UNDERSTANDING NECROPHILIA
A Global Multidisciplinary Approach

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South Africa has had its fair share of serial murderers. It is estimated that approximately 160 have been active, most identified since the early 1990s when the Investigative Psychology Section of the South African Police Service (SAPS) was established. This unit bears the responsibility of advising on all serial murder investigations, training investigators how to deal with serial investigations, and conducting research to further the SAPS understanding of serial murder. The first confirmed case, where court records are available, was back in the 1950s where Elfasi Msomi would lure unsuspecting women with offers of employment, then rape and murder them, a common modus operandi until today (Labuschagne & Salfati, 2015).

A serial murderer returning to a crime scene, while the body was present or removed, to masturbate is not unheard of, few however, have included cannibalism or necrophilia in their repertoire of behavior. One such offender that displayed both of these behaviors was Stewart Wilken, also known as “Boetie Boer.” “Boetie Boer” was an Afrikaans language nickname given to him which roughly translates into “brother Afrikaner.” Boetie is a diminutive term for “brother” in the Afrikaans language, and Boer literally means “farmer” but in the Apartheid days tended to be a derogatory term used to refer to Afrikaans-speaking people.

Wilken lived in the seaside town of Port Elizabeth and was a commercial fisherman by trade. He was suspected of committing at least 12 murders, having initially confessed to 12, but was ultimately convicted of 7. He is still married to the woman he was married to at the time of arrest. When interviewed years later in 2006 by the author, the source of the quotations appearing in this text, he stated that he had killed many more victims but had taken their bodies out to sea where
he disposed of them. The information for this chapter comes from the original police case files, court records, and an interview with Wilken in 2006 over a 2-day period in prison.

**WILKEN'S BACKGROUND**

Wilken was born on November 11, 1964, in the town of Boksburg on the East Rand of Johannesburg and was 26 years old when he committed his first confirmed murder in 1990.

He however claimed in his interview with the author to have been 18 when he committed his first murder. South African serial murderers, on average, are 29 years of age when they commit their first murder (Salfati, Labuschagne, Horning, Sorochinski, & De Wet, 2015). He was arrested in 1997 in connection with the murders he was later convicted of. At a young age he and his sister were allegedly found abandoned in a public telephone booth and were taken in by the people that found them. He claims to have been abused by these persons, including being burnt on his genitals with cigarettes, having to eat his food with the family's dogs, and other physical assaults. The person who later became his adopted mother reported these individuals to the welfare structures and she then adopted Wilken. According to Wilken, he never knew his biological parents, except for a brief visit when he was 3 years old from his mother. After incarceration for the murders, he met his biological mother in 1999 but did not have contact with her after 2002. He never met his sister who was left in the telephone booth with him.

Wilken's adopted mother had other children with her husband. Wilken claimed that he would be blamed for the misbehavior of his adopted siblings. Wilken was the youngest of all the siblings in his adopted family.

In terms of his criminal history, prior to his 1997 arrest in connection with the murders, he was convicted of possession of marijuana in 1984 (6 months imprisonment suspended for 5 years) and malicious injury to property in 1987 ($30 fine).

**SCHOOL CAREER**

At junior school he struggled academically and failed at least four times, later being placed in a “special class” at the school where he was regularly teased by the other children for being adopted. He claims that it was during these early years when he first found out that he was adopted after being teased by these children. After his stepmother explained to him what the word *adopted* meant, he returned to school the following day and assaulted the teacher, whereupon his received corporal punishment by the headmaster (principal). He claims to have also experienced physical abuse from his adopted mother. He additionally claims that at the age of 9 or 10 he was sexually molested by a church official.

After another physical confrontation with learners and teachers at school he ran away from home. He was subsequently found and returned to school, he stated that he realized that he would have to be his own “mother and father” from then on.

He was later placed in an “industrial school” which was a school where typically “problem” children were sent. He stated that this school had a negative effect on him, he began to smoke marijuana and was sodomized
by the older children, and also by a boarding school house master. He was regularly blamed for everything that went wrong in the boarding hostel at the school. One evening Wilken and two other children ran away and after going their separate ways Wilken went to his adopted mother’s sister. He stayed there for a month before being told that he must return to his adopted mother. He hitchhiked to Port Elizabeth and was informed that after the school holidays he would be returned to the industrial school. He returned to school and completed his grade 11 at high school. Wilken claimed that his treatment in the industrial school developed a hatred inside of him that made him want to take revenge.

AFTER SCHOOL

After school he was conscripted into the military as was the practice for all White males in that era, but 3 months into his National Service he was discharged following a suicide attempt. He returned to his adopted family and began learning the trade of a fitter and joiner and shortly thereafter married his first wife. He met his wife in a hotel in Port Elizabeth after being discharged from the army. As Wilken stated:

I was in PE because I was tired of my adopted family. I met her and after a month I moved in with her. What attracted me to her was that she treated me well, for the first two years of the marriage. I worked away a lot, and she began to “whore” and it disgusted me. For money. She was unemployed, she had a state income because she was unmarried and had to care for the children, she was on welfare. I would catch her red-handed, with policemen (from prison interview with Wilken, 2006).

Wilken claims he caught her cheating on him six times. His wife had a daughter from a previous relationship, and he also fathered a child with her, Wuane, who became one of his last victims. In total Wilken was married twice; the second wife is still legally married to him, and he fathered two children with his current wife before his arrest.

THE CRIMES

Wilken stated that his motive for the murders was because as a child, experiencing these abusive events, he had asked God for help and God hadn’t helped him. Wilken felt that he would take revenge on God one day by committing the mistakes that older people committed upon him. Wilken stated, “I wanted to be God.” He stated that while murdering his victims they had to shout out to God for help. Wilken stated, “The control over the person gave me pleasure. I would fantasize about it, it would make me happy to see them submit, I would say ‘you see God, I got you’” (from prison interview with Wilken, 2006).

Wilken would go back to most of the scenes and watch the police to see what they were doing at the crime scene. He wanted to see how quickly they reacted, what they were looking for and to learn, he said, “I would do things more perfectly the next time, having seen what they [police] were doing.” When people would start to ask questions from bystanders he would walk away. When asked what he thought of the police at the scene
he replied "Some were good, but they weren't good at catching me, I waited to see how long it took to be caught" (from prison interview with Wilken, 2006).

He lived in the area of his crimes or he would walk around in the area. He had scenes spread out over different neighboring areas. From the suburb of Sydenham to St. George was about 4 to 5 kilometers; this represented his comfort zone. He would go in search of potential crime scene areas beforehand. His criteria would be that the area had to be quiet, thus allowing him to commit the crimes. "When I looked for a place, I knew what I was going to do there." Wilken claimed to have murdered other victims that were never discovered. He claimed that he murdered them in a similar fashion to the others, then stole a vehicle and transported the bodies to a nearby dock where he stole a ski-boat and disposed of the bodies at sea. This is, however, very unlikely, and there was never any evidence to substantiate these claims. He stated that the reason for leaving some on land and disposing some at sea was to change his modus operandi. He states that these sea disposal incidents occurred in between committing the other murders (from prison interview with Wilken, 2006).

THE FANTASY

Wilken had clear fantasies of domination, control, and revenge, which he relates back to the abuse he experienced as a child.

"I would have continued if I hadn't been caught, as long as I got that ecstasy. I knew that if I left that [police] office I would go out and murder, I wanted to stop, so I decided to point out two bodies. I really hurt them, I made them scream, told them to scream for God to come and help them. While I was having sex I would strangle them, with a cord and hands, and once a knife after I tied" (from prison interview with Wilken, 2006).

In between his crimes, Wilken would masturbate, fantasizing about the murders. He also stated that what he did on the crime scene was a reflection of his fantasy: "Most of the stuff was the same, almost the same." He also stated that "(detective) Derek Northworthy treated me decently, like a person, which made me confess. He didn't make promises, we talked like we are talking now. I told Derek I went back to the scenes, he may have suspected it, but I told him." With regard to the child victims, he stated, "I felt very powerful, because it happened to me, I promised God the kids would scream for him, they had to scream for God." Regarding the sex worker victims he stated, "prostitutes made me think of my own biological mother. I never knew her back then, I always thought my mother was a whore because what kind of person gives their child away? So if I get a whore, she is going to die, she is like my mother." Wilken would read of his crimes in the newspapers but wouldn't keep the articles for fear of them being used as evidence against him, despite a desire to do so. He did, however, keep souvenirs of his victims; when asked what he kept, he stated, "Panties, if they were nice g-strings. Then burn them, a month or two later. I kept them between clothes, I can't remember how many. I would lay them out then masturbate. I would fantasize about the murder while masturbating, it feels a little less nice than a real body" (from prison interview with Wilken, 2006).
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I would strangle them while having sex. I would go into another world when I am strangling them and raping them. When I was strangling them, they would go limp, like a jellyfish, made me feel like a king. ... I had sex with some of the dead bodies. Then I can have my ecstasy. Then I can do things the way I wanted to, there is no screaming and chaos. I would fantasize about the murder and masturbate at the body also (from prison interview with Wilken, 2006).

When asked what type of sexual acts engaged in with the dead bodies he replied, “I had sex with them. I took condoms because of the dead body, they are cold, that's why I used condoms with the dead bodies. I also don't throw it [condom] away there, somewhere else. I didn't use a condom when I killed them. I was a 'sex maniac.' I do what I want with the victim, if they don't comply I hit them. What bothered me was the begging, I hit a blank, I am not myself, then afterwards I realise what I have done (from prison interview with Wilken, 2006).”

CANNIBALISM

In one incident, while still at the crime scene, Wilken ate the nipples and external parts of the vagina of the victim, who was an adult sex worker. The cannibalism incident was also the only incident where Wilken used a knife during his crimes; when asked why he replied, “I wasn't satisfied just using the cord, I then stabbed when she was cold, to feel how it felt, the sensation, it was a nice feeling. She couldn't feel; she was dead already. I stabbed her a few times.” When asked how he felt after stabbing the victim, he said he felt “big” and “powerful” and stated, “I only used it on one victim. I wanted to experience that feeling, I tested on her, how it would be, how quickly it went in the skin” (from prison interview with Wilken, 2006).

INTEGRATION

Aggrawal (2011) differentiates between anthropophagy which refers to the eating of human flesh (aka cannibalism) which is not related to sexual arousal, from necrophagia which is associated with sexual arousal. He further states that necrophiles who indulge in cannibalism should be referred to as “cannibal necrophiles” and provides the example of Russian serial murderer Andrei Chikatilo. This differentiation can be problematic, in the case of Wilken, he never indicated that the eating of the victim's body parts was sexually arousing but was rather out of curiosity, he wanted to feel what it felt like to push a knife into someone's flesh, he wondered what the nipples and genitals tasted like, he was curious about the inside of a woman's vagina and inserted his hand. However, the context of the crime was sexual serial murder, and the body parts eaten were “sexual” body parts. Wilken also engaged in such behavior with only one of his victims.

In current DSM-5 nomenclature (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), necrophilia would be classified under 'Other Specified Paraphilic Disorder’ as long as the behavior existed for longer than 6 months and caused marked distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of the person's
functioning. Wilken would meet the DSM-5 requirements for necrophilic disorder. Neither psychosis, sadism, or mental retardation appears to be related to necrophilia, with only 11% of true necrophiles being classified as psychotic (Rosman & Resnick, 1989). This sentiment is echoed by Stein, Schlesinger, and Pinizotto (2010), who state that engaging in such behavior should not be seen immediately as a sign of psychosis. Wilken was fit to stand trial, and was thus legally responsible for his crimes and possessed criminal capacity. Years after his conviction, when interviewed by the author, he still did not display any signs of psychosis.

Rosman and Resnick (1989) differentiate between genuine necrophilia and pseudonecrophilia. Genuine necrophilia can be divided into necrophilic homicide/murder to obtain a corpse for sexual purposes; regular necrophilia (using an already dead body for sexual purposes); and necrophilic fantasy (those who fantasize about sexual activity with a corpse without carrying out any acts). Aggrawal's comprehensive, and at times hair-splitting, categorization speaks of homicidal necrophiles, and divides this type into six further subtypes (Classes IX-a to IX-f). These are differentiated by the behavior with the victim while alive and after death (Aggrawal, 2011). Irrespective of which classification system is used, Wilken seems to fit into the necrophilic homicide (Rosman & Resnick, 1989) or homicide necrophile type (Aggrawal, 2011).

In the study by Stein, Schlesinger, and Pinizotto (2010), 7.6% of cases in their sexual homicide study involved necrophilia. Two of their 16 necrophile offenders were serial offenders; however, necrophilia was not present with all of the serial offenders' victims. In other words it was not a constant theme in series where it did occur. This is similar to Wilken who engaged in necrophilic acts with some but not every victim. Strangulation was preferred method in 11 of the 16 necrophilia incidents (68.8%) in their study, which was also Wilken's preferred method of killing his victims, usually strangling them while engaged in sexual penetration with the victim. In their study, sex with the victim prior to death occurred in 43.8% of the victims while 93.8% immediately violated their victims post mortem, with one of the serial offenders violating the victim several days after death. Wilken would strangle victims while raping them and reported to enjoy the sexual feeling of the victim dying while raping them, similarly most of his necrophilic behavior seems to have occurred in the days following the murder when he would return and have sex with the dead bodies using a condom, placing tissue paper into the victims' orifices to prevent maggots entering those orifices. Two of the 16 necrophile offenders in their study kept souvenirs such as the victim's underwear. Wilken also kept victims underwear for sexual purposes. Two in their study revisited scenes afterwards but did not engage in sexual activity (Stein, Schlesinger, & Pinizotto, 2010). Wilken claims to have returned to his daughter's crime scene but not engage in sexual behavior with her. He did however return to the scenes when he saw that the police had discovered the body, to observe police activities on the scene.

In their study 3 out of 16 offenders bit the victims' nipples (Stein, Schlesinger, & Pinizotto, 2010). In another study breast biting occurred in three cases of pseudonecrophiles exclusively, three fourths of decapitations were pseudonecrophiles and 36% of homicide necrophiles mutilated their victims (Rosman & Resnick, 1989). As stated, with one adult victim, Wilken cut off the nipples and the external part of the vagina and ate them at the scene.

According to Rosman and Resnick (1989) a common motive is for an unresisting, un-rejecting partner, to some degree this is expressed by Wilken, who said:
I had sex with some of the dead bodies. Then I can have my ecstasy. Then I can do things the way I wanted to, there is no screaming and chaos. I would fantasize about the murder and masturbate at the body also. ... I do what I want with the victim, if they don’t comply I hit them. What bothered me was the begging, I hit a blank, I am not myself, then afterwards I realise what I have done (from prison interview with Wilken, 2006).

In Stein, Schlesinger, and Pinizotto’s study (2010), they found that necrophilia didn’t appear to be relating to sexual difficulty with living victims. Wilken never expressed any difficulty in becoming aroused to engage in sex with a living person or victim, and was married at the time of his arrest. He also fathered three children with two different women.

CONCLUSION

While serial murder is fairly common in South Africa, confirmed necrophilic acts by serial murderers is not, even less so when combined with cannibalism. Wilken seemed to become aroused by the actual act of the victim dying, orgasming while the victim was in death throes, and also later when returning to act out sexually with the dead bodies. It was when returning that he felt he could freely act out sexually without the chaos accompanying the murder and fantasize about the act of murder. In some way this relates to the often expressed view that reality is never as good as the fantasy.

REFERENCES