's supervision emerged as significant in their identity reconstruction and negotiation post-release. As discussed, the mandatory lifers in this sample did not simply accept probationers' interpellation of their identities as risky and dangerous and have constructed counter-narratives to guide their construction of identities and guide their actions. Overall, the men have been experiencing supervision with a degree of ambivalence. They were given plentiful space to function freely outside, but this was envisaged as merely a testing field, or as a consequence of a favourable political climate. The men have been constructed as risky and dangerous, and their crimes positioned them as prime suspects to 'snap' and commit a second murder – as shown in Peter's case. Their crime – murder - emerged as significant in positioning the men as extra-ordinary compared to persistent offenders, as shown in Raul's case. Moreover, the type of murder committed seemed to matter too in the ways in which probationers constructed their supervisees as dangerous and risky. This was evidenced in Richard's and Jacob's case. All the men had internalised the risk-paradigm of neo-rehabilitation (Feely and Simon, 1993) but were able to construct their identities in negotiating with discourses projected upon them by the probation system. All men evidenced a very good understanding and skill in engaging with 'risk parlance', and a capacity to perform a 'penal avatar' to negotiate their risk in the community and manage probationers' expectations. Jacob has epitomized this in our discussion about the gravity of his murder which warranted a type of purgatorial demeanour – proportional to the brutality of his crime. This means that the men understand that the context of their own murder is important in selected the right type of performance as changed individuals on release (see Warr, 2019 for a prison-based context). For example, remorse needs to be performed visibly, and proportional to the brutality of the crime committed – this indicates that our society accepts certain types of murders as more morally blameworthy than others (see Brookman, 2022).

All the men experienced a lax and responsibilising supervision, combined with episodes of acute risk assessment which betrayed an ideological schism in the way that the service works to construct and interpellate its subjects. One potential explanation for this dichotomic supervision is the highly politicised nature of murder. The neo-liberal probation officer, in times of structural change and stress may use recall to prison as a back covering mechanism (Farrall, Bottoms, and Shapland, 2010). Murderers are potential liabilities who attract great attention when specific recidivism occurs, and this may warrant increased surveillance from time to time. In this equation, the type of murder committed seems to have an influence in both

the intensity and balance between the two alternating discourses/approaches to supervision. A range of directions for future research and practical recommendations based on these findings are provided in the conclusion to the thesis.

The following three chapters will focus on the ways in which the men reconstructed their identities in the interview context. In other words, chapter eight, nine, and ten focus on the 'what' of the stories; that is, on their function. All three chapters evidence the discursive devices that the men used to develop ethical selves in interaction. Thus, chapter eight will introduce concepts such as 'performative remorse' and 'complicated redemption' to showcase how the men portrayed an appropriate level of remorse, proportional to the enormity of their crime in the interviews. Chapter nine then explores how the men, despite their complicated redemption and self-flagellation, relativise their involvement in the murder by employing a Splitting Narrative. Finally, chapter 10 explores how the men constructed acceptability by othering different types of murderers as the truly reprehensible type. These three chapters formulate a wider theme around discursive devices used by mandatory lifers to construct ethical selves in interaction and thus directly adds a further layer of complexity in tackling the research question: "how do people who have committed murder negotiate identities post-release?".

Reconstructing identities in the interview context

Chapter 8: Reconstructing identities (i) Redemption and forgiveness

8.1. Introduction

The previous chapters suggested that soon after release, the men had to negotiate a set of contrasting identities both internally and externally within the rich, liminal realm which they inhabited. It was argued that the men's early re-entry narratives (up to 18 months) are characterised by ambivalence around their personal identity, which stemmed from their prolonged imprisonment. In other words, they needed to internally negotiate a multiplicity of contrasting voices. Further, identities had to be constructed by reference to and submission (or through illusory resistance) to the ideological precepts of consumer culture. In addition, the men negotiated identities with criminal justice agencies which interpellated them as responsible, but risky and dangerous subjects. All the mandatory lifers in this sample experienced probation's supervision with a degree of ambivalence: the service evidenced its neo-liberal character in painting the men as in charge of their own rehabilitation – responsible, self-sufficient, but at times risky and unpredictable. In the end it was suggested that the type of murder committed, and the social context of its occurrence led to expectations around enacting certain types of remorse (which I call 'performative remorse'). These chapters represented a series of themes which render mandatory lifers' construction of identities post-release as in a game of tug of war. The findings provided an initial conceptual model that captured specific factors in the identity reconstruction of people who committed murder, as well as considered the extent to which formal/informal mechanisms of support/surveillance constrained or enabled pro-social identity reconstruction (see aims/objectives of the thesis).

The following chapter will explore issues around guilt and remorse in more detail and will evidence how performative remorse is used as an internal identity management mechanism that contains the enormity of the men's crime as well as providing ways to perform acceptability and a moral self in interactions. Here, the emphasis is placed on the function of the stories rather than their content. A narrative of 'complicated redemption' stands at the centre of this process, and which is enacted through various generative behaviours as public manifestations of ways to 'ask for forgiveness'. This type of remorse is considered complicated

because it cannot find any traditional resolve – it is impossible to forgive and impossible to forget. Nevertheless, complicated redemption as mentioned previously leads to a series of generative acts. Remorse is transformed into generativity by the men and performed in interactions.

Four out of the five the men engaged or attempted to engage with roles which promised to deliver generative potential in giving back to the society which they have harmed. In this sense, the men perform a set of generative identities by taking on wounded healer (White, 2000) and 'professional ex-prisoner' roles (Brown, 1991) with very little difficulty. To underscore, the point being made is that the 'generative' potential of these roles assists the men to earn their 'redemption', by going 'the second mile' (Eglash, 1957, 1977) in demonstrating that they are "worthy of forgiveness" (Maruna and Lebel, 2015:66; Maruna and LeBel, 2009). One of the functions of the stories is to portray an appropriate level of remorse, adequate to the enormity of their crime and avoid being 'sort of remorseful' (Tudor, 2022) as well as to contain any internal stigma of an inherently malevolent self.

8.2. Experiencing Complicated redemption: Janus-Faced Struggles

It was suggested in chapter three that the act of committing murder attracts a range of specific adaptive responses due to the enormity of the crime and its irreparability. All the men in this sample referred to the irreparability of their past and their crime, and the need to move on with their lives in a constructive way (through generative roles in the community). At the heart of their narratives stand the experiences of 'complicated redemption' – a need to contain the past and transform it into a constructive future. The section will evidence a series of Janus-Faced struggles that the men experienced, and which were the driving force behind their generative activities post-release.

Peter described how the irreparability of murder is experienced by him on a day-to-day basis, and why redemption is complicated for those who murder.

> I've committed a crime that stained my soul isn't it. Really, every bit of happiness that I ever have now is tinged with: 'don't forget what you did to that guy' you know, do you know what I mean? (Peter).

> When do you remember that? (Dan).

> All the time, all the time… I taste some nice food and I think, none for him (his victim), and that's like another channel, constant… very quiet… just like this… just every now and again… "Ohh I wouldn't mind going to the cinema and watch

that"! "Yeah yeah, you going to the cinema" … you know what I am saying? Can't wait to see my son, he can't see his son, you know what I mean? (Peter).

Give it a name (Dan).

It's guilt! It's a funny one guilt, because, I just am guilty of it, do you know what I mean, so it's not about being found guilty, or I find myself guilty, or I feel guilty, or I shouldn't, the situation is I am guilty of it and I have to, what that means, me being guilty, means I have to take responsibility and ownership of it, and I have to hold a little bit of suffering for it, emotionally, and that is my biggest highs in life now are: your son will be born one day, I hope for you… and the happiness that you feel when you see him for the first time will be let's say 100 yea? Mine would be 99. Because there will be that thought he aint gonna see his son, you know what I mean… That's the way it is. I don't argue about that thought in any way because the fact is, I am guilty, there is no case to answer, there's no… there's no getting away from it, I did it, so therefore I am responsible for it, you know where I am coming from? In the nicest possible way Dan, dead is dead, dead is dead. I can take that from you. And say, right, I'm not gonna give it back to you, and then you say come on… alright there you go. And I replace it, and then you could say… alright Dan, have mine because I took yours, that's nice, I am sorry… and I mean that as I say that. I can't look him in the eyes because he is dead. I can't look at his family in the eye and say do you know I am seriously sorry this is happened, and I would like to show you how sorry I am by replacing the item I have taken, you know what I mean… it's not possible to do when a murder has happened, is it? You can't put it back, you can't restore it, you know, they have restorative justice, how can I put that back? How can I? If there was a button for me and him to swap places, I would press it (Peter).

The passage above shows Peter's experience of complicated redemption – it is complicated due to the irreparability and enormity of the act which casts him as 'eternally stained'. This causes significant stress and psychological auto-flagellation.

I asked Nathaniel whether he could ever forget what had happened. His narrative is representative of a similar Janus-faced struggle:

Well, I don't think you ever do, it's just, it's just, have to sort of have to look forward, you never forget, what you've done cuz it's obviously a terrible act, but you sort of, you can either self-pity in a cell, and… cuz it's not gonna get you anywhere, or you move forward and the only thing that you can do is to… you sunk to the lowest part of what you can possibly do so the only thing to do is to rise, so you gotta just keep going forward, the soon you start looking back it's gonna creep back onto you, and that's where the insecurity is and… mental health issues can rise, so I can just try focus forward, cuz… don't get me wrong, I still got days where I obviously, sad days, but I don't, they could be underlying back to my offence, but I don't want to get to that stage where I am overthinking about

that and then putting them thoughts in my own head then, so… like I said, I try and keep moving forward, I got days when I am pissed off, but overall I just literally, creeping through life and try to provide for my son for a potentially good future. That's it really. Switching off, keeping busy, I don't want to dwell with the past. My past is my past, like I said. I won't forget it, but I don't want to remember it either, sort of thing. I don't want to relive that every time I open my eyes, so obviously just being a better person (Nathaniel).

Nathaniel's past is constructed as intrusive: it has the potential to creep in and occupy his 'mental space'. In this sense, these thoughts need to be contained, sublimated, and converted into constructive energies. Importantly, Nathaniel referred to his past as something which he won't forget but doesn't want to remember. This paradoxical double negation creates the premise for the existence of a middle position, one where remembering what happened fades from conscious thought but is nevertheless present. Then, what transpires in the narrative is Nathaniel's containment of his internal struggles and the enactment of strategies that aim to switch the focus from the past to that of the future. Nevertheless, Nathaniel's past is included in the future, albeit not consciously, but experienced as a force for good. A similar Janus-faced struggle was experienced by Raul.

It's always in your mind, every single day you wake up, you know. You can't ever escape it. All that really happens is that as the time goes on, the disbelief and the shock just lessen more and more, but you always remember what you done. You know what I mean? You don't feel good about it, you know what I mean? You feel horrible. Aaaa, but yeah, I just have to live with it. Otherwise, if you don't, it's gonna eat you up you know (Raul).

Raul expressed that one needs to learn to live with the enormity of their crime; otherwise, they risk being 'eaten up' by their past. By employing this narrative, Raul presents an appropriate level of remorse and avoids being "sort of remorseful" (Tudor, 2022:97) whilst trying to move on. I then asked Raul for more details about his experience of remorse, including if he ever dreams of the murder scene.

Sorry if I am too intrusive, but how does it happen? You wake up? Or do you dream of it? (Dan)

Aaa, so, no. I have been lucky not to have any dreams about it, nightmares, or anything like that, uhm, it more so comes into your mind when you yourself read into your mind cuz, you know you could be doing something like walking past the area that it happened in, like when I have to go to work, I have to walk past where it happened every day, and yeah, it always comes into my mind, you know… (Raul).

Seemingly, the men in the sample had constructed strategies to contain their past which is constructed as a potentially devastating force. Up to this point, the men have contained intrinsic anxieties and guilt as a result of the murder by sublimating the past (Freud, 1930), whilst attempting to evidence an 'appropriate level of remorse'. In this way their murderous past fades away from conscious thought but is present in a latent manner (potentially this is to signal responsibility for the crime in the face of authority). This can be done by way of transforming these energies into constructive ones by way of mobilising stories related to helping others. Jacob's narrative goes some way in supporting this hypothesis. I asked him whether he ever forgets what he has done:

> Oh God…. ah, trying it's been very difficult. Most of the time I am a workaholic, so If I engage in lots of activity then, that is a cover, but it's only a cover for it , I don't really know, I know I need to forgive myself and I do periodically (laughs), ah… but it's something that I have to keep working at really, to all intents and purposes as far as the system is concerned I paid the price I've done the time, and never missed a supervision for 15 years or so it's just down to me and how I feel about it, I really, I struggle with it… ah, I try to… mitigate that as I've said I, leading a meaningful life and caring for other people, but I think I am caring anyway, I think I would be the same person, ah, if even, I just think I would uhm, I think the fundamental nature is with you from birth somehow so I struggle with it, I really do. There are particular times of the year when it is difficult for me and uhm…. uhm… I don't think it will ever go away, I…. uhm … (evidences signs of distress) and it's just something that I have to live really, I don't know if that is answering your question really… I suppose what is somehow in spite of how I beat myself up, or punish myself, for what happened, because I made this decision to live the best life that I could I've had this measure of success because I have been driven to try and achieve something not necessarily, and this sounds terribly, but it's true, I haven't done it necessarily, completely for myself (Jacob).

Jacob here is describing a dichotomy: "I need to forgive myself" versus "the system needs to forgive myself" which stands at the heart of the Janus-Faced struggles explored above. He seemed to have difficulties with forgiving himself, and a strategy he mobilises to navigate this struggle is to make the life of the person he murdered suffered count, including his own life. The best strategy to make the lives of others count is through mobilising generative behaviours outside.

All the men mentioned that rumination can be destructive, but they cannot afford to become "remorseful but forgetful offenders", as remembering is intrinsic to any type of redemption (see Tudor, 2022:99-100; Tudor, 2001) and is something that is seen as expected from them.

The irreparability of the act further complicates this sense of redemption. The role of these stories is to perform an appropriate level of remorse, proportional to the enormity of their crime.

8.3. Using generative roles to enact and perform complicated redemption.

Richard's re-entry narrative is presented as a 'smooth transition' into the natural role of the 'helper'. Now released, he dedicates his whole life to helping others.

> I think… If someone would ask me what my purpose in life was, I would say it's about help and support. On my WhatsApp profile you'll see: "I'm here to help" (his WhatsApp status). It's help people, and solve problems, I see myself as a problem solver, solution finder to issues, people come to me all the time, so… so, I suppose me wanting to be that problem solver uhm, is realising that people do come to me to help all the time, even this morning, they will ring me or they will text me or send a message, I've got this problem you know, I need you to help me and what's helped me to do that is my massive network (Richard)

Richard's redemptive narrative started in prison, through a series of conversion narratives which are presented in the next chapter. He is consistent throughout interviews in referring to the value that he attaches to his professional life, evidencing the helper role as foundation to who he is now. To reiterate, Richard had started his role at NACRO during his imprisonment as well as for a well-known broadcaster network. Twenty years later Richard runs an organisation which raises awareness around penal issues and is concerned with the re-entry of ex-offenders. During our first interview, I asked Richard what these jobs mean to him. His response resembles the traditional 'Marunian' 'redemptive narrative'. Richard told me that his jobs represent a continuous act of asking for forgiveness

> I think unconsciously a lot of my activity, a lot of the things that I do is because of guilt. I think, my driving force, in many ways aaa, to whom I am, people often see me doing lots of different things as well as the [redacted], I do a lot of community work too, with different organisations, and I don't really think about it, but then I stop and think and each new thing is me trying to pay back, be trying to make up for what I've done, which I will never do, so I think guilt is a massive part in my life really. It's an underlying, current of guilt that keeps me, that drives me to do what I do, because I like to see things positively. I've turned the guilt into something, as an energy, if that makes sense (Richard).

These roles provide Richard with mechanisms of reconciliation with society and his own past; they are a viable way to redeem himself for past mistakes, and to continuously ask for forgiveness (Heidemann et al. 2016). Fraley (2001) remarked that offenders can seldom make amends directly with victims. In this sense, reconciliation can target other aspects of offenders'

lives and even other people. Naturally, for mandatory lifers, direct reconciliation with the victim is virtually impossible (also see Liem and Richardson, 2014). Richard's guilt, as he remarked, had been transformed into a positive energy dedicated to helping others. This finding reiterates LeBel's (2007) point those feelings of remorse are a strong predictor of the helper orientation in ex-offenders.

Further, the job continues to offer the narrative resource necessary for the development of generative stories that guide who Richard is, and who he can become (see Frank, 2010a). An abundance of research has found voluntary peer-mentoring to offer a 'hook for change' (Giordano et al, 2002:312), and a 'renewed sense of self' as the ex-offenders gives back (see Buck, 2020; Nixon et al. 2020:54; Nixon, 2019; LeBel, 2007; LeBel et al, 2015; Bazemore and Karp, 2004; Irwin, 2005; White, 2000) and subsequently feels accepted in the community (Kavanagh and Borrill, 2013).

Maruna (2011:13) said that "successful reintegration is a two-way process". As such, it requires an effort on the part of the ex-offender as well as that of some wider society which should forgive and accept those who have harmed. It is not sufficient for the returning prisoner to simply 'ask for forgiveness', especially if their call is left unanswered. This may even place the ex-offender in a state of 'liminality' (van Gennep, 1960; Maruna, 2011). In Richard's case, the professional ex-prisoner/lifer role had placed him in an ideal situation to receive the public recognition necessary to reconcile with his past and society. As a 'returning citizen' status, elevation ceremonies, such as the one described below provide his life with meaning and imbue his reconstructed self with credibility for continuous performance upon release. Richard had received an award by the [redacted] police force for his exemplary work and contribution in the field of criminal justice.

> What did you feel when you got that award? (Dan)
>
> I felt, really shocked and elated, really, looking at the paradox of all those years ago the police has arrested me, bringing me to the prison cells, and now they are awarding me, uhm, but, I felt slightly uncomfortable as well, what would happen if her family would hear of this, you know, the victim's family, because you have to think about that as well you know, it's always about the victim, but it was very pleasing for me of course, and good for my children as well, because one thing that I have to do is to get them into the idea that yes dad has been into prison, committed this terrible offence, which they know about now, but so when I receive things like this it helps me to sort of manage that process, my kids knowing that dad is a murderer, you know, that that is the stark truth, you know,

so it certainly helped with that you know, any positive thing like that it help so it
is a good feel (Richard).

The story above allows Richard to view and present himself as a 'returning citizen', reconciled with his past and with the society that he has harmed. Importantly, Richard explicitly remarks that he is now able to manage his stigma, especially as experienced through the eyes of his children. In this sense, the stigmatising identity of being 'a murderer' had been acutely experienced in the context of an emerging 'fatherhood' identity, perceived to be spoiled (see Neale, Nettleton, and Pickering, 2011; Best et al., 2016). Lebel, Richie, and Maruna (2015) too remarked that professional ex-criminals and wounded healers perceive less personal stigma and increased psychological wellbeing because of their roles (also see Maruna and Lebel, 2009). As McNeill and Maruna (2010) have argued, an offender must pay back before they can trade up to a restored social position as a "citizen of good character" (McNeill and Maruna, 2010 in McNeill, 2012:13). Status elevation ceremonies are the "mirrored parallel processes" of Garfinkel's (1956) status degradation ceremonies (Rouse, 1996:21), typically experienced by prisoners and ex-prisoners. They can facilitate the manufacturing of an identity (see Rouse, 1996), or, as in this case, offer a credible performance of a reconstructed identity post-release. An evaluation takes place "when an actor's old self is typed by the self and others as untrue" (Rouse, 1996:38).

As discussed, Richard presents a life dedicated to helping others and redemption is constructed as a positive, ongoing process. His professional ex-prisoner role makes him feel good, offers a clear purpose in life, and provides some resolution to the dissociative experience which are described in more detail in the next chapter. Further, as shown above, these roles offer Richard a degree of public recognition to his reformed self and the necessary narrative resource to perform a pious, generative identity post-release. The official and public nature of the role renders the 'helper orientation' as the pinnacle of who he is now, post-release. Status elevation ceremonies further cement the public nature of harm recognition and appeals for forgiveness and assist in stigma management.

Once released, Peter approached AA groups outside where he quickly established himself as an 'old veteran of introspection'. During our interviews, he repeatedly takes on the 'therapist's role', and employs psychotherapeutic discourse indicative of his specialist therapeutic knowledge, and an AA adopted narrative framework. He established his superiority compared to other types of ex-offenders by reiterating his introspective potential – in fact this is the secret of his success. The psychological jargon below portrays a complex set of narrative resources

which assist in performing a pro-social, generative role post-release. Peter told me that he identified 'proper introspection' as one of the most important virtues that one can exercise. His position is closely related to and stemming from his commitment to therapy as a Grendon graduate. He expresses his position in the following fictional scenario:

> What is going on inside of here (points towards heart), why am I fucking raging all the time? And then come to that "ah shit, it's probably because of that" and it's time to let some of that weight go away man, I've been carrying all this shit around me because in a sense that abuse from childhood is continuing because I believe, Dan, as well that all of our negative traits lack of communication, thieving, fucking, lying, you know, whatever all of those bad traits are rooted somehow in childhood because they begin as defense mechanisms (Peter).

His model's conceptualisation of defence mechanisms and anger as consequence of childhood experience indicates his affiliation with psychodynamic therapy, most likely explored during his treatment at Therapeutic Communities (TCs') such as HMP Grendon (Stevens, 2012, 2013; Wilson and McCabe, 2002; Yardley and Rusu, 2018). In establishments such as HMP Grendon every behaviour must be dissected; any potential correlation between problematic behaviours and experience is explored (Stevens, 2013).

Peter is a devoted member of AA who religiously attends meetings every Thursday. Evidently, the narrative resources portrayed above indicate that Peter has adopted the narrative framework dictated by the group to interpret human behaviour (see also Gubrium and Holstein, 2008; Denzin, 1986; Frings and Albery, 2015, also see Loseke, 2007 on 'organizational identities'). Gubrium and Holstein (2008:179) have argued that "the selves that emerge under AA's auspices draw upon a shared stock of interpretative resources from which selves may be crafted" (also see Denzin, 1987a).

Befriending and helping others is an integral component of 12 step groups such as AA and NA through their member-sponsor relationship (Zemore, Kaskutas, and Ammon, 2004). As a sponsor, Peter accumulates the narrative resources to perform an introspective, generative identity post-release. He established himself as a wise holder of academic and experimental psychological knowledge. I was interested to understand how this therapeutic identity performance is maintained throughout the years. Continuous membership to AA group and his role of being an active sponsor (mentoring role) have been identified as salient in providing the narrative resources needed to sustain this prosocial self throughout the years.

Sometimes, sometimes, this is the beautiful thing about Alcoholic Anonymous and Narcotic Anonymous, Dan, because that's where I can go and see somebody who is essentially a carbon copy of myself from 25 years ago and they can come and say I am in pain in trouble I don't know what is going on and I can say to them "you know what mate, it's like this". I can be open and honest to share my experience of which problems I have personally and how I manage to overcome them and sharing that experience is in a sense an estimable thing, innit? Makes me feel good because I can see that I am helping that person get better because I don't believe that drug addicts are bad people. Addicts are not bad, some of them are, because there's arseholes in every fucking cult, or call it, addicts are sick people who need to get better and I know that it's exactly how I'm saying, it's this fucking spiritual disorder, breaking the link between subconscious and your conscious sets off a fucking mental obsession about things you know what I mean all the time, about everything and then you try and take drugs to fucking just to shut it out for a minute. And that's why a lot of people, a lot of proper junkies, their aim is to go to the edge properly as close to death as possible without going over what they want to. They are seeking oblivion. And I know that's true Dan, not because of any book that I have read, but because I have done it, I have lived in that way where I feel disappointed that I've woken up the next morning (Peter).

Peter finds that the practical and experiential nature of the help he provides is saturated with a type of credibility (also see Matthews, 2021) which is lacking in 'theoreticians of addiction' and their supporting literature. As a 'recovered counsellor' (White, 2000), the emphasis is clearly placed on his own 'woundedness' (Nixon, 2020:54) - *sine qua non* - 'true' knowledge of the physiology, psychology, or culture (see White, 2000; Maruna and LeBel, 2009) of addiction and recovery cannot be acquired. Further, Peter has the capacity to identify with and act as a role model for those who are "carbon copies of [himself] 25 years ago". In this sense, "having been there too" (Humphreys, 2004:15), renders Peter's stories accurate articulations of the type of pains of recovery experienced by his peers and have the potential to change the lives of those who listen to them (see White, 2000).

Although he is not explicitly 'asking for forgiveness', as Richard did, the generative motivation is implicit in the passage explored above. Peter engages in what he perceives as an "estimable act", which, in the end, means doing the right thing. Riessman (1965; 1976) suggested through his 'helper therapy principle' that "those who help are helped the most" (Gartner and Riessman, 1984:19). Helping others provides him with status and increases his commitment to therapy (Zemore, Kaskutas, and Ammon, 2004), in the end making him feel good about himself (see also Aresti et al., 2010). He is consistent in the importance that he attaches to his therapeutic self across three different interviews through the two years I have interviewed Peter. It takes a

master status significance early on in our first two interviews and is salient in a 'role identity hierarchy' (Stryker and Serpe, 1982), affecting other roles that he portrays (Brown, 1991) during our third interview. As evidenced above, the therapeutic self is hierarchically structuring a therapeutic, wise, generative self. Immediately after his release, Peter recognised that, at the basis of who he is, stands a sort of fluidity characteristic to those who change, for the better.

> Who am I? Wow, that is a big question. I am about to be a father, I have many opinions about many things, they are all able to change, but you know, provided concrete evidence, I am a fluid person, you know, I am happy to go with the flow, most of the time, but ultimately, I will stand up and to the right thing, because that is what I have to do and while I hold the belief that's what everybody should do, I don't expect that from everybody, because it's not up to me what you do, you know, so I am someone who…[pause]…lives in flux in a situation where change is possible…you know…I am someone who has changed his own mindset (Peter).

Much of Peter's early release narrative identity represented a mobilisation of institutionally and organisationally (see Loseke, 2007) derived narrative resources which aimed at sustaining the performance of therapeutic self in the community (also see Best et al., 2016). This type of self-construction was projected from within the cultural horizons of AA discourse, thus having an "organizationally embedded" (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008:165) dimension. Further, continuous attendance at the meetings and his role of a sponsor Peter provides the resources and credibility in performing a generative self which assists him in giving back to society and to feel better about himself. Active and continuous participation in AA meetings is crucial to this process (see Best et al. 2018). During our third interview (around almost two years after our first one) Peter alternates between performing his therapeutic self and the father role, the latter gaining more significance with the passage of time.

Jacob alternates between presenting a humble persona and a successful businessman. To reiterate, soon after release, he started his own IT business and quickly became 'very successful'. Beyond the obvious pecuniary advantages of owning a successful business, for Jacob, true value lies in the humanistic, generative, and altruistic potential that leading a successful business can offer. Jacob explicitly remarked on the generative motivation that lies behind his business: he wants to 'give back' to future generations. He employs individuals with no skills, some of whom suffer from disability.

> I stumbled across an algorithm to convert data to a very complex ERP system, and we integrate it with other systems, so we basically write copy day code to make this system work for other systems, so we are essentially, a systems creator.

> Ah, it's a very niche and unique business, and the guys I have working for me are all clever. They have all got different skills and abilities, and it's been wonderful for me working with them, where they come in and join with no skills and they acquire them and it's always a revelation to me so you know… and I mean I've got one young guy who is 20 now, he is with us 2 years, he knew nothing about writing code when he joined us, he is autistic, and he is absolutely brilliant, and he is writing better code than I am , and it's amazing and I [unclear] so much… uhm, so, you know, ah, they are building something and something for which other people benefit and is a huge amount of satisfaction and fortunately through this Covid thing, we haven't had to let anyone go, you know, it's a big worry of mine that you know, a lot of businesses had to, you know furlough, hasn't been an option for us, you know, if they don't work there is no money, so, but fortunately we were so far we are doing well you know, ah, the way I see it these guys committed themselves to the business and are dependent they got children, the responsibility is huge uhm, and I care, I really care about, yes I am in business with my business partner to make money ultimately, but we are also trying to build a business that has a future for development for these guys too so, I am getting a lot of satisfaction… uhm, seeing them grow, their careers take off (Jacob).

> So, is there a sense of giving back here? (Dan)

> Oh yah, I mean, argh, and that's what I believe in, life is about sharing, uhm, ah, and being in a position to do that is great aah… but having said that at the time these guys give back a lot too, they put a lot, you only get out of life what you put into it, you know… and they put a lot of effort in and, I don't have an ego when it comes to being a boss or being the holder of all knowledge. The fact that you know Kristopher is barely 20. He is writing better code than I am, doesn't make me feel envious, it makes me feel happy. I just think wow, you know, this is cool (laughs) you know… seeing other people [unclear] is like gardening isn't it. You plant something you get a beautiful flower; it gives you know, just a huge satisfaction (Jacob).

In comparison to Peter and Richard, Jacob's generativity is not delivered in official capacity, or as part of a peer-mentoring programme and he does not seem to seek public recognition for his benevolence. When considered in isolation to the rest of the narrative, the passage above seems to represent the natural resolution to Erikson's (1958; 1963) psychosocial stage of 'Generativity versus Stagnation', typically found in mature men (between the ages of 45 and 60; Jacob was 60 at the time of this interview). Erikson argued that during this 'conflicting stage' the mature individual orients their energy towards giving something of value to the next generation (also see McAdams, 2007). Nevertheless, participants in this sample have all expressed their interest in 'giving back', albeit in a myriad of different forms, irrespective of

their age. We know from desistance research that 'generative activities' translate into successful reformation of identity (Maruna, 2001; Vaughan, 2007; Maruna and LeBel, 2009).

The findings discussed above reinforce that "one of the consistent findings emerging out of the research on the lives of successfully desisting ex-prisoners is that successful reintegration often appears to involve an explicit investment in what developmental psychologists call 'generativity' (See McAdams, Hart, Maruna, 1998 in Maruna and LeBel, 2015: 66). The MLS individuals in this sample seem to know this very well. The most recently released men, who did not have opportunities to engage with generative behaviours have expressed their desire to do so in the future. They would like to make a difference through 'giving back' and this made up their imagined future selves. For Nathaniel, as an example, participating in this piece of research represented his 'foot in the door', hoping that his involvement will lead to other opportunities to get engaged in the future.

> I've got, I feel more comfortable with myself with what I did, that I potentially, I am looking into helping others now, so it's a big step from when I went out, before it was all about me getting myself sorted, I feel now I am at a stage where I can use my experiences to help others, so… I don't feel any more comfortable […], I am not a great role model to most, but I could be, potentially, if someone is going on the wrong tracks, I don't know, maybe I could help someone in that aspect, it's all about looking at the big picture and help everyone you know if you just skip to that the one person to the difference and it's still helping, so obviously just baby steps (Nathaniel).

Similarly, Raul expressed his desire to visit as a guest speaker on one of the modules that I teach at university. He hopes that his stories may influence future criminal justice professionals, for the better. However, these are comments made in passing and are not echoing a strong commitment to generativity.

8.4. Conclusion

The findings partly contradict research conducted with lifer populations. These suggested that lifers discard their previous identities in favour of new pro-social ones, and that a crucial component of the process is a desire to give back (see Liem, 2016; Liem and Richardson, 2015; Herbert, 2018, reinforcing Maruna's 2001 work). However, the present research shows that mandatory lifers experience complicated redemption due to the difficulty to reconcile the enormity and irreparability of the crime that they committed with their present selves and society at large. The men did not discard their previous identities as this would represent not

taking responsibility for what they have done. Rather, the men attempted to signal an appropriate level of remorse by talking about the irreparability of the act which led to the enactment of generative behaviours.

In this sense, the men developed strategies to consciously avoid thinking about the past while reconciling their relationship with society through generative activities. Importantly, such research indicates the performative nature of generative behaviours, pointing to the 'identity work' displayed for parole boards (see Maruna and Liem, 2020). Nevertheless, this is not the whole story. Rather, as the archetypal 'prodigal son', the men negotiated a return to the society which they harmed. This is partly being done through their generative work and roles; they address society in an attempt to 'ask for forgiveness'. Eglash (1957, 1997) argued that redemption involves 'going the second mile', not merely by paying one's depth through purist retribution (see Maruna and Lebel, 2010). The men know this very well. Reintegration is at the very least a 'two-way process' (Maruna, 2011), and cannot be completed in the absence of a 'moral and social rehabilitation' where the state and society are indispensable (McNeill, 2012). This may explain why all participants expressed a desire to give back in one form or another, albeit varying in their commitment to the desiderate. All the men experienced Janus-Faced struggles where they had to contain intrusive recollections of the past and sublimate them to perform generativity to the outside world.

Then, by becoming professional ex-criminals and wounded healers, the men did not completely repudiate their past, but rather, capitalised on it (Brown, 1991). Past identities "linger on", as Brown, (1991:221) has said in that they affect how the men present themselves now, but they linger on latently. Importantly, the men evidenced good ability to take on negative experiences and transform these into positive outcomes – an advantage to their life post-release. As professional ex-criminals or wounded healers, the men used their old identities (prison-based identities) and merged these with redemptive narratives to negotiate a sort of duality (see Honeywell, 2020) utilised to neutralise stigma post-release and to reconcile their relationship with the world.

Chapter 9: Reconstructing identities (ii): The Splitting Narrative

9.1. Introduction

The current chapter builds on the previous one by focusing on how the men constructed acceptable identities at 'micro-level', in the interview context. Despite the performance of 'an appropriate level of remorse' as evidenced in the previous chapter, the current one evidences that to achieve ethical selves, the men relativised their involvement in the murder by negating their capacity for agency. This was achieved through the structure of their narratives, placing the men in a paradoxical situation: they performed remorse for a crime which de facto they had limited involvement in. I called this situation the 'Murderer's Identity Paradox' which was solved by them through employing a 'Splitting Narrative' to account for what happened.

The 'Splitting Narrative' explored below is used to: (1) build coherency between a murderous past and an ethical, moral self-present in a way which is not pathologically dissociative; (2) function as an internal narrative of change which reconciles the past with the present and the future (acting as an internal and external stigma management mechanism); (3) present/perform acceptable identities and reform to authorities to minimise their risk, and to solve a paradox that stands at the centre of the narratives - the murderer's identity paradox: this is to be guilty for a crime one did not 'really' commit.

The internal narrative was found in the most skilful participants and represents the first such narrative of desistance for murderers to date explored in criminological literature. The men engaged with complex identity work through the specific life stories that they have told during the interview context, and which will be explored in this chapter. To reiterate, the ways in which the men positioned their selves *vis-à-vis* having committed murder emerged as a significant element in their identity negotiation. In a similar way to prisoners in O'Connor's (1995; 2000:38) study, where utterances placed participants on an agency continuum, the men in this sample 'deflected', 'problematized', or claimed complete agency in their murder stories. Participants tended to problematize agency and showed an initial deflection of responsibility which was then continuously negotiated. I argue in the following section that the men's conflicting statements on their actual and symbolic involvement in the murder - beyond evidencing the men's reflective stance (O'Connor, 1995; 2000) - is representative of more complex identity work. The men who presented conflicting statements of their responsibility

for the murder (Peter, Richard, Jacob) have constructed their agentic self along the lines of a 'Splitting Narrative' within a romanticized struggle plot (McAdams, 1993). The men's personal myth (McAdams, 1993) is constructed as a heroic narrative where 'unfortunate' events are followed by positive outcomes in the end (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988).

9.2. The Splitting Narrative

The overall goal of the 'Splitting Narrative' is to portray the men as good and moral people in the present who had struggled to rise from an unfortunate event representing an unfortunate past. The main discursive device used is an 'agentic split' which creates a sense of responsibility for a crime which, according to them, they have only partially committed. Negotiating a sense of responsibility is crucial given that the men are on a life licence for murder: it is reflective of their 'narrative labour' (Warr, 2019), and institutional narrative templates (Harding, et al. 2017) to take responsibility for the crime, and thus signal low risk to authorities (see also see Fox 1999; McKendy, 2006). A specific temporal order is used: (a) early childhood is constructed as insular and traumatic (generally, ontologically insecure) (b) murder stories are reconstructed as taking place under the influence of the 'Other'; (c) prison is presented as a place of crossroads and revelatory identity reconstruction – initial trauma is followed by a journey of making sense of the crime and agentic identity reconstruction; (d) re-entry is sequenced: initial struggles gave way to a need of giving back. Alternatively, those who were younger at the time of the arrest (Raul and Nathan), although following similar narrative trajectories, have made sense of their prison sentence as natural maturation. There is a continuity in their identity (murderous self/present self) which explains their insistence for a good core self (Maruna, 2001), or stable (Presser, 2008) self. The latter tended to directly claim responsibility for the crime and evidenced an internalisation of rehabilitative discourse as a form of negotiating their own 'risk' in the community (see Nichol, 2007; McNeil, 2016). The structure of the Splitting Narrative is provided in figure 1.

Figure 1. The splitting Narrative
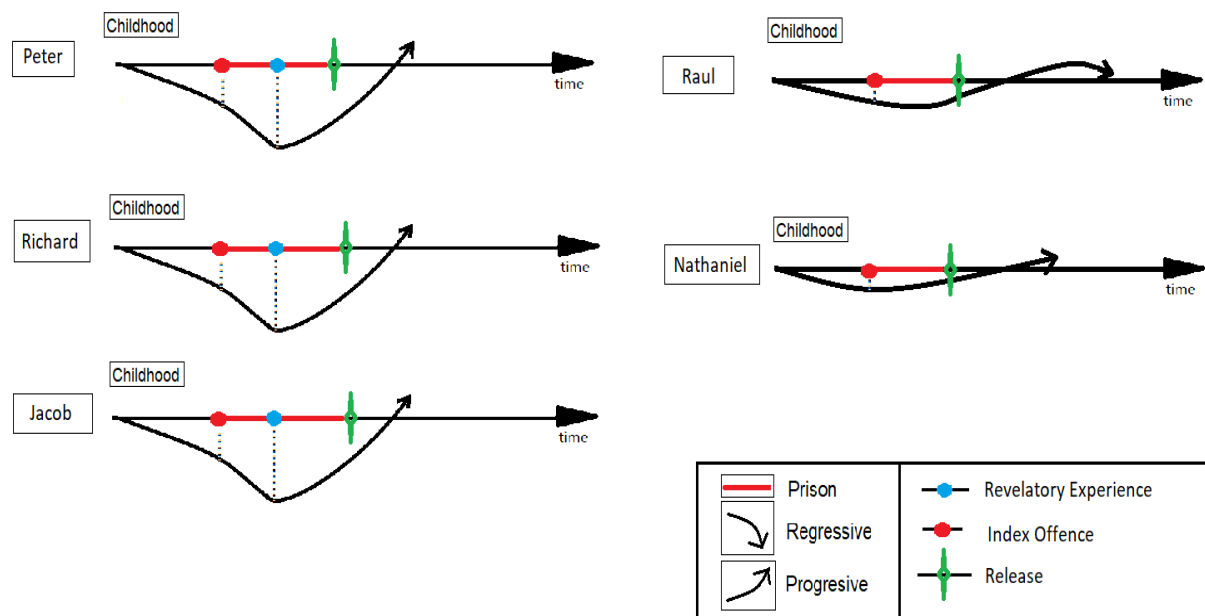
Peter, Richard, and Jacob present a romanticised plot: an initial regressive narrative followed by a progressive narrative (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988). This graph represents the men's initial regressive narrative up to the index offence, followed by a progressive narrative starting from prison. The elements of this narrative are explored below.

9.2.1. Childhood as passive existence: Experiencing Insularity and inadequacy

Most of the men's stories of early childhood are imbued with a sense of isolation, passivity, and inadequacy. These stories are causally linked (Gergen and Gergen, 1988) with the 'murder stories' which follow strictly after. The exception is Richard's story which starts with the murder scene. Peter narrates the early life of an isolated child, incapable of expressing and understanding emotions. His alexithymia took shape shortly after a conversation with his father, which in turn, had a lasting impact on who he was to become. Peter identifies his emotional inarticulation as the biggest problem of his life.

> The biggest problem I had in my life is, Dan, I never talked with anybody about how I felt, yea? (Peter)

Although he now realises that his parents were available to talk to him about most things, a particular discussion with the father had the fatidic effect of alienation:

> I have always been told by my father, (lower voice, whispers) you should be grateful for what they are doing for you then [his grandparents], for what they are

doing for you, it… closed me down, it made me… when I had problems, I didn't go to them. So if I was in the garden playing and I hurt myself, I would go indoors, I would go in the kitchen and try to sort it myself, you know what I mean, I wouldn't go and use the parental figures that were there, and they were there… you know… and that just developed into when I was a teenager and I started having problems, and when I said I had problems as a teenager, I just had the same problems as any other teenager had, you know, trying to work out who I was, and you know… just the same shit that every teenage kid had, but I had no…. voice to go and speak to someone else about it, I always thought it's not alright for me to vocalise my problems with other people, I felt that this would put more on them than I deserved to put on other people, you know what I am saying? (Peter).

Peter described himself as an insular child who initially found comfort in reading books, and then soon engaged with a prolonged period of hedonism by using drugs. Peter's quick transition from an avid reader to an avid drug user provided a viable way of escaping the present and assisted in forging relationships with others (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002; Hall and Winlow, 2005).

I just started trying everything you know, mushrooms, acid, everything you can think of, I just tried everything, I wasn't afraid of drugs, you know people… I never had that fear, to take anything that is going, you know, I just tried it to see what the experience was, and I was very good at controlling the experience, you know, I have taken too much of most things, taken them to excess, but never put myself in danger, you know, like I've taken too much acid and really started to freak out inside, but because I was quite an insular person, that I was, I can shut it down… So people were asking me 'yo you alright', 'yeah I am alright mate, how are you doing, having a nice night yea?' I could hold it down, you know what I mean, so then we just fast forward a little bit because the drug story is the same, and the progression is the same, and I won't go through each different drug I tried, it's pointless innit? (Peter).

His decline eventually culminated with the index offence. He felt he had no voice of his own. He was existing, but unable to become a person (Smith, 2016). Peter provided a clear example of his ontological insecurity (Laing 1960:42-43) in the following 'reflection narrative' (Brookman, 2015). He draws from an institutional discourse of Alcoholic Anonymous (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008) to explain that much of his early life he felt he did not have an identity of his own:

As I was growing up my identity was defined by the facts that my father told me, there was external influences that defined myself, you know what I say, or my

identity […] that's how I was, I'd be with someone and 'I'd start to become like them, I had no real identity of myself, you know what I mean. (Peter)

Now we are talking about many years of being clear minded, drug free, clarity, conscious, and introspective. I know my own thoughts and feelings, you know. So really, no other thing or a person can really have an effect on who I am, because whatever is said to me, whatever argument is put to me, I am free, to give my own opinion, I am able to think what my opinion is to construct my opinion, you know what I mean? (Peter)

Similarly to Peter's early childhood, Jacob also felt inadequate. On numerous occasions, he refers to his family "not knowing what to do with him", symbolically constructing himself as an object, manipulated by others. Jacob's stories paint an isolated, alienated child who could never fit in, and was not capable of decision making, or agency. They moved houses many times which had always rendered him as an outsider in endless new environments. Jacob recollects having had a very difficult relationship with [his] father who used to brutalise him and his brother, with whom he shared the index offence:

I had a very I had a very difficult relationship with my father uhm, who was very unemotional, he was very clever, and he was very handy with his hands, things, and I used to love doing things, with him… but he never he never any affirmation, he never got to school, he never got involved with anything, he was very distant, so you know, you know, often you know, open days have uhm… parents would come, but my parents, you know, my mother was too busy, my father was just… they were never there they were never part of those years, and obviously I reflected deeply on this over the years (Jacob).

I didn't realise at the time but I realise it now, they were very brutal and abusive, you know, if we did something wrong uhm we wouldn't just be given a slap or something, we would be beaten, you know my father used a riding crop on us regularly, in terms of sort of discipline, to us… it was normal, we didn't, I didn't realise until years later, I mean these days they would be put in prison probably for the way we were treated (Jacob).

The brutality of his father made Jacob more and more insular. He could never fit in anywhere and could never reach his father's expectations. He managed to escape from 'his shadow' at the age of 16, when he started working in a nightclub, and got a place of his own.

Richard's early life is described with a degree of ambivalence. Born of "rich Caribbean heritage", he enjoyed a loving childhood. Despite his family's intrinsic love for each other, he felt that they were dysfunctional and disorganised due to their socio-economic position as immigrants.

Just like all rest of African-Caribbeans they (the parents) came to make some money and then get back home, and things like the poverty in England for black people, the lack of work in certain areas, the discrimination, uhm, made our families a bit dysfunctional really, plus we had kids, siblings that were in Jamaica, that were older than us, and there was no bonding between us you see, so for me it was making sense of all that really, the migration from Jamaica, and [...].My position as a black Briton, I don't really I think I understood really, we were taught everything about our culture and, for me I was kind of lost when it came to culture, when it came to identity, the only thing that kind of helped to a certain extent, was in the late 70s when the Rastafarian - a lot of records were about culture in Africa, and the process of slavery and then the police started to drop us, people in my age group (not clear), and that's why things the way they were. But I think my childhood was reasonably happy, my parents loved me, it was very poor though, you know, we didn't have much (laughs), so it is good to be able to give our kids a bit more, aaaa, and there was a spiritual upbringing as well that helped, that helped bring the moral compass, in a sense, really, doing things right, of course until that big, big mistake you know, it was quite a happy childhood (Richard).

Richard's story of his childhood self is one that is transitory and lacks clarity. He identifies his early sense of self with his family's immigration from the Caribbean's to the United Kingdom, and with the hardships which ensued. He could not grasp his position as a young Briton; he felt lost when it came to identity; his confusion is one which was shared by many at the time as the term 'black' was emerging as a political category (see Sarup, 1996).

Overall, this section has shown that the men in this sample had reconstructed their childhoods through stories which create and allow for early ontologically insecure selves (Laing, 1960). The men's relationship with their families, and with their fathers emerged as salient in reflecting on earlier selves, and the ways these have evolved. Sarup (1996:171) remarks that "our identity is influenced by the experiences of our parents and what they tell us". Such 'unchosen stories' can ultimately have the effect of leading people to "choices which are unchosen" (Frank, 2010a:35) through the images later used by the men as narrative resources to develop a personal myth (McAdams, 1993). These have relevance in understanding the ways in which the men negotiate their crime, and identities post release because, as Frank (2010:153) has said: "part of letting stories breathe is letting them do what they do, which leads to another story". The men's recollection of their childhoods established a causal linkage (Gergen and Gergen, 1988) with the stories of the index offence which are explored in the next section. Through these following stories the men relativize their symbolic versus *de facto* involvement in the murder. The purpose of such identity work will be the focus of the next section.

9.2.2. The index offence

Now that the men constructed their early life stories as ontologically insecure, they could introduce stories relating to the murder that they committed and construct these as out of their control. The men managed to relativize their involvement in the murder at a socio-linguistic level, through the language they employed. Analysing utterances on specific stories of violence and/or murder was revealing of the ways in which the men made sense of their murders, as well as the ways in which they employed discourse to negotiate/distance themselves from the murder scene. O'Connor (2000:58) presented situations where her participants at times deflect agency, whilst other times take full responsibility for their crimes, in the active voice. In her view, this is to achieve narrative coherence: "such a shift, I argue, is one in which the speaker places such event(s) in a life story in order to achieve coherence through describing a state in their life situation and to make sense of what "ended up". This is, of course, interesting, and could potentially serve this function. However, an addition to this view, as presented here, is that these constructions may provide evidence for specific identity work, and 'narrative labour' (Warr, 2019) aimed at reconciling contrasting expectations of the men. Taken together, "the formal aspects of structure express the identities, moral dilemmas, perceptions, and values of the storyteller" (Phoenix and Smith, 2011: 631), and thus assists with painting a complete picture of the identity work and the stories that the men live by. In this sense, these murder scene stories serve to problematize agency, and evidence some deflection of responsibility (O'Connor, 1995), for a past self, whilst demonstrating an agentive self in the 'interview-present'. Further, there is an internalisation of institutional discourses coming to light (Fox 1999; McKendy, 2006; Miller, 2011; Wright et al. 2017).

Peter's index offence is sequenced in two distinct parts. He initially shifted the focus from the act of having killed someone to his position as being acted upon (O'Connor, 2000:50) by saying that he was "put in prison for murder". The sentence serves to highlight something that happened to Peter rather than placing the emphasis on what Peter has done. Further, he constructs the imagery of speed – a stereotypical story of drug abuse provides an "acceleration of the narrative slope" up until the murder scene which occurs one year later in the story (Gergen and Gergen 1988:27).

> What I think the next thing that is important is Halloween 2001, I went to see a band called the Fear Factory, played at Brixton academy, and for the first time, someone offered me some crack to smoke, and I thought yea, because of my mindset, so I said yea yea, and I smoked it (makes that smoking sound again), and boy I didn't stop smoking it since… I literally did not stop smoking it from

the 31 October 2001 until 20 June 2002 when I got put in prison for murder, I smoked crack and heroin every day, and ketamine, and the first time I smoked it… it took me away I loved it loved it loved it, I wanted more, more, more all the time, and I spent everything I had and more (Peter).

Peter then explored the murder story in more detail:

I got into some trouble in [City], you know, basically, I hit someone with [a hard object], and the person I hit was someone you shouldn't hit, you know, and uhm… I got a message come through to my family: 'he needs to get outside of town and sort himself out because he is in danger', so I left town, and ended up near over [place] and then, on a gypsy site, living in a caravan yeah? And then I met this guy there, he was a smoker as well, so I was smoking with him, and we basically ended up going and doing a robbery together where there was somebody in the house. A burglary initially, but it turned out there was an elderly gentleman in the house and through whatever means I am responsible for his death you know, and I got put in prison for that I was arrested within 3 weeks and put in prison straight away (Peter).

Here, Peter explained that he is "responsible for his death" through "whatever means"– thus claiming responsibility for his victim's death, and evidences a reflective stance: whatever the means, he has reflected upon that night, and drew the necessary conclusions. Interestingly, Peter does not use the word murder once in his murder story. In fact, he tacitly excuses (Scully and Marolla, 1985) his unmitigated involvement in the murder. Had he not been insular, an addict, and had been able to exert control over his actions, the murder could have been avoided.

Unlike the rest of the men, Richard's story starts with the murder scene. He manages to label his murder as a 'crime of passion' within the first few minutes of the interview, thus priming (Chartrand and Bargh, 1996; Bargh, 2006) a specific interpretation of what follows. Further, the murder scene serves to portray himself as being acted upon by forces outside of his control (Sykes and Matza, 1957). By providing no information about his upbringing, one could argue that Richard constructs his past as inconsequential to the story (Spector-Mersel, 2011). Nevertheless, an alternative perspective is that the absence is in fact important to the story, as it shows an ontological insecure/unclear core self which should have its roots in childhood (see McAdams, 1993).

Well, I suppose, what happened to me, very sad really, I suppose you can call it a crime of passion, it involved my fiancé, and it all started when were quite young when we got together, we were at school, and we first met because two schools joined together to form a comprehensive school, and we found that we played the same instrument, the brass band, so that was kind of a romantic beginning I

suppose, really, and our relationship developed quite intensely from a young age. At the age of 13 we met, and by the age of 14 we were having sexual intercourse together you know; we were young, and we got involved very quickly and I […]. Looking back, we thought that we will be together for the rest of our lives, because our love was so intense, and we would do things like sneak out at night-time of the house at night, and meet in the park, it was really intense (Richard)

Richard started seeing other girls which culminated with him "getting someone pregnant" and which led to his fiancé "deciding to leave him".

Then she decided to leave me, so I begged her to come back to me, and in all that chaos, I couldn't cope basically, you know, because it was like, I was a young male probably 19 years old at the time, didn't know how to cope with my emotions, and so I thought probably the best way to deal with this may be to experiment with drugs to see whether I can escape the trauma because I never took drugs in my life before, so I started to take cannabis, I was mad a few days, I didn't sleep, so, in the end, it was like a psychotic experience really I just felt everything was chaotic, and I became very emotional and I… everything intensified, I went to her and begged her to come back to me, so I met her in the park one day, I decided that if I couldn't, if she didn't come back to me, nobody could, so I strangled her, you know that was something that I decided before, in all the chaos, that that's what I will do. So, uhm, when I realised what I'd done, after I strangled her, I ran off, uhm, trying to suicide myself, I went into a train station, got into the train, and bought bottles of whiskey, and tablets and stuff like that, took them on the train, and I expected to die that day (Richard)

He was saved by the ticket inspector who called an ambulance; he then woke up in hospital the next morning. Richard uses utterances such as 'happened to me' to evidence the passive nature of his involvement in the murder (see Adshead, 2020). The episode was fatidic, and thus his involvement is minimal. The plot intensifies towards the culmination point - the murder scene, and then ends abruptly. By the end of the story, Richard is demonstrating a stronger commitment to what he has done by saying that he decided to commit the murder, albeit in a moment of chaos (emotional and drug related) – thus problematizing his unmitigated involvement in the murder. Nevertheless, he is showing 'strong evaluation' (O'Connor, 1995) of what happened back then, through his interview positioning. This is an important element which signals Richard as a moral agent capable of reflection, and of moral reasoning – and therefore an agentic person in the present. His story culminates with his passage on 'decision making' – he later deflects agency again, when considering what has happened, reflexively:

This was something that happened to me that was totally out of character, uhm, and I wasn't, I sort of wasn't involved with criminal culture you know, so it's all been developmental (Richard).

In bringing his confession forward he is declaratively showing responsibility for the crime, and signals his charitable, pious side - by confessing his crime - he protected the victim's family from further emotional turmoil. Nevertheless, Richard negotiated a stable moral self (Presser, 2009) by presenting the murder as forced onto him by the Other – that of unbearable love, and thus excusing (Scully and Marolla, 1985) the crime as out of character.

You know, it was obvious that I committed the crime, so I confessed, and it was quite straightforward really, there was no trial, and even though some people said that at that time, I should've pleaded diminished responsibilities. I wasn't really bothered about that and the reason why I didn't, because I was told that if I did, there would be a trial, and that would mean getting their family involved getting them in court and all sort of these things and I didn't want to bring them into that, aa so, I just pleaded guilty in court and in 1982 I got set down for life in court and that was the start of my licence really (Richard).

Jacob, too, showed a strong evaluation of what happened, and years later managed to make sense of the murder scene through conceptualising it as a projective identification with the victim (Klein, 1946 in McAlister, 2008), especially on his brother's part with whom he partly shares responsibility for the murder (O'Connor, 2000).

I do have a theory about the whole thing. Ah, and…. I've never discussed this with anybody, but my brother was very insistent to the point of threatening me. He pointed his gun at me and the point of saying, we have to kill this guy and he was very insistent that it was something that we did together. I did not realise it then but it was drawing me into something that he wanted to do and it was very, very clear to me that he really wanted to kill this guy and on reflection, uhm, this guy looked very much like my father, it was a likeness in age in looks even, the amount of hair that the guy had, it was a similarity, and I really believe that in some way my brother was killing my father uhm because my father really brutalised us and my elder brother in particular, aah, they were, he was cruel and he wasn't a good man, and my eldest brother more than any of us was I think once my parents realised the effects of the brutality did to him they started to be a little less brutal with us, you know, aah, and I really feel that was the case (Jacob).

The brother is described as the true mastermind who 'really wanted' to commit the murder:

One day my eldest brother came back we went out we had some drinks with some girls you know, the 3 of us, he said come on let's just go somewhere so, we started going around the country and we did some armed robberies and getting money

and so on, and uhm, it was a very short period of time and one day we found a chat sitting in a layby in a car we hijacked the car and we took him to some woodland and my eldest brother said he got to see my face and we had to kill him and because otherwise he would recognize us and it was very you know… uhm… threatening situation I was in and… so I agreed with my brother and we shot this guy and killed him and took his car and did some more robberies at which time we had the police looking for us. We escaped the country, we were captured we were extradited, and we were tried for the murder and obviously found guilty and uhm, we… we went, we were sent to prison. Whilst I take full responsibility for what happened, ah, I didn't do it willingly, I was, you know, a brother, I didn't tell this to the prison authorities or anybody, because ironically, I thought that was a betrayal of him, even though he always blamed me for everything, [unclear] it's not something that I wanted to do (Jacob).

Similarly to Richard's account, Jacob is presenting a set of contradictions and tensions. As evidenced in the first extract, Jacob problematizes agency by introducing the influence of his brother, who really wanted to commit the murder, to the extent to which, Jacob was forced, at gunpoint to get involved. There is a sense of shared responsibility being portrayed initially, but he subsequently declaratively takes 'full responsibility' for what happened, although somewhat partially: 'to take responsibility for something you did not do willingly'. Throughout, Jacob evidences an exceptional capacity to evaluate what has happened and to position himself as a moral agent capable of reflecting upon his life.

The stories presented here are animated by a visible sense of contradiction and neutralizations. This is not necessarily new in criminological literature (see Brookman, 2015; Sandberg, 2009a). Presser (2013), for example, made the point that "an actor might both deny responsibility for a harmful action and deny that it causes injury: "I can't help it. Anyway, it won't hurt anyone". The men in this sample are characterised by such paradoxes. After their apprehension and trial, the men received their life sentences and were put in prison. Here, the men have made sense of what happened and radically refashioned their personal myth (McAdams, 1993)

9.2.3. The Prison Experience: crossroads for becoming

All the men have described their prison journeys as a profoundly transformative experience (F-Dufour and Brassard, 2014; Schinkel, 2014), especially in gaining some control over their lives through reconstructing themselves. For the first few years of their imprisonment the men had ruminated over what had happened (Richard, Jacob, Peter), and struggled to navigate the realities of their new environment (Richard, Jacob) (Crewe, Hulley, Wright, 2017; Crewe et al.

2020). Initial hardship and trauma (including that which was offence related) has ultimately given way to positive outcomes (van Ginneken, 2016; VanHooren, Leijssen, and Dezutter 2017a; F.-Dufour and Brassard, 2014), and opportunities to refashion the men's personal myths (McAdams, 1993) in the later stages of the sentence (see Crewe et al. 2020). The men's movement from 'reactive' to 'productive agency' (Crewe et al. 2017a:538; Jarman, 2020) followed a clear sequence of events, as discussed below.

To construct and envision new selves, the men had to first make sense of the murder (Adshead, 2014; Ferrito et al. 2020; Crewe et al. 2020; Honeywell, 2015), and refashion their life myth (McAdams, 1993). In this sense, the men underwent revelatory experiences (spiritual and religious, see Schroeder and Frana, 2009) which had equipped them with a set of new 'meaning systems' (Maruna et al. 2006) to interpret their own condition, and to reconstruct their narrative identities. The revelatory stories are like that of Irwin's (2009) lifers' stories of 'awakening' - the men have unshackled from the influence of the Other and were able to reinvent their narrative identities. An agentic split had been constructed between a murderous self, and the person in the interview present (see James, 1958 for an overview of the 'divided self'). Other research has identified similar moments which they named 'cognitive shifts' and 'epiphanies', in prisoners' lives (Liem, 2016), although with the assistance of vehicles for change (such as prison rehabilitation programmes). Herbert referred to this process as simply 'maturation' and 'recognition of interdependency' (Herbert, 2019:28), although only those who killed when very young (between the age of 16 to 18) referred to and made sense of their prison experience as maturation in his research. In this sense, the men's life stories followed similar structures, but the meaning attached to their prison time is sharply distinct, when compared to the other participants (see Riessman, 2008).

9.2.4. Trauma and early prison adaptation

In contrast to much penological research (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Snacken, 1997; Crewe et al. 2020; Richardson, 2012) the men in the sample did not refer to the weight of their prison sentence (Crewe, 2011; Crewe, Liebling, Hulley, 2014), or to difficulties in managing and coping with the passage of time whilst on a life sentence (Cohen and Taylor, 1972; Crawley and Sparks, 2006). However, these discussions did become important once we reached their lives post-prison. For example, the effects of prolonged vitamin D deficiency was discussed. Alternatively, the men told stories of physical abuse, emotional numbness, and trauma as representative of their early prison years.

Two of the men have presented symptoms associated with perpetration induced (see MacNair, 2001) Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (see Badenes-Ribera et al. 2021 for a review) after they had committed the murder. For the first few years, for example, Peter had been 'emotionally numb'. Time had just passed by; he continued to abuse drugs; and was surprised at how time evaporated:

> The first few years just passed by; "[…], all those years of drug abuse distilled my emotions down to, I was stoned, I was bored, or I was angry (Peter).

Peter has never been given a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), although emotional numbness, and drug abuse are both correlated with the disorder (see APA, 2013). A comprehensive body of literature suggests that homicide perpetrators can develop PTSD because of their killing (see Di, Chung, and Wan, 2017; Pollock, 1999; Fraser, 1988; Ternes, et al. 2020; Harry and Resnick, 1986; Papanastassiou, Waldron, and Chesterman, 2004; Pollock, 1999). Soon after he completed a detox course at his own request, Peter started to experience 'night terrors'.

> My sleep was disturbed by these things called 'night terrors', have you ever heard of night terrors? It's like a real lucid nightmare, where… some examples of my own personal I can give you, you know the offence, the murder is happening again, in my sleep in my dream, but it feels real, but my family is there, and they are saying: What are you doing? Why are you doing this? And I am trying to stop this from happening, but it is still happening anyway, and I can't stop it from stopping, and it would be different family members, sometimes it would be children, from my family, and they're saying what are you doing? Stop, stop, stop and I am trying to stop, but it happening anyway in my dream, and I thought I can't fucking handle this what am I supposed to fucking do? I'm fucking going crazy, I'm cracking up, and aa, a I had some sort of serendipity, somebody told me about Grendon, you know, you need to start talking about your shit, man that's what you need to do, yeah right, just a bunch of nonces, and I went to the doctor, and I said look, cuz I thought that tablets might be the answer and I said look, I have these fucking things in my sleep and aaa, he said, aa, yeah I know what they are they are called night terrors, he said, next week, come and see me on Friday and I will bring you some literature you can read about the night terror and it might help you out… ah yeah, thanks a fucking lot mate.. (whispers), I wanted tablets to stop it from happening, and then you give me some fucking book, right? I went to see him anyway and the literature he gave me, on the top of the pile, "night terrors", and there is a little drawing and it says night terrors, there's a little girl holding a teddy bear, crying, cuz she's got night terrors, and I thought to myself that's me, and all this gangster number 1, that's me I am now, I am a crying little child, and I thought, I need to go to Grendon and see what the fuck

is going on.[…], that night I had one, my hand up to my elbow was in blood, literally (Peter).

Peter's 'night terrors' were vivid recollections of the murder scene – the intrusive images were demonstrating his struggle for agency and revealed some of Peter's emotional rumination over what he had done. Richard too, describes the murder as a traumatic event. Soon after he had killed his girlfriend, he attempted suicide and started to present with symptoms associated with PTSD (see Harry and Resnick, 1986) and this continued for a few more years after his imprisonment.

Previous case studies suggest that emotional attachment to the victim exacerbates the experience of PTSD in homicide offenders (Harry and Resnick, 1986; Rynearson, 1984). The type of guilt expressed by Richard reminds of Fraser's (1988:128) "complicated mourning", usually found in those who kill someone who they loved. This is strikingly different to the other two men in this sample, both of whom killed strangers, and not someone they knew intimately. The finding also echoes that of Sapsford (1983), who found that domestic murderers had a more difficult time integrating the murder into their picture of themselves, and who expressed more remorse, compared to other types of killers. Richard ruminated (Evans et al. 2007) on what happened for the first 1-2 years of the prison sentence before 'it all made sense' and became a 'new kind of person' (see Crewe, et al. 2020; Vaughan, 2007).

Jacob's initial prison struggles are different to Peter's and Richard's, who 'enthusiastically' (Crewe, 2006) complied with prison authority (Richard), or retreated into drugs (Peter). Conversely, his struggles are constructed as if 'swimming against the tide' (see Crewe, Hulley, and Wright, 2016). Jacob's prison stories are initially constructed under the auspices of a pervasive sentiment of injustice. After his co-defendant (his brother) "concocted an elaborated story" portraying him as an informer to other inmates, he was bound to experience a particularly brutal prison experience:

> I mean I was 18, 19, at the time, I mean…. ah we were treated in maximum security prisons and we were put in London, maximum security terrorist wing, so there I was a 19 year old kid surrounded by IRA terrorists, Libyan terrorists, uhm hitmen, you know, the crème de la crème of armed robbers and so on… and my brother sort of fitted in with these guys and because of what was happening in the newspapers and so on… he told this story that I was informing on him and these guys bullied me, they pressured me to uhm… they treated me terribly, so I had a really hard time there I was at a top security prison, convicted, and… uhm… I was send to Hull prison and once again the news followed I had a difficult time, I was beaten up, assaulted, uhm, I ended up in the segregation unit, punishment

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> block, under protection and spent 9 months in total isolation really, and I sort of
> lost it really, in that I was, I was being punished for something above and beyond,
> I was beating myself up, for what we done, the sort of responsibility that I felt for
> the whole thing (Jacob).

Jacob's early abuse was attributed to his brother who "fitted in with these guys". The fact that he did not fit in with *the crème de la crème* of British criminal underworld marks Jacob's importation of a different set of norms within the prison system (Irwin and Cressey, 1962; Dhami and Loewenstein, 2007; Paterline and Petersen, 1999; Porporino and Zamble, 1984), fundamentally at odds with that environment. He soon established himself as a 'player' (see Crewe, 2009) initially outwardly repudiating prison culture and disregarding authority, but in the end became compliant, and controlled; a prisoner "easy to keep" (Herbert, 2019).

> My rebellion against that culture on both sides of the authority point of view and
> from the prison culture point of view I just, it wasn't for me, and I wasn't going
> to be part of it. I had to live in it, but I always excluded myself from that, because
> I just couldn't participate, so… (Jacob).

As it has been shown, initial prison years were representative of the men's emotional struggle to make sense of the enormity of their crime, as well as to navigate their new environments (see Crewe et al. 2020). None of the men had been given an official diagnosis for PTSD. Nevertheless, a recent meta-analysis (Badenes-Ribera et al. 2021) found that 46.2% of incarcerated adult killers meet the criteria for a full PTSD diagnosis after committing homicide. The men had started to come to terms with what they had done, after eventually having reached 'rock bottom' (see Paternoster et al. 2009). This was followed by a spiritual 'awakening' (Irwin, 2009), which assisted the men to reconstruct their personal myth (McAdams, 1993).

9.2.5. Spiritual and religious rebirth: Reconstructing identities

The majority of the men eventually reached some form of 'rock bottom' (see Paternoster and Bushway. 2009) during their prison time which heralded an acute need for radical change. The men underwent revelatory experiences (spiritual and religious, see Schroeder and Frana, 2009) which equipped them with a set of new 'meaning systems' (Maruna et al. 2006) to interpret their own condition, make sense of their crime, and to reconstruct their narrative identities. When a person gives up a specific view over the world for another, the process is referred to as a 'conversion' (see Lofland and Stark, 1965). The conversion narratives explored below are spiritual and religious, and assisted the men in coping with the enormity and irreparability of their crime and helped to achieve forgiveness. Further, the new meaning systems provided the

men with purpose in life and allowed the emergence of 'redemptive selves' (Maruna, 2001; Blagden, Winder, and Livesley, 2020; Morash et al. 2020).

Peter provided a clear example of spiritual awakening (Irwin, 2009) from a process of ontological insecurity to one of existence in the world. As mentioned previously, the journey started in prison. Peter told me about a cell mate who he spent much time within detention due to their drug use, but whom he loathed but saw himself "becoming just like him":

> One day someone said to me, you (whispers) you getting like him, you know the way he talks to people and that, I say (whispers and in contempt): "fuck off", but it went in… and then I started to watch, because that's what you do isn't it, introspect, you just watch, and I found myself talking like him on a few occasions, and I thought fuck! I don't like this guy, I am becoming him and also, we both had attained the same tariff but I did 3 years and a bit, he done like 12, and we were both in the same prison, and I thought ok, so if I carry on like this, this is what's gonna happen to me, you know what I mean, and I got myself, a few other things happened around that time, and I got myself so hyped one afternoon I thought fuck it, I went to the office, I knocked on the door, and a screw opened the door, it was the worst one, was an asshole, you know there is always an arsehole, so I'll tell you his name, it was it was [redacted] and he says (whispers again) "what do you fucking want?". I said look, you know I got a drug problem, I've had enough, how do I sort it out? (Peter).

The above passage shows Peter's 'crystallization of discontent' (Giordano, et al. 2002), by imagining his imminent engulfment (Laing, 1960) into a 'Feared Self' (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009) represented by the cellmate. This, in turn, opened a set of possible new selves to Peter who developed an initial motivation to change (Vaughan, 2007). Vaughan (2007:391) found that "very often, it is through seeing the self through the eyes of others that raises questions about the worthiness of past and present choices. Emotional empathy and responsiveness may help initiate a process of self-appraisal from which a different kind of person emerges". Peter's self-appraisal initiated a journey into reconnecting with his emotional self in HMP Grendon, and to ultimately discover [his] identity through working his way through the Alcoholic Anonymous' 12 step recovery process during his time at HMP Kingston.

> So, I started going to AA when I was at Kingston, and I found a few connections there, you know, like I found a kinship, a family, these are my family, my people you know? And now… I started to realise there was a lot of people with a similar mindset with me, you know, so I went to (not clear) and almost straight away put myself to the RAPS program. I did that for 6 months and that really have me a good opportunity to work my way through the steps you know the 12 steps, I worked my way through it slowly and through steps, you know, are you familiar

with… through my step 4 I really discovered my identity you know what I mean, and I realised that out there were points in my life where my identity did not belong to me… you know what I mean, as I was growing up my identity was defined by the facts that my father told me, there was external influences that defined myself, you know what I say… and when I was in prison I said that I was becoming that guy, because that's how I was, I'd be with someone and id start to become like them, I had no real identity of myself, you know what I mean, writing down my step four (is uhm… basically, your life story, essentially)… writing it down, going through and going back to it and going back to it really gave me a sense of my own identity… you know what I mean… and from then on that felt precious to me and that something I was not willing to give up again, you know what I mean? (Peter).

Recovery through Alcoholic Anonymous is founded upon a complex set of spiritual principles (Segal, 2020; McInerney and Cross, 2021). The main premise, well represented by Step 3, is that one needs to "make a decision to turn our lives over to the care of God as we understand him" (Segal, 2020:3), and to accept that a major change of character is needed (Segal, 2020). The steps are spiritual rather than religious. Peter explained that he believed in the "Gaya Principle" and not in religion in a traditional sense: the latter is seen by him as "manufactured". He plans to try and "look after the earth" once he has this capacity through gardening.

I've written religion off, because any religion you are looking, I'm fucking damned, I am going to hell anyway, you know. I'm not into that redemption you know, and I am also not very interested in religion because I think it is manufactured, and I think it is not uhm… It's not really an internal thing. Spirituality, me being connected to my higher power you know… I believe in the Gaya, the mother Gaya principle (Jacob).

Then he talks about steps 4 and 5. As a result, Peter differentiates himself from other people with sheep like mentality, who are not capable of reflecting upon their own lives and identifies himself as part of a 'community of the awake'.

Outside of prison, the majority of the people don't know this they are not self-aware whatsoever, they just do their little things, get… they are wage slaves, you know they are employees. That's why they say ignorance is bliss. And it is interesting because do people you know like AA and then there is Community of the Awake, they are two things, I do feel I am an awaken person, like I, walked into a lot of bad things, and then luckily, I was given time in a prison cell to reflect upon these bad things and really understand introspection (Peter).

Importantly, Peter's past, especially his prison time is now transformed into a positive experience (also see Schinkel, 2014; F.-Dufour and Brassard, 2014), much like in Richard's

case. In contrast to Paul's secular spiritual transformation, Richard and Jacob had started to make sense of their murder through religious conversion narratives (Maruna et al. 2006; Kerley and Copes, 2009). Irwin (2009:68) suggests that "religion has a great appeal to lifers", because it offers meaning and purpose to an unsatisfying past which needs reconciliation and expiation. Both men referred to pervasive sentiments of guilt which stemmed from the irreparable nature of their crime, and which in turn hampered their potential to construct a 'redemptive script' (see Maruna, 2001). Jacob embarked on a long journey of spiritual search before the truth revealed to him under the Christian credence. His thirst for such a spiritual search was initiated by a short conversation with a priest who could not promise Jacob that he could be forgiven for what he had done. The story is narrated alike an initiation rite: he initially flirted with Buddhism and meditation, then moved on to study Islam, before truth revealed itself after Jacob read the 51st Psalm in the Bible.

> It's a long story with King David, but he was found out he was challenged, but he wrote a song which started to and created me […] and reading that song I realised, I don't know what happened but I realised that there was a presence and I realised that I could be forgiven and it was a complete revelation to me and I read that song, on my knees weeping and somehow from that moment there was clarity in my mind in the circumstances that I was in. It was like somebody in the environment around me had switched on a fluorescent light; everything in the prison was just cleaner, brighter, and it was different and I felt different and I didn't really understand what had happened and I continued going to church and it was kind of meaningless to me, and I continued to read the words of Jesus in the Bible and I knew that somehow it all made sense and from the moment through my prison journey I met with other people like [...] and so on who also had some sort of religious experience of God and it was meaningful where they found forgiveness and faith and an empowerment and that faith got me through a lot (Jacob).

Richard, too, found that Christianity provided the "language and framework for forgiveness" (Maruna et al. 2006:175).

> I think, the way I was looking at the whole panorama, of people offending, and looking what I was going through spiritually as well, and forgiveness, because the whole thing about Christianity is about forgiveness really, and try to get to a situation where I can almost forgive myself, and, uhm, it came to me that if god forgives people and has forgiven me then maybe I should have an attempt at forgiving myself as well, and trying to make good, and also, the support of my family and friends, and the support of the chaplaincy, was good, and that made me think you know, I can't let them down, why should I still want to kill myself, and that people still want to invest in me, people in [university], still wanted to

support me, so I thought having all that support I need, made me want to respond to that support and it was that that started to change my thinking as far as my life is concerned. Because I never really had a criminal mentality but, the problem, when I was at Gartree, I was very suicidal at first, cuz I thought this is such a terrible thing that I'd never get over it, and even at those dark days at Gartree sometimes I thought I'd never get released and even if I would get released how could I live a normal life? So, it was quite a transition for me really (Richard).

As with baptism, which serves the symbolic effect of erasing original sin, religious conversion offers an opportunity to the men to start anew, *tabula rasa*. Both Richard and Jacob had made specific comments about forgiveness in the Christian religion which, as Maruna et al. (2006:177) argues: "provides a stronger foundation for forgiveness than nearly any other meta-narrative available in modern Western society".

There is this concept in Christianity, of the original sin, that all men are guilty, are naturally simple, there is a proclivity to commit sin, whether its stealing or doing something as drastic as murder. And what Christianity said is that all sins are just as bad as the other, even though the sin of the word, without confession of that, will bring you to hell. So, I suppose that concept has helped although the reality is that you still aware that you committed something really bad. So, Christianity helped me to manage that process in a spiritual sense (Richard).

As shown above, spirituality and religion had provided the men with a set of resources to alleviate some of the hardships associated with their crime, and to cope with their new environment (Schroeder and Frana, 2009; Crewe, Hulley, and Wright, 2016). Further, available religious discourses (see Warr, 2019) offered the men a 'hook for moral transformation and identity change' (Crewe, Hulley, Wright, 2016:19), and a readily available formal redemptive narrative (Warr, 2019:39) which has been performed continuously ever since. Maruna et al (2006:168) also remarked that incarceration can be a catalyst for identity reconstruction as "prisoners […] face a crisis of self-narrative". James (1902/1958:177) observed that with religious conversion a "complete division is established in the twinkling of an eye between the old life and the new." He goes on to add that this involves a dissolution of the past and the construction of a new identity." A sort of a positive subjective religious 'knifing off' (see Maruna and Roy, 2007) which may explain why "religion has a great appeal to lifers" (Irwin, 2009:68).

9.2.6. Living in the shadow of guilt: Performing Generativity

As demonstrated, the men reimagined their personal myth (McAdams, 1993) in light of these new revelatory experiences (Snow and Machalek, 1983). Kerley and Copes (2009) observed

that religious epiphanies are particularly important in reconciling past and current selves. Both The men have henceforth constructed a split between a murderous self and newly found, generative, and agentic self. This narrative split emerged due to the traumatic and irreparable nature of committing murder – which renders it difficult to reconcile with a 'good core self' (Maruna, 2001), or stable moral self (Presser, 2008). In this sense, the narratives are distinct from Presser's (2008) reform narratives.

Of course, "the good, mature, and adaptive personal myth cannot be based on gross distortions. Identity is not a fantasy" (McAdams, 1993:111). Identity operates at an interpersonal level (see Gergen and Gergen, 1988) and it can be maintained only inasmuch as there are opportunities for its performance in a way which is credible and "recognized by oneself and others as a socially 'valid' performance" (Caddick, 2015: 230). The men have found a new purpose in giving back and helping others. Such generative thinking and behaviour in turn offered credible identity performances for the newly found identities - both in prison, and outside.

It is possible to understand as generative all these activities whether expressed in teaching, mentoring, volunteer work, charitable activities, religious involvements, or as political, usually aiming at "fostering development and wellbeing of future generations" (McAdams and Logan, 2004:16). All the men felt that "killing makes the killer both omnipotent and immortal – murderer and victim are eternally bound" (Stein, 2007:8). For Richard the pervasive sense of guilt is part of who he is, and the driving force behind much of his generative work. Guilt operates as a 'narrative binding glue' in the men's narrative, linking a reinterpreted version of the 'murderous self' (see Snow and Machalek, 1983) with a present, agentic, and generative self (see Feritto et al. 2020). Guilt assists the men to achieve coherence in the context of the creating agentic split. In the absence of guilt, the men's dissociation from their previous, murderous self, would become pathological. All the men talked at length about the irreparable nature of their crime, and that they are bound with their victim forever (Stein, 2007). This has been explored at length in the previous chapter.

9.3. Conclusion

To reiterate, the most skilled participants (Jacob, Peter, Richard) employed a specific temporal order which provides a platform to their problematization of agency. There is a cliff between the murderous self and the present self which was reimagined through a radical alteration of the men's personal myths during their time in prison. Personal narratives, as Riessman (2004:35) said, are simply "meaning-making units of discourse"; narrators "interpret the past

in their stories rather than reproduce it as it was". Given Riessman's words, the structure presented here offers a glimpse into the way the men have made sense of their lives and have organised these coherently in narrative form. It evidences the natural progression of events leading up to the murder and thereafter. The men envisioned their prison sentences as a transformative experience (Schinkel. 2014); much of early trauma is conceptualised through positive lenses, later in the sentence. Had it not been for the lengthy time behind bars, Peter would have never regained his emotional self and write a life story as a natural process of AA therapy, and God may have never revealed itself to Richard and Jacob. Potentially, the growth out of trauma displayed by the men may also be a form of accounting for much of the early suffering, as effort justification (Harmon- Jones and Mills, 1999; Aronson and Mills, 1959). Nevertheless, as demonstrated in figure 1, the men's narrative followed a story of decline well into the prison sentence; henceforth, the men perceive their lives through a progressive narrative (see Gergen and Gergen, 1997; Schinkel, 2014). However, Jacob did complain about long-lasting negative effects on his body due to incarceration – he claimed that vitamin D deficiency due to lack of light led him to have osteoporosis and other issues. Although their redemptive selves (Maruna, 2001) along their conversion scripts (Maruna, et al. 2006) are not compatible with their old murder selves, the men are performing (see Plummer, 2019) guilt by talking about the irreparable nature of their murder which haunts them. This does not simply serve the function of impressing authorities and evidence of an internalised containment of their own risk (see McNeil, 2016). The men in this sample are put in the paradoxical situation of showing guilt for a crime which, according to their life myth (McAdams, 1993) they have *de facto* not committed.

Hulley et al. (2019) found a similar response in offenders imprisoned for 'joint enterprise murder'. In sum, the 'Murder's Identity Paradox' (MIP) is solved through a series of competing/conflicting stories which serve to construct a dichotomy between the murderous past persona, characterised by ontological insecurity (Laing, 1960) subjected to the Other's influence and a new self, distanced and alien to the 'murderous self.' Stories of guilt are used as glue for the story arc, linking the past identity to the present one (and thus solving any pathologies of dissociation). Further, the men use stories of guilt in anticipation of perceived expectations, as "many practitioners believe that offenders in denial present a high risk of offending in the future, since they are seen to be making themselves unaccountable for their past action" (Vaughan 2007:400).

The men are skilled users of narrative as an identity management (Warr, 2019; Laws, 2020) who are displeased with the continuous request of penitence and self-flagellation (Warr, 2019) requested by the authorities. These shifts may be considered strategic (see Brookman, 2015), presenting of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), or dissociation (Stein, 2007) a specific Murderer's Identity Paradox. The view presented here is that of a multiplicity of voices – the murderous self is dissociated and in lacking agency; the present identity is one of agency, pious, and guilty. This narrative is the first such narrative of desistance for people who committed murder and as evidenced above serves three clear functions (1) build coherency between a murderous past and an ethical, moral self-present in a way which is not pathologically dissociative, (2) function as an internal narrative of change which reconciliates the past with the present and the future (acting as an internal and external stigma management mechanism), (3) present/perform acceptable identities and reform to authorities to minimise their risk and to solve a paradox that stands at the centre of the narratives: the murderer's identity paradox – to be guilty for a crime one did not 'really' commit.

Chapter 10: Reconstructing Identities (iii) Constructing hierarchies of moral abomination

10.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters explored the ways in which the men negotiated acceptability in the interview context by showing an appropriate level of remorse (performative remorse, proportional to the crime) and by problematising their involvement in the murder through a Splitting Narrative. This ensured that the mandatory lifers showed remorse for a crime which was beyond their control. Building on this theme of reconstructing identities in the interview context, this final analysis/discussion chapter will consider a further strategy used by them, which was to construct ethical selves by othering different types of murderers as the truly reprehensible type.

In this sense, the type of murder committed turned out to be significant, in that it allowed a set of narratives to emerge in response to the men's experience of stigmatised identities post-release (Goffman, 1959). Stigma management is a crucial precursor to the construction and performance of identities (Hochstetler, Copes, Williams 2010:494; Copes, Hochstetler, and Williams, 2008). In other words, the research environment emerged as an ideal place where ethical identities could be reconstructed (Ugelvik, 2012). The context of the murder and its type are placed on a hierarchy of moral abomination where victims' identities take central importance.

10.2. Hierarchies of murder acceptability

To reiterate, Richard was 62 when I first interviewed him; he had spent 12 years in prison for killing his girlfriend when he was 19. Soon after he was released, Richard started working for a well-known broadcaster as well as for an organisation specialised in dealing with ex-offenders – an organisation which he now runs. He has been able to construct a pious, post-prison persona; Richard lives his life to "help others". Having killed his partner out of 'passion', he found that his domestic murder (Brookman, 2005) renders him as "worthy of forgiveness" (LeBel, 2015).

Is the type of murder committed important in experiencing stigma? (Dan)

Yes, because mine was a crime of passion, I felt that people were much more forgiving. Obviously, the act of murder, but they had sympathy, because they kind of knew that I wasn't a violent person in the first place and they knew I was young at the time, so I was 19 at the time, so, it was that type of murder, crime of passion murder, uhm there wasn't much condemnation from people that knew about it. Uhm, people who live in the area saw that as a crime of passion, I imagine if for instance I killed an old person, or I killed a child then people would be, when it is a crime of passion, in my experience, people are a lot more compassionate (Richard).

Richard outwardly seems to appeal to mainstream society's acceptance of him, and constructs himself through 'othering' (Sarup, 1996; Plummer, 2019) those who kill children, or the elderly as contemptible murderers. This murder hierarchy allowed the creation of distance, through establishing difference between those who have engaged in the righteous type of murder, or 'acceptable' murder in contrast to the abominable, unacceptable 'killer' (Jenkins, 2004). Acceptability showed up as dependent on whom the victim was and constructed children, and the elderly, as 'undeserving victims' (Maruna and Copes, 2005; Sykes and Matza, 1957). Richard characterises himself "not a violent person in the first place" – thus constructing an image of someone authentically non-violent (see Hochstetler, Copes, Williams, 2010; Scully and Marolla, 1985), a characteristic incompatible with 'true murderers'. Frank (2010a 35) made the important point that "we talk in borrowed language" – a point which is central in considering how Richard drew from gender normative, master narratives around uncontrollable love and passion (Mullen, 1993), as well as stereotypes surrounding 'true murderers' to make sense of his killing and to manage stigma.

All the stories presented here are constructed with specific audiences in mind; they draw from master narratives (Syed and McLean, 2015; Hammack, 2008; Presser and Fondevila, 2020; Plummer, 2019), and stereotypes around masculinities, love, patriarchy, as well as specific local cultural relevancies as narrative resources (Loseke, 2007). Master narratives are dominant stories (Presser and Fondevila, 2020) which hold power in our societies. This is because they are considered truthful, or 'the truth' (see Sandberg and Colvin, 2020), and such master narratives are "directed from and ultimately constructed and reproduced as social reality by dominant institutions, agents, and systems" (Snajdr, 2013:234). Lilgendahl (2015:490) has suggested that "master narratives are critical for identity development because they can shape how individuals engage in meaning-making in response to their own life experiences".

Master narratives were indeed critical for identity construction, and negotiation by providing a backdrop against which stigma was managed by the men. In negotiating with master narratives (Plummer, 2019), the type of murder committed emerged as significant in the men's attempt to reconcile a good self. As demonstrated above, Richard committed a domestic murder which he classes as a 'crime of passion'. The label feeds into a specific view held within the public imagination of patriarchal societies, where men are lacking in control over their needs and urges (see Ryan, 2011, 2019). Having his version of the events accepted, or rejected by mainstream society is a necessary precursor to maintaining his reconstructed identity and to creating a sense of belonging upon re-entry (Fox, 2016):

> Uhm, I think, I am trying to think of the lowest point really, probably, because, a lot of people in the town that I offended, [redacted] uhm, perceive it to be a crime of passion, they were quite fine with me and kind of understood the history, but of course some people haven't you know, so, probably, the lowest point was when I went to a funeral in [redacted], and I went to shake the hands of one of my cousins, and they said I don't want to talk with you but that sort of reactions have been very few, so that was why it was so upsetting really, uhm, but I understand, because not everyone sees is the way that everybody sees it, most people see it as a crime of passion, most people can't deal with it you know, and so that was kind of a low point. And that made me realise that if he felt that way maybe other people felt the same way you know, so that was a low point (Richard).

Critically, having his interpretation of the events accepted by mainstream society, which he cherishes, is of utmost importance for Richard's continuous performance of identities. As previously discussed, identity is a relational enterprise and "degradation ceremonies" (Garfinkel, 1956) such as exemplified above, serve to remind Richard of his spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963), and so run the risk of rendering his personal myth (McAdams, 1993) implausible. Such situations are presented as upsetting and in tension with his hard-earned 'redemption' (Bazemore, 1999: 768), but too limited to warrant a reinterpretation of his life through some sort of 'looking glass self' (see Maruna et al. 2004). So, framing his murder as stemming from pure, uncontrollable passion opened a set of possible identity management strategies, and ways to negotiate stigma on the outside. The internalisation of his projected 'crime of passion' through the looking glass self allows him to solve a potential cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) in his own personal myth (McAdams, 1993). The following case is strikingly different to Richard's but highlights the importance of the type of murder in identity negotiation, and stigma management for men who brutally kill strangers.

To reiterate, Jacob's murder followed an 'execution style', as he described it, by shooting a person three times in the head. Jacob refers to his murder as 'callous, brutal, and ruthless'. He describes what seems to be a 'murder acceptability continuum', where those who kill their wife or girlfriend could find compassion. Then, on the righteousness axis, Richard placed petty killers and sexual murderers at one end, and terrorists alongside the most brutal, fearsome murderers on the other. The latter are "prisoners with solid convictions" (Ricciardelli, 2014, 2015:179), who are given higher status in prison due to associated masculine characteristics. He also agrees with Richard, that 'child killers' are at the bottom of this constructed hierarchy (also see Winfree et al. 2002; Sapp and Vaughn, 1990; Jewkes, 2005a; Crewe, 2009). Having laid the coordinates of the discussion, Jacob then tacitly aligned himself alongside one of the two groups, whilst concomitantly, established a sense of uniqueness.

> But if you take for example, somebody, who kills their wife or their girlfriend, I think society's perception of that kind of crime is different and more compassionate; if you take someone who has killed a child, then, that's if you like that's the farthest extreme in terms of… people's perception and horror and hate you know… if it involves sexual abuse and whatever; being at the other end of the spectrum there is the terrorist that puts a bomb in the pub or you know or a football stadium, or the twin towers or you know whatever that context is, it's a different kind of perception and horror and feeling, but I think that the nature of my kind, you know with the Home Office, that they saw it as particularly brutal and ruthless, aah, and there is no doubt that that has affected the way I was dealt with as well you know I was a maximum security prisoner for 10-12 years or something, and… and something else is that in the very early stages you know, every 15 minutes when I was in the segregation unit they would come and switch off the light, it will get movement and then it will switch it up, I was on suicide watch, so I never slept properly, I still don't sleep properly, I could exist on three hour sleep and… so, sleep deprivation and so on. But yes, there's definitely a stigma in terms of the way in which people are prepared to see things and I think there was a case recently where a wife killed her husband, she got guilty of manslaughter aa, and released because he had particularly brutalised her and you know driven her to the point, where you know, she killed him. You know, if you push and push and talk with somebody it's a little under that they will go [unclear]. It's a different kind of crime, it's a different kind of so yes (Jacob).

Jacob tacitly identifies with the dangerous type – petty murderers sit at the other end of the spectrum. In fact, throughout his life story, Jacob constructs a strong individuality and sense of uniqueness, committed to a multiplicity of voices (Sandberg, 2009b; Sandberg, Tutenges, Copes, 2015). He presents himself as both conventionally and unconventionally attached. Some of his stories of imprisonment serve to associate himself with well-known serial killers

and gangsters, such as Peter Sutcliffe and the Kray twins. Other stories allow for the creation of a pious, devoted Christian who lives to give back to society – demonstrating the complexity of lived experience and identity negotiations (Sandberg, Tutenges, Copes, 2015) for mandatory lifers. Jacob's murder context is devoid of any extenuating circumstances when compared with other types of murder, for example, with Richard's 'crime of passion'.

> Many of the people that I know who served life sentences were unlike myself in some respects you know…my brother and I committed a horrendous crime, uhm, many of the life sentenced prisoners that I knew where people who on extreme emotional circumstances had overreacted and killed their girlfriend or their boyfriend or their wife or husband or whatever, the vast majority of life sentenced prisoners are domestic kinds (Jacob).

Nathaniel had been released for six years when I first interviewed him and had been recalled to prison on one occasion prior to this. The context of his killing had been kept silent to the extent to which he only mentioned killing a random man after breaking up with his girlfriend. Throughout the narrative, Nathaniel uses narrative tropes (Sandberg, 2016), "briefly [hinting] at shared stories that do not need to be fully articulated" (Laws, 2020:11) to signal his 'hypernormality'. He pleads to 'generally accepted knowledge' to say that child killers experience "most of the stigma": he does not directly refer to their abominable act/character, as it is implicitly inferred in the following interview.

> We all know that stigmas, like the child killers and all of them I think they always have the stigma, and it all goes to circumstance, how it happens, and stuff like that. It's weird to get your head around, because it's all about circumstance, why it happened, stuff like that. It's the longer you are out, the more you get on, the longer you are away from that type anyway, so the longer you out the more freedom you feel, the further you distance yourself from the past (Nathaniel).

Through the informally used plural: "we all know", Nathaniel excludes himself from the insiders' position of the 'lifer community' (Honeywell, 2015), and discusses from a position of equality. He reinforces a hierarchy were 'child killers' are experiencing most of the stigma, although meaning is circumstantial to other murder types. Up to this point, the men have all used child killers as a morality barometer against which they could construct their acceptability. All the men, except for the person who has actually killed his girlfriend (Richard) have constructed 'women killers' as being contemptible – perhaps second worse on the morality scale.

Raul had been released for 6 months at the time of our first interview. He killed his opponent with a knife during an arranged street fight. For him, the type of murder committed resembles a 'lifestyle choice', which is suggestive of a life once lived, and which sets the parameters of identity management on release. Having been released into a small part of de-industrialized London, he feels that the murder is not something he needs to feel shame for. Similarly to Jacob, he negotiates an acceptable identity by othering 'petty' murderers, and thus separating (Copes, Hochstetler, Williams, 2008) himself from those murderers having a lower status:

> The type of offence you committed is a reflection of the lifestyle that you have led. You know what I mean. Uhm, so it's not as if I come out and I have to be as extremely as ashamed as some who's on a sex offenders register, or… offenders, or burglar, or you know something like that, petty stuff like that. What I did I am not proud of, it's not something to be proud of, but at the end of the day I can still walk around with my own self dignity you know what I mean… like no one can look down on me or tell me that you know, what you did that was a scumbag thing to do, you know what I mean, circumstances of what happened, there was a fight, you know what I mean, something that was kind of normal to us, yeah ok, he got stabbed, yah ok, he died, it's ruined his life, it's ruined my life, his family's life, at the end of the day he knew what he was walking into, and I knew what I was walking into, as best as you can accept. So, yea, depending on the type of crime you did it does judge how you are when you come out. (Raul)

> Because of the stigma? (Dan)

> Yes. If I walked around the streets and people knew ah that's the guy who killed a woman, or killed an elderly person or a child, you're a scumbag you know, you are on the same level as rapists or paedophiles, but, at least when I walk around people that do remember what happened now and they say: ah ok, it was a fight, and these things happen, men will be men and boys will be boys, you know what I mean so yeah […] So, if I went to somewhere else, obviously no one will know and I wouldn't find any need to say it, you know what I mean… if I was going for a job nothing was said, but like I said, it's not something you brag around or you wear a t-shirt, yeah, this is what I did, blah blah blah. I would talk about it here because people remember, some people remember what happened then you know what I mean, and yeah they know the circumstances of it and they know it was a terrible accident, it wasn't, he wasn't meant to die, and people understand that in some ways (Raul).

Raul's hyper-masculine remark that "men will be men and boys will be boys", as well as his reference to the victim's knowledge of the implications of showing up to an arranged fight (see Scully and Marolla, 1985), serve to introduce the listener to the appropriate cultural context (Copes, Hochstetler, and Forsyth 2013) – that of the street code (Anderson, 1999 ; Brookman

et al. 2011a, 2011b) – in making sense of what happened. It is through the lens of 'higher loyalties' (Sykes and Matza, 1956) that one is requested to interpret the given situation. His gendered talk achieves a situated masculine identity (Messerschmidt, 1993) and manages to diffuse some responsibility for the murder. The murder scene is located within the cultural narratives of the East London's gang-culture. This is further exemplified in the following passage, where he constructs a more intricate murder hierarchy, related to the weapon of choice:

> It was curiosity, because it seems that the weapon of choice is important in the hierarchy? (Dan)
>
> Yeah, it is, I'd say it is. Not a massive difference, but it kind of shows the type of person you are. I mean, shootings, among the south London boys is seen as a big thing. In East London, it wasn't seen as anything special, because it's a gun, you can shoot someone from a mile away, you know, so for East London it was things like stabbing, and beating, if you beat someone to death with your own hands, it is a lot more visceral you know, because you know that guy, over there, he put in the work, that's what you call it, you know, so yeah (Raul).

Raul's comparison with the 'Southern boys'' *modus operandi* provides a glimpse into London's gang culture (see Sandberg, 2019a), and positions Raul as a former 'hard working', true gangster, who was 'willing to put in the work'. The type of violence enacted by the East boys is portrayed as visceral and manly. He is unwittingly referring to a visceral habitus, inculcated in the social practices of industrial man, and re-enacted in the 'hard lad' cult and criminal economy of post-industrial East London (Hall, 1997). His connection to East-London emerged as crucial in constructing a sense of masculinity (see Winlow and Hall, 2009), and offered some limited narrative resources in the way of constructing a territorial identity (Fraser, 2015). I have experienced (see Presser, 2004) Raul's hyper-place attachment (Kintrea et al. 2008) and territoriality emerge first-hand, after we have concluded our interview and started walking together back to the train station:

> Raul pointed out to me every Romanian on the streets that he could identify. He didn't personally know these people; so, he only guessed with complete certainty that they were Romanians. This reminds me of the conversations we had before I started to record the interview; he said that the animal he identifies with the most is the eagle. He must look down on us, flying, he knows who the Romanians are, who the Asians are; he can spot this from miles, as he said. I was on his territory, and he wanted to make this clear (Reflective Journal - 7/30/2019).

Nevertheless, a fuller read of the narrative suggests that Raul lives his life by a multiplicity of complex stories and sets of values: his narrative is imbued with undertones of guilt; stories of love; commitment to his family; of uniqueness; and longing for a stable loving relationship through marriage. In fact, a struggle is evidenced in Raul's desire to move away from the city, but he reconsidered this plan in our second interview. Raul located this discussion in the past, as he was reflexively positioned, whilst concomitantly representing the speaker in the 'now' (O'Connor, 1995). Thus, it would be simplistic to imagine Raul as a current or former gang-member (although gang membership is never mentioned by himself), unconventionally attached and unconditionally following a gang-culture master narrative (Sandberg, 2009b). Depending on how one asks questions, interviews may draw narratives of the present self, or past selves (see Brookman, 2015) and so Raul would not boast about his crime on the streets, as this is what kids do. By not boasting about his crime, he is constructing himself as a wise veteran of the streets.

Raul managed stigma by situating our discussion of the murder within London's gang culture and positioned himself accordingly. His resistance narrative may be a consequence of his struggle to re-enter conventional society after release (see Harding et al. 2017). As evidenced above, Raul has initially drawn from the seriousness of his crime to exclude any potential associations with petty offenders generally (sex offenders, burglars, etc). Then, the hierarchy becomes more intricate, with specific hierarchies of moral worthiness being constructed. Interestingly, the discussion appeals to specific audiences rendering his stories as 'moving targets' (Maruna and Liem, 2020). This may be characteristic/telling of early re-entry narratives. In other words, Raul's appeal to conventional and unconventional cultures is indicative of his struggles to reconstruct his identity post-release, where he is met with blocked opportunities, and a lack of narrative resources.

Peter had been released for 6 months before our first interview. To reiterate, he killed an elderly man during a robbery who 'turned out to be in the house that night'. Having asked him how this type of murder is perceived, he said:

> Is it seen as if it would have been a woman, or a child? (Dan).
>
> It's seen like sort of crackhead, scummy" (Peter).
>
> There is a big stigma attached to the type of murder you committed (Dan).
>
> A small stigma attached (Peter).
>
> Still a stigma (Dan).

A small stigma, but still the requisite amount of fear that people will be polite when they need to be, and you know what I mean. In prison yea, it matters, to a degree. But I definitely also think, after I got clean, it is your attitude that matters (Peter).

Peter recognized the 'crackhead' stigma (Copes, Hochstetler, Williams, 2008) which accompanies the context of his murder. Importantly, he draws from the prison code (Clemmer, 1940) to make sense of the question, but appeals to his identity – in the now post-prison and post-therapy (see Stevens, 2012; 2013) to manage stigma. Heroin users are a stigmatised community in prison and Crewe (2009) found that heroin users are referred to with disdain because they imply contamination and moral decay. In contrast to the other men, Peter's was an internal resource which he drew from to discuss and manage the context of his murder (see Stevens, 2012; 2013). Similarly to Raul, Peter situated our conversation about stigma post-release within the local culture of his workplace.

I guess…there's different ways you meet people innit? People that I meet at work, I talk to them, I just say. I've been in prison for a long time and they say… how long you've in jail for then mate… and I say 17 years… and they say fucking hell what did you do, and I say… well it wasn't graffiti, or colourful language it was something serious but it's done and they normally, if you lead them down that road, you know it's been done nearly 20 fucking years ago, they will go along with that, oh yah yah yah… they don't want to know…they don't really want to know, no. You get 1 or 2 who's gonna go and try to find it on the internet… and all of that… and when they do, they sort of…but I am there for work, communication is necessary for work and the way in which we interact with one another at work, that sort of thing is irrelevant. Someone came into work the other morning yeah, and said aa.. this is how it is at work, the base level of its very black humour, same as prison yeah: say fucking hell, I nearly killed an old woman on my way here this morning! Ah really did ya? Yah, so I couldn't be bothered, so I just raped her. That's the base level that we are dealing with… and a few weeks ago, this notorious serial rapist got put back to prison, do you remember that, and it was on the news, and as I come into work, I walked into the canteen it was on the news and they said oh, we thought you was in jail, like its fucking making it like it's me, you know what I mean and that's alright, that's acceptance isn't it, that's trusting that they can say something out to me and I'm not gonna freak out… a few people know what I've been in for (Peter).

Peter has found a viable way to disclose what he did by hinting at the serious nature of the crime, albeit with a note of humour. Further, he does not experience his spoiled identity at the workplace, as this is not incompatible with the cultural logic of the workplace (see Harding et al. 2017)

10.3. Conclusion

As has been shown, the index offence has meaning for the perpetrator (see Ferrito, et al. 2012; 2017; 2020), and the men appealed to culturally derived and constructed meanings around what is acceptable killing to both make sense of their crime as well as to negotiate 'acceptable characters' in the interview context. Crucially, to negotiate acceptability, most of the men constructed themselves against the abominable and unacceptable killer. Compared to Becker's (1967:239) 'hierarchy of credibility', where dominant voices are given legitimacy, here, the men construct hierarchies of moral worthiness by either accepting or negotiating with available master narratives. As Sarup (1996: 47) argues: "to maintain a separate identity, one has to define oneself against the Other" – and this was exactly what the men did with their reference to different typologies of killers. Importantly, the men drew from a multiplicity of voices to negotiate acceptable characters, thus evidencing the dialogic nature of their narratives (Frank, 2010a). Also, the men revealed that stigma management is not unidimensional, but is continuously negotiated by appeals to a variety of local relevant cultural groups which are accepting of the lifer's past. Victims' identities were crucial in placing murderers on the hierarchy of moral abjection. In this sense, the men constructed categories of deserving and undeserving victims.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

11.1. Introduction

The research questions emerged out of an initial interest in offender reintegration and desistance research. A review of literature on the topic demonstrated that people who committed murder are a neglected population, especially in the United Kingdom. The majority of studies focused on populations who served short-term sentences, and perhaps this is reflective of their preponderance within the criminal justice system (see Office for National Statistics, 2021). It was suggested by researchers, predominantly from the United States, that the 'usual' correlates of desistance do not apply to homicide offenders (Liem, 2016; Liem and Garcin, 2014). The only explanation available for some of their success was intra-individual, generally meaning that the 'successful group' had higher degrees of efficacy (they believed in their own capacities) than the 'unsuccessful group' (who returned to prison). This came as a surprise and warranted further research, in a UK context.

Chapters two and three explored existing literature pertinent to these questions. The review explored the importance of identity in individuals' desistance from crime. Further, the review explored how agency intersects with structure to produce desistance. Then, it investigated the extent to which adaptation to long-term imprisonment affects resettlement post-release especially with consideration to the socio-symbolic system which preceded industrial society.

The thesis explored the re-entry experiences of 5 mandatory lifers after release. In this sense it analysed the narratives of different types of mandatory lifers (revenge homicide, financial gain homicide, intimate partner femicide, and random homicide) over a period of two years. In total, 11 interviews were conducted. The men's identity reconstruction was placed at the centre of the analysis. To reiterate, the research question that guided the research was: "How do mandatory lifers negotiate identities post-release?"

This conclusion will commence with a brief answer to the research question before moving on to explore the key findings of each chapter and consider these in relation to the aims and objectives of the thesis. Recommendations for future research and the criminal justice system are then outlined. Finally, the chapter will explore the main limitations of the present study.

11.2. How do mandatory lifers negotiate identities post-release?

To answer the research question, the thesis focused on the content and function of the men's stories. In this sense, the first three chapters (chapters five, six, seven) focused on a range of 'push-pull' forces which either assisted or constrained the men to achieve pro-social identities post-release. This was in line with one of the main aims of the thesis: to "develop a conceptual model that captures the significance of specific factors in identity reconstruction of people who committed murder".

Then, the remaining three chapters of the analysis/discussion focused on identity reconstruction at discursive level, in the interview context (chapters eight, nine, ten). These were instrumental in finding a direct answer to the research question. These are explained further below.

It was argued in chapter ten that mandatory lifers negotiate their identities to reconciliate their murderous past with their present moral and generative self. In this sense, an internal narrative of desistance for mandatory lifers was found to manage internal/external stigma by way of providing an account for a presently moral self, despite the enormity of the crime that the men committed. The ideal type of narrative is structured around a problematisation of agency through a story of decline, which prepares the murder scene, followed by a progressive narrative. The function of the Splitting Narrative, as highlighted in chapter nine, is to provide coherence to the men's identity and to provide a discursive way to negotiate and perform acceptability in social interactions (including signalling low levels of risk to authorities).

The men chose to tell the Splitting Narrative in interaction with myself which facilitated the negotiation of an acceptable, moral self despite the enormity of their crime. The implication of this type of narrative is that a degree of agency problematization should be considered as a natural step in creating a moral distance between a murderous self and the current self and not necessarily a criminogenic denial of harm or neutralization of involvement (Sykes and Matza, 1957). The narrative serves three clear functions: (1) it builds coherency between a murderous past and an ethical, moral self-present in a way which is not pathologically dissociative (here performative guilt serves the role to link the story arc); (2) it functions as an internal narrative of change which reconciliates the past with the present and the future (acting as an internal and external stigma management mechanism); (3) it presents/performs acceptable identities to authorities to minimise their risk, and to solve a paradox that stands at the centre of the narratives - the murderer's identity paradox (that is to be guilty of a crime one *de facto* did not 'really' commit).

Also, as demonstrated in chapter 10, mandatory lifers also negotiate their identities by constructing murder hierarchies of moral abomination. In this final discussion chapter, it was clear that the type of murder committed offered more 'difficult' or easier 'ways out' of internalising stigmatised identities. Constructing murder as a crime of passion was the most facile way to negotiate acceptability and gain sympathy from the general public. This speaks volumes about our society as well as about perpetrators – the identity of the victim emerged as significant in the construction of offenders.

However, personal identity can be perceived as a social performance constituted from stories which are enacted in social life; such identities can only be maintained as long as there are opportunities for performing them. Identities need to be recognised by the person and others as a socially valid performance (Smith and Sparkes, 2008 in Caddick, 2015). In this sense, in line with the aims and objectives of the thesis, a range of factors were found to provide the narrative resources for the performance of pro-social identities post-release, and which also sustained this internal narrative of desistance. A range of resources needed to be mobilised for the narrative to be enacted/performed with credibility (see Smith, 2016). The thesis explored a variety of factors which assisted, or constrained the "pro-social identity construction, management, and maintenance for people who committed murder" after release: the main themes identified were: (1) resettlement capital, (2) consumer capitalism and consumer culture, and (3) supervision.

11.3. Key findings and recommendations for future research and policy

This section tackles the aims and objectives of the thesis: (1) Explore the lived experiences of identity construction, management, and maintenance for people who committed murder; (2) develop a conceptual model that captures the significance of specific factors in identity reconstruction people who committed murder; (3) critically consider the extent to which formal and informal mechanisms of support/surveillance of people who committed murder constrains or enables pro-social identity reconstruction post-release; and (4) develop a set of appropriate recommendations for state, voluntary and private sector organizations in and around the criminal justice system to promote better outcomes in working with people who committed murder

Chapter five drew attention to the crucial importance of timing in accumulating 'reintegration capital', to ensure a smooth transitioning into a range of pro-social identities post-release. The men's organic/formed families, as well as employment status were important in providing

social capital, and the necessary narrative resources to perform pro-social identities post-release (especially as 'family men'). In this sense, the criminal justice system - HMPPS, should continue to assist mandatory lifers in (re)building ties with families (also see Farmer, 2017), as well as new social relationships with pro-social groups whilst in prison. Further bridges between the voluntary sector and mandatory lifers need to be built to "foster the sort of ties and social contacts which allow the development of pro-social capital" (Farrall, 2011:75; also see Kay, 2020). Most studies recommend that offenders should be given opportunities to receive visits from their families (Taylor, 2016), but very few discriminate between indeterminate sentenced prisoners, and those with fixed terms. The chapter demonstrated that indeterminate sentenced prisoners need as much support as possible to allow the accumulation of narrative resources to construct pro-social identities after release. Families and romantic relationships are critical in allowing the performance of these identities post-release, as well as to provide instrumental and emotional support.

Best's (2019) research in this sense is timely. Prison based programs should encourage contact with families as the men approach the completion of their tariffs (or earlier), but this should be self-determined but guided, in line with Eglash's (1957) principles of restorative restitution. Interventions for mandatory lifers should aim at strengthening and enhancing protective factors, such as family integration and the development of resettlement capital in prison where this is possible. Alongside these measures, HMPSS in tandem with the voluntary sector should start considering this group of individuals as in need of measures to promote an expanding network and bridging capital outside of their existing network (see Best et al. 2018).

One obvious difficulty in doing the above is that for indeterminate sentenced prisoners the "route map to freedom is by no means clear" (Crewe, 2011:514). However, the recommendation is that the construction of bridging and bonding capital should start preferably before the men enter open prisons, and before the end of their tariffs. It was also evidenced that culture is a significant variable in the process of resettlement.

Future research should consider larger samples of mandatory lifers from diverse cultural and ethnical backgrounds in their analyses of life after a life-imprisonment. In this research, culture emerged as significant, especially in Raul's case who referred to his east-Asian heritage as significant in the way in which his family managed both the news of his crime and arrest, as well as his prison and post-prison journey. A further line of inquiry should focus on whether the type of murder committed has any influence in families' acceptance and willing to assist

mandatory lifers' struggles to reconstruct their lives post release (see May 2000 for a discussion around stigma and offenders' families). Although the majority of the men returned to their families, the research does not claim that this is a true representation of the experiences of mandatory lifers across the country. In fact, existing evidence points towards the opposite conclusion as discussed in the main chapter. This is precisely what stands at the heart of the recommendations provided here.

Chapter six explored the ways in which the most recently released mandatory lifers, Raul and Peter negotiated with master narratives of success in consumer capitalism which interpellated them as consumers on their release. Interpellation is a process which teaches people who they are by inviting them to take particular identities (see Frank, 2010a). It was found that some people are more likely to respond to this invitation than others. As mentioned in chapter five, the narrative habitus (representing the collection of stories which make up one's identity), is crucial in deciding the success of such invitations.

For Peter, his 'family man' identity acted as a protective mechanism against the forces that Interpelled and attempted to render him as a 'failed consumer'. He repudiated ornamental consumerism and thus constructed a resistance narrative stemming from an anti-capitalist moral position. Fatherhood equipped him with the necessary narrative resources to discard consumer culture as a mere distraction from the important things in life. Raul, on the other hand, had a more difficult trajectory in negotiating with this predominant discourse (and this was mainly because he was lacking in narrative resources to enact different identities). Soon after his release he experienced what I called 'consumption melancholia' as he failed to answer the 'cultural injunction to enjoy' (Žižek, 2002) and entered the "battle for consumer significance" (Hall, Winlow, and Ancrum, 2008: 65). In the end, he managed to adapt to realities of his condition by slightly altering the set of values which stand at the heart of his narrative identity. In this way, he at times also resisted being positioned as a failed consumer. The adaptation of narrative identity to his structural position stemmed from his narrative habitus (see Frank, 2010; Fleetwood, 2016) - an internal, biographical source, intimately linked to ideals and stories constructed around the father figure.

A few lessons can be learned from this chapter which are relevant to the aims and objectives of the thesis. Following the precepts of the Good Lives Model of offender rehabilitation (Ward and Maruna, 2007), practitioners of the criminal justice system should ensure that they identify released mandatory lifers' priorities, goals, and values as they make up their narrative identities

before and after release. They should establish collaboratively on the most appropriate way of achieving these goods and values in ways which are manageable and adaptive to their situations post-release, in a Good Lives Plan (Ward and Fortune, 2013). For example, practitioners can focus on ways in which success can be reconceptualised, and secondary goods to achieving a reformed version of success can be constructed. In Raul's case, masculinity and success would have been important such sites of exploration. Although Raul has not proven ill-equipped to cope with his release, he evidenced the slow development of a cynical attitude towards the world outside. His narrative identities, evidenced in our conversations, are firmly built upon a set of ideological beliefs (see McAdams, 1993) which suffered change throughout the years due to the structural constraints he faced. Probation officers, taking a strengths-based approach can identify MLS individuals' goals and value commitments and the secondary means used to achieve such goals. They then can assist mandatory lifers to harness energy in activities which deter them from developing such cynical attitudes that run the risk of finalising their enthusiasm and projections for the future.

Chapter seven showed how criminal justice agencies and probation services can act to constrain the development of pro-social identities for mandatory lifers due to their constructions of the men as responsible but risky, and fundamentally dangerous. This was evident from the men's internalisation of such constructions which emerged in our conversation. Criminal justice agencies were a vector that at times interpellated the mandatory lifers to accept dangerousness and risk identities (as evidenced in Paul's and Raul's case). Importantly, the type of murder committed had a significant effect on these constructions as well as expectations around performances of remorse. Critically, the men either resisted these invitations, or they accepted them. All the men experienced a lax and responsibilising supervision combined with episodes of acute risk assessment which betrayed an ideological schism in the way that the service works to construct and interpellate its subjects.

Future research should employ an ethnographic approach in exploring how probation officers and mandatory lifers interact upon release; further, special attention should be placed on the importance of the murder type committed by the men in the ways in which they are constructed by their supervising officers. In turn, this will lead to a more nuanced understanding of the way in which mandatory lifers are governed in our communities and may inform important policy in improving the men's re-entry and reintegration. This research is a first step in evidencing the importance of these elements.

Peter's case draws attention to a problematic communication between different MAPPA partners and their inconsistent approach to the risk-management of mandatory lifers. In this sense, the probation system and social services have constructed Paul's dangerousness fundamentally differently. Whereas the parole board and his probation officer have not imposed any restrictions in communicating with and having children, the social services utilised a larger brush in painting Peter as a potential danger to his child, on account of his crime only (cf. Barry, 2021). In this sense, the social services acted to constrain Paul's development of a pro-social identity, that of the father, through spoiling this role by constructing him as a potential danger to his child. Fatherhood, as Opsal (2015) remarked, should be considered as an opportunity, and not a risk as it provides a perfect context for the development of pro-social identities. Raul's case drew attention to the importance of considering relational aspects to desistance as well as the importance of 'places' in imposing or avoiding stigma (see Albertson et al. 2020). For Raul, the space-time rhythm which included routine visits to the probationer's office served as a reminder of his own riskiness (the alarm along the wall, the interview arrangements, the pen and paper). Although these are necessary tools which serve to protect HMPPS staff, it is suggested that a psychogeographic approach (see Coverley, 2006) to improving the design of these places may be fruitful. Further inter-disciplinary research should explore this possibility (see Jewkes, 2018 on the psychological influence of prison architecture and design).

The longitudinal nature of the data presented here demonstrated that this sample of MLS individuals had expected varied levels of probation involvement at different stages of their re-entry. In this sense, it is recommended that probation officers work together with probationers in setting the goals of their sentence plan of their collaboration more consistently, as the men's needs change with the stages of their resettlement. In this sense, the men should be constructed as individuals with complex needs and not merely subjects of supervision. As shown here, the men's needs change drastically in short spurs of time, which once more directs to the importance and complexity of the initial stages of resettlement for mandatory lifers.

Chapter eight draws attention to the importance of generativity as a site of pro-social identity construction for individuals who committed murder and who need to perform an appropriate level of remorse. It was found that the men experienced 'complicated redemption' (a sense that complete closure with the past is impossible) due to the irreparability and enormity of the crime. In order to contain the past and transform it into a constructive future the men started to take on generative roles in the community which were enactments of their sense of

'complicated redemption'. These roles provided credible performances of a generativity and moral self (which also sustained the internal narrative of desistance discussed at the beginning of this chapter). Also, the roles acted as protective mechanisms which allowed a practical way to ask for forgiveness (see McNeil, 2012) and assisted with the performance of an appropriate level of remorse, proportional to the enormity of their crime. Interestingly, irrespective of their resettlement stage, all men in the sample had plans to engage in such activities. This indicates towards a unique pathway into resettlement for people who committed murder; for such individuals restorative justice in the traditional sense is impossible. Nevertheless, generative roles provide the men with purpose and with a strategy to face the world despite the enormity of their crime and would stand as proof for their remorse. The chapter attempted an aetiological explanation to generativity in mandatory lifers. In this sense, practitioners of the criminal justice system should encourage and assist mandatory lifers in finding generative roles both whilst in prison and on release.

Following on Maruna's (2011b) plea for status elevation ceremonies and reintegration rituals as part of the re-entry process, this research shows that having professional ex-prisoners and wounded healers can provide a much-needed social context to engage with this type of rite of passage to 'law abiding citizen' and thus to a credible, new performance of identity post release. In line with Positive Criminology (Ronel and Elisha, 2010; Ronel and Segev, 2010; Ronel and Elisha, 2011; Ronel and Segev, 2014) and its 'strengths based' and 'restorative interventions' in re-entry (see Maruna and Lebel 2003; 2009, 2010; 2015; LeBel, Richie, Maruna, 2015; Kewley, 2016) this research directs attention to the importance of treating mandatory lifers as "community assets to be utilised, rather than merely liabilities to be supervised" (Travis, 200:7 in Maruna and LeBel, 2010:67).

The probation service is in a suitable position to assist mandatory lifers develop social capital and human capital to find such roles. Prison based interventions can bring together the voluntary sector alongside practitioners of restorative justice to find ways in which to include people who committed murder in their programs. However, a degree of caution here needs to be used. The mandatory lifers in this study mentioned a pressing need to move away from their murderous past and thus, such roles should not cement a murderous self as master status, but rather, in line with Braithwaite's (1989) suggested 'reintegrative shaming' should focus on them as individuals and not on their stigmatised past.

11.4. Limitations and future research

This thesis is not without limitations. These concern the sample and research design, theoretical inconsistencies, sample size, considerations to time and place (including the Coronavirus pandemic), lack of focus on gender and victims, and issues around the ethnic and cultural diversity of the participants as well the nature of truth to participants' stories, and conceptualisation of participants' subjectivity.

The sample size consisted of 5 mandatory lifers who were at different stages of their resettlement and reintegration in the community. Three of the men were at the initial stages of their resettlement (Peter, Raul, Nathaniel) whereas the remaining two (Richard and Jacob) could be classed as reintegrated, as they were released for over 20 years at the time of the interview (this distinction is discretionary too). This is as much of a limitation as it is a strength for the research. It is a limitation because the retrospective accounts of the more experienced mandatory lifers were at times used alongside the accounts of the early releases to construct themes around early resettlement. There are (at least) two risks in taking this approach: Firstly, asking participants to reflect upon their experiences 20 years ago exposed the research to potential imagination inflation and post-event misinformation (see Schacter et al. 2011). Nevertheless, the men's experiences were remarkably similar to those who were experiencing early release and whose stories could be classed as 'in the now' (Brookman, 2015). This fact alleviated some of these fears. Second, as societies change, the men's early experiences were representative of a specific time and place. For example, Richard was taken aback by the prevalent use of phones after his release, which he would describe as walkie-talkies at that point. In this sense, narratives need to be historicized to a more significant extent by further researchers (see Maynes, et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the exploratory nature of this research renders the approach as much a strength as it is a limitation.

By taking this approach, the thesis allowed for the exploration of re-entry narratives for men at different stages of their re-entry process and it also showed how some of the issues identified by those recently released were still present in these later stages of the resettlement process. Future research should (similarly to how penological research has already done so) identify barriers, hardships, and adaptations to different stages of the resettlement process for mandatory lifers. In this sense, research samples should include both cross-sectional designs based on groups of individuals at different stages of their release as much as longitudinal designs which spread over a significantly longer period of time.

To predict some further criticism, the current study was influenced by the Coronavirus pandemic. An initial face to face approach had to change in favour of phone interviews. Admittedly, this was not a limitation in the end, as the use of video-calls made up for lost paralinguistic elements which were important in making sense of data (but unfortunately, these could not be always used). Further, the men's lives were influenced by lockdowns, and some of the narratives presented in this piece are representative of the hardships and struggles that turned to characterise the years 2020 and 2021. Some usual barriers to reintegration were exacerbated by the pandemic – some of my participants have lost their jobs, others, feared for their loved ones.

Critics of this thesis would naturally question the sample size. The sample consisted of 5 men, and it is therefore difficult to assume that their experiences are representative for all mandatory lifers in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, as discussed in chapter four, qualitative research based on narrative inquiry do not aim at generalising their findings (cf. Lewis et al. 2014); such golden standards are reserved to the domain of hard sciences and positivist epistemologies with their insistence on the existence of universal truths. In a sense, each one of my participants' lives is unique and therefore representative generalizability or saturation is difficult to achieve. This limitation is one which stems from particular theoretical positions. It was not within the aspirations of this study to argue that the findings apply to all mandatory lifers in the United Kingdom. Thus, the statistical approach to generalisation is not consistent with the thesis; however, case studies involve "generalisation to theoretical propositions" (Riessman, 2008:13), or could represent inferential generalisations (see Lewis et al. 2014). In this sense, the study speculates that the findings (and most necessarily the recommendations) can be applied to other samples of mandatory lifers in the UK. Therefore, future research should explore whether the findings of this research apply to other mandatory life sentenced populations. Hopefully, the thesis can represent a heuristic guide to such researchers aiming at developing theory around the ways in which people who committed murder negotiate their identities post-release.

The demographics of the individuals can be subjected to criticism. The study focused solely on men who committed murder and therefore the experiences of women in similar position remain virtually absent from research. This is problematic given that we now know that women's desistance from crime and re-entry into society is highly gendered (Bachman, et al. 2016). The ways in which our society responds to calls for reintegration of women who killed remain virtually unexplored. Further, the narratives of secondary victims who lost their loves ones to murder are not given much voice in this study. However, important research in this tradition

has been carried out recently – see Brolan's (2022) recent doctoral study. Moreover, the research attempted to use an ethnically and culturally diverse sample in order to explore potential effects of culture and ethnicity on the ways in which MLS individuals experience re-entry and reconstruction/negotiation of identity post-release. Although this was achieved to an extent, future research can do a better job in exploring more diverse samples (including sexual minorities coming from LGBTQ+ communities) and can devise interview schedules which have culture, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality at the forefront of the analytic interest. Another important variable that demands attention is participants' social class which had not been discussed to a significant extent here. For example, social class will most likely interact with levels of available social capital as well as with the adaptive response to consumer culture post-release. Future research should consider these possibilities in their analyses.

Other limitations of the study reside in the way in which the thesis conceptualised the study of identity. In line with the theoretical framework of this research, it is suggested that individuals refrain from crime by enacting or by being guided by particular stories of their own selves. Nevertheless, as Laws (2020) mentions in a recent article, experience is not always storied. He drew from Kahneman's (2011) work on the 'experiencing self' to argue that much of our transformative experiences are difficult to verbalise (and thus transposed into stories). For example, an 'experiencing self' is found in accounts that can be called 'transcendental', or 'extensions of consciousness' after psychedelic experiences, which can rarely be transposed into words (see Verde, 2021 for a response).

In the present thesis, one such example of transcendental experiences of the self were narrated by the men who experienced religious conversion in prison. Then, narrative conceptualisations of identity are not without limitations, they are yet to "set out to present a complete theory of the self" (Laws, 2020:8). In reality, as Laws (2020:12) remarked, various positions on these issues "uncover deep epistemological fissures that are hard to reconcile". Such a reconciliatory project is beyond the scope and capacity of this thesis; it is sufficient to say that the thesis had used a range of theoretical positions (not limited to narrative criminology, see use of concepts such as 'social capital' or 'socio-symbolic order') to make sense of the data. Where possible, such fissures had been explored and attempted to be resolved (see use of narrative habitus, Fleetwood, 2016).

Critics could also highlight that the research is solely interested in fiction and 'language games', rather than in what is actually happening (or what has happened). For example, critics

could draw from Laws (2020:6) in arguing that "without external reference points beyond the narrative it can be hard to identify the lines of demarcation between fantasy and real-life event" (Laws, 2020:6). However, the research, as per the epistemological and ontological positions explored in chapter four, does not claim access to objectively identifiable truths. In fact, the research was interested in the worlds as they made sense to the participants. For Bruner (1991:4), "narrative constructions can only achieve 'verisimilitude' […], which are only "version of reality rather than empirical verifications". The thesis was not guided by truth as understood in the ontological sense as a measurable or verifiable site, but rather, in what Spence (1982) coined "narrative truth". However, to control for 'fantasies' presented as real life-events, and to gain a degree of access to events as seen by others, I read about the men's murders in the print media after the finalisation of the data analysis, to spot any outright discrepancies. There were none.

There is also a problematic conceptualisation of human subjectivity. For example, it has been suggested that narratives do not just appear in a vacuum, but that they emerge within the specific socio-economic and symbolic architecture of our society and its underlying driving forces. Chapter six explored the men's negotiation of identities against master narratives of success within neo-liberal consumer capitalism. It was proposed that recently released mandatory lifers interact with ego ideals as proposed by consumer capitalism's prevailing consumerist culture (or master narrative). However, some questions were left unanswered: for example, what are the processes by which these subjectivities are generated? Recent theoretical developments in criminological thought, such as ultra-realism (Hall and Winlow, 2015) may be appropriate in making sense of this process by drawing from the transcendental materialist subject. In this sense, individuals' disposition to engage with ego ideals as constructed within neo-liberal consumerist capitalism may be conditional to individuals' immersion in a Symbolic Order which is characterised by individualism and competitiveness (Lloyd, 2018b). Success on release is then intimately linked to specific patterns of consumption (Hall, Winlow, and Ancrum, 2008) characteristic of the Symbolic Order. Future research should consider utilising new criminological theory, such as ultra-realism, to make sense of the rehabilitation and desistance in the context of prevailing ideologies in our society.

11.5. Conclusion

The question: "how do mandatory lifers negotiate identities post-release?" has been approached through a socio-narratological narrative framework which led to the development

of the first internal narrative of desistance used by people who committed murder. As mentioned previously, the narrative serves to negotiate a moral, ethical self despite the enormity of the crime that the men have committed. Further, the narrative serves to (1) build coherency between a murderous past and an ethical, moral self-present in a way which is not pathologically dissociative, (2) it functions as an internal narrative of change/desistance which reconciliates the past with the present and the future (acting as an internal and external stigma management mechanism), (3) present/perform acceptable identities and reform to authorities by minimizing their own risk. This ultimately solves a paradox that stands at the centre of the narratives: the Murderer's Identity Paradox (MIP) – to be guilty of a crime one did not 'really' commit. The implications of this narrative have been discussed. Further, the men negotiated acceptability through constructing hierarchies of moral abomination in the interview context. In this sense, all the men engaged in a process of 'Othering' different types of homicide offenders as more despicable than themselves; in this way the men negotiated an ethical self. The identity of the victim was crucial in this process: domestic murder has been found the worthiest of forgiveness as it can be integrated with a 'good moral self'. This is because it can be constructed as stemming out of too much love: a crime of passion.

The thesis also focused on the content of the stories, not merely on their function. It explored the men's journey's post-release methodically, in a dialectical fashion by concentrating on the interaction between internal/external pressures to negotiate identities post-release. In this sense, the chapters explored both internal and external barriers to the development of pro-social identities as well as on the ways in which the men developed narrative resources to sustain pro-social identities post-release. A set of themes were identified and discussed: the role of family/employment as resettlement capital, the role of consumer culture/ideology, and supervision. Finally, the thesis provided a set of recommendations for the criminal justice system and the voluntary sector working with individuals who committed murder.

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Appendix

A1: Research Tools (Consent Form)

Consent Form: 'Life after life, beyond the gate: the construction and reconstruction of identity among homicide offenders'.

Please tick the box if you agree

1. I have read and understood the project information sheet ☐

2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project ☐

Please tick the box if you agree

3. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded. I understand that the recording will only be used for analysis and will be destroyed one year after the project is finished ☐

4. I understand that my taking part is voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any given time ☐

5. I understand that my name will be anonymous and that the research has no implications on my relationship with my probation officer ☐

6. I understand that my words may be quoted in publications and reports, but my name will be anonymous and pseudonyms will be used ☐

7. I understand that my personal details are anonymous and will not be revealed to anyone ☐

I agree to take part in the project ☐

_____   _____   _____

Name: Signature: Date:

_____   _____   _____

Name of researcher: Signature: Date:

For any queries please contact me at Dan.Rusu@bcu.ac.uk. Also, I am willing to prepare a follow-up discussion and presentation of my findings if you are interested in the findings of the research.

A2: Research Tools (Information Form)

Information Form

Title of research: *'Life after life, beyond the gate: The construction and reconstruction of identity amongst homicide offenders'.*

Researcher's details:

Name: Dan Rusu

Email: Dan.Rusu@mail.bcu.ac.uk

You are being invited to take part in the abovementioned study. It is important for you to understand why this research is conducted and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully:

Purpose of study:

The study aims at exploring the lived experiences of homicide offenders who have been released on a life licence. There is little research that 'gave voice' to the experiences of homicide offenders, and which explored the life that follows after a life imprisonment, specifically for this group. It is the research's belief that homicide offenders' experiences after imprisonment are fundamentally different to other offences, and this research aims at exploring such differences.

You have been invited to take part in this research as your experience is highly valuable in improving our understanding of 'life after life imprisonment' for homicide offenders; the ultimate aim is the development of new models aimed at improving resettlement.

Please not that participation is **entirely voluntary** and you can withdraw before or after the interview

takes place. In the eventuality that you decide to withdraw, all the generated data will be destroyed.

Please note that your taking part in the research is **confidential.** The research follows a strict policy of anonymity and confidentiality, which means that your name will be replaced with a pseudonym and no particularities that could lead to your identification will be used.

The results of our interview will be transcribed, analysed, and coded under a pseudonym (not your actual name) in the research thesis. Interviews will thus be anonymously represented in the research, publications, where no legal names will be used.

If you wish more information about the study and/or a summary of the results, or any other enquiries, please feel free to contact me at Dan.Rusu@mail.bcu.ac.uk.